



LIVING HISTORY:  
MYTH, REPRESENTATION AND DRAMATISING CATHERINE THE GREAT

A Thesis submitted by  
Stanislaw Janowicz Candidate, MA Eng Lit, BA (Hons.) Act,

For the award of  
Doctor of Philosophy

2017

## Abstract

Catherine II of Russia entered the realm of legend already during her lifetime and now, over two hundred years after her death, she not only continues to be the subject of a steady stream of new historiographic work, but retains her presence in a wider public consciousness through fictional and dramatic representations. Her successes and the scope of her achievement could humble any leader, yet her fictionalised image seems to oscillate around murder, sexual scandal, numerous allegations of 'indecent' and even bestiality. My research investigates the various ways in which Catherine II has been represented in recent biographical histories and works of popular culture counterbalanced against the historical record of the eighteenth century in Catherine's memoirs and the memoirs of her contemporaries, their correspondence and other primary documentation of the period in view of creating a new dramatic representation of her. As can be seen in fictional constructions of Catherine – from Bernard Shaw's *Great Catherine* (1913) through Marlene Dietrich in *The Scarlet Princess* (1934), Mae West's *Catherine was Great* (1944) to Tony McNamara's recent Australian play *Great* (2008) – they can reveal the way myth tends to override historic renderings of Catherine. This process can also be traced back to the very time of Catherine's reign, when manuscripts and caricatures appeared in London and Paris that created fictitious narratives about her. Anxious over the way she might be perceived by posterity, Catherine tried to repudiate the slander and myth in writing and by other means; she denied being called Great – the title by which we now know her, but, in John T. Alexander's words, "from her grave, her lifelong concern for her place in history cannot dodge constant questions, charges, and counter charges from individuals and groups." In his book *Catherine the Great: Life and Legend* John T. Alexander dedicated a separate chapter to dozens of theatre, film, television and literary titles that emerged in English language before the time of its publication in 1988. Utilising the advantage of my cultural and linguistic background, I will complement this study with the Russian language presentations that were released before and after the time of Alexander's publication.

This analysis reveals a peculiar dichotomy of outlook which exists between the scholarly discourse about Catherine the Great, which is based on research and analysis, and her remarkably scandalised image in popular representations of her life.

My PhD project has involved producing a new work for the stage about Catherine, along with a broader examination of the genre of the history play and the playwright's responsibilities in dealing with historical evidence. From a historian's point of view, theatre might appear a poor medium for conveying history. It carries too many subjectivities, it presents difficulties for differentiating evidence from fiction, and it is very selective in what it portrays. This is perhaps one of the reasons why representations of Catherine are mythologised so often. This project attempts to bridge the gap between the scholarly and the theatrical in search of a more detailed rendition of the historical subject. Utilising one of the oldest and most resilient terms used in relation to theatrical endeavour – *energia*, its employment by Freddy Rokem in his notion of historic energies in performance about history, and its central role in the art of acting, I will argue that historical playwriting can contribute to historical discourse from an unexpected point of view – the notion of experiencing history through a live performance. By using Rokem's concept of the 'Hyper-historian' actor in the context of performing history on stage, and by widening its scope to encompass the role of the playwright within the circuitry of historic energy in the theatre, I will outline the possibility of restoring the historic energy of Catherine the Great on stage.

Thus the principal focus of this study is the creation of a new dramatic work based on the life of Catherine, which will participate in and interrogate these debates about Catherine's public and historic images. The text is divided into three parts. The first one is dedicated to the mythos of Catherine, a brief overview of various anecdotes about her and their reflection in scholarly and popular representations of her. Part Two deals with the theoretical approach to historicisation on stage, my reading of historic energies recovered and performed and the placement of the playwright as a link in the chain of collective effort to bring the historic energies to stage. It details the approach to recovering and transmitting the historic energies by the playwright for the actor using the 'organic' approach to character building. Finally the third part deals with the building of the new play about Catherine the Great and her times using the historical energy approach to play writing in view of the mythology of Catherine.

### **Certification of Thesis**

This thesis is entirely the work of *Stanislaw Janowicz* except where otherwise acknowledged. The work is original and has not previously been submitted for any other award, except where acknowledged.

Student and supervisors signatures of endorsement are held at USQ.

Dr Daryl Chalk

---

Principal Supervisor

Associate Professor Laurie Johnson

---

Associate Supervisor

---

### **Declaration by author**

I acknowledge that copyright of all material contained in my thesis resides with the copyright holder(s) of that material. Where appropriate I have obtained copyright permission from the copyright holder to reproduce material in this thesis. Student and supervisors signatures of endorsement are held at USQ.

This thesis partially relies on foreign, mostly Russian, language sources. All quotations are presented in the author's translation. The original foreign language quotations are placed in the appendix at the end of the document and are organised in the order of their appearance in the text, with the relevant page numbers provided. All foreign language quotations are presented in their original spelling. Thus quotations from the Russian publications prior to the language reform in 1918 are presented in their original historical spelling.

## Acknowledgements

I wish to acknowledge the dramaturgical advice of Eugene Gilfedder who has been very generous listening to my ravings about this project and whose incredible theatrical experience and thoughtful writer's insight helped me a lot.

I must mention the good will and dramaturgical assistance by my publisher Playlab Inc.

I also wish to thank Freddy Komp for lending his expertise and helping my understanding of the German language texts.

I owe a debt of gratitude to Scott Alderdice at the USQ for the inspirational acting training which allowed me to look at playwriting and text analysis in a new way.

My supervision team of Darryl Chalk and Laurie Johnson for their patience, assistance and guidance through the process of putting together this dissertation.

I wish to acknowledge the very positive role the Australian Postgraduate Award scholarship played in assisting my research.

Finally I wish to thank my parents for their unceasing support of my artistic and scholarly pursuits.

## Contents

Prelude. ‘Catherine’s Way’ .....	1
Introduction. Sensing History .....	7
Chapter One. Assassination:.....	30
Semiramida of the North Never Was. Murder, Bestiality and Character Assassination of Catherine the Great. ....	30
The Horse and the ‘Prodigious Expansion’ .....	31
‘Oppressive’, ‘Thoughtless’ and ‘Obsolete’ .....	35
‘Dismissive’, ‘Inaccessible’, ‘Arrogant’ and ‘Absent’ .....	38
‘Ugly’ and ‘Grotesque’ .....	40
A Sex Slave Collector .....	48
From “Erotic Universe” to Dragging Russia into Enlightenment.....	50
The Two Greats .....	53
Semiramida of the North?.....	55
Renaissance .....	57
Chapter Two. Living History.....	61
No History for Theatre .....	63
History Belongs Here .....	73
History Is Energy .....	86
Chapter Three. ‘Resurrection’ .....	91
Bringing Catherine Back to ‘Live’.....	91
Conclusion. Eternity.....	103
CATHERINE’S BEGINING.....	108
PRELUDE "1753. 'A Beautiful Attempt'" .....	111
PROLOGUE "22 January, 1756. Ivan Zubarev" .....	116
ACT ONE "1756. THE DIPLOMATIC REVOLUTION".....	127
SCENE ONE "The Empress Awakens" .....	127
INTERLUDE "26 January, 1756" .....	138
SCENE TWO "The Diplomatic Reception" .....	139
SCENE THREE "The Young Court" .....	151
SCENE FOUR "The System" .....	162
SCENE FIVE "Peter and Paul Day" .....	167
SCENE SIX "Peter and Paul Day" Part Two.....	177
SCENE SEVEN "Messonier de Valcroissant" .....	179
SCENE EIGHT "Thunder and Gadzooks!" .....	183

---

SCENE NINE "Thunder and Gadzooks!" Part Two .....	189
ACT TWO "1756-1761. THE WAR" .....	194
SCENE TEN "Queen Beats Jack" .....	194
SCENE ELEVEN "It's War!" .....	203
SCENE TWELVE "On Poniatowski" .....	210
SCENE THIRTEEN "The Plot" .....	214
SCENE FOURTEEN "Delivery" .....	216
SCENE FIFTEEN "13(24) April 1758. "Showdown at the Empress" .....	221
SCENE SIXTEEN "Vivat Victoria!" .....	229
ACT THREE. "1762" .....	238
INTERLUDE "January" .....	238
SCENE SEVENTEEN "The Crown" .....	239
SCENE EIGHTEEN "The Fire" .....	244
SCENE NINETEEN "The Peace Banquette" .....	246
SCENE TWENTY "28 of June" .....	254
SCENE TWENTY ONE "The End of the Emperor" .....	262
SCENE TWENTY TWO "Prisoner Grigory" .....	277
FINALE "The Coronation" .....	283
Appendix .....	287
Works Cited.....	298
Bibliography .....	303
Primary Resources .....	303
Dramatic Sources .....	304
Secondary sources.....	307



## **Prelude. ‘Catherine’s Way’.**

...According to Materlinck’s law the dead come to life when we remember them.

*Olga Chaikovskaya*

If you travel north-east across Saxony-Anhalt from the Harz mountains towards Zerbst, you will need to forgo the convenience of the autobahn network and experience rural Germany. A narrow road will take you deeper and deeper, through tiny villages of Altenburg, Nienburg, then Calbe, away from ‘urban civilization’, to Ziegeleiweg where you will need to turn right, trusting the sign, and the road will end at the water’s edge. It is the Elbe. A small ferry driver will see you from the other side and cross the river to pick you up. Then, behind Walternienburg, the road will suddenly end again with a stripy barrier. You will need to turn back to the village and find a detour through the wheat fields that will bring you to the outskirts of a small town of Zerbst. A couple of right turns in the town and you will get to the park in its midst, where the family palace of the Anhalt-Zerbst dynasty used to stand – Schloß Zerbst. Its left wing, or rather its hollow walls are still there. The rest of the once large building is gone, bombed to the ground by the Allied air force during WWII.

I made that trip driven by the research I was doing for a future play about Catherine the Great. I wished to see her family home, touch the stones as it were, and, if lucky, discover something interesting about my heroine. It was Sunday and the palace park was filled with the trailers of a travelling carnival show. But there was no carnival. Everything was closed. The carnival was packing up. Closed too was her museum in the Rathaus, but I managed to find someone who was glad to open it just for me. The exhibition consisted of an eighteenth century dress, a few pieces of furniture, cutlery, crockery and coins, a prayer book that is said to have belonged to the empress, her portrait and the portrait of her son, the Grand Duke Paul, and one decree she signed – all in one room. That was all that the only museum in the world dedicated to Catherine the Great had to offer. No trace of her childhood, her parents, brothers, or sisters. I came out of the Rathaus into the blazing summer afternoon somewhat disappointed, bewildered, and thirsty. But unlike the majority of German towns I had seen that seem to have cafes and restaurants everywhere in the

centre, this one had none. I walked away from the Rathaus square along the street named "Katharinenweg" past the closed carnival stalls towards the palace park and pondered. It seems so much is known about her. Hundreds of books, thousands of pages, along with dozens of movies, television series, plays, and musicals have been written. She herself was a prolific playwright. And back in Russia, all over the country from St Petersburg to Crimea stand buildings, monuments, museums created by her decree. Beneficiaries of her education reforms went on to give life to what we know as great Russian literature. St Petersburg boasts Hermitage – one of the greatest museums in the world – created by her. Catherine was so much to so many – a reformer of state and church, an educator, a lawmaker, a publisher, a writer, a playwright, a historian, a memoirist, philosopher...and yet her own museum cannot tell much at all. Perhaps once the family palace used to have material traces of her presence but one day that was turned into dust. Zerbst has literally only a few artefacts that could be attributed to Catherine. It felt like the physical traces of her had been obliterated. It definitely felt so here, next to a ruin left by the most destructive war in history. Almost nothing that would tie her to this place, except for the street named after her, "Katharinenweg", that leads, incidentally but somehow not surprisingly, north-east away from the ruins and in the general direction of St Petersburg. This is the only road from the palace – the road to destiny which she sensed so early in her life. Curious is also the fact that she was not even known as Katarina when she lived here. Her name was Sophie Augusta Fredercke. She became Katarina, or Catherine, in Russia where she was rechristened as part of the necessary change of faith. Sophie ceased to exist when she became Catherine. Now her native Zerbst has accepted her new identity and remains proud of its famous daughter. But the word "weg" in the street name irrefutably refers to abandonment and desolation. It is as if Catherine has disappeared from there completely. One day she left this palace without a second thought, changed her country, her language, her religion and her name and never looked back. I could think of a reason. If the place was so quiet, dull now, one could imagine what it was like in the first half of eighteenth century. when travel from here to anywhere would take so much longer. The future promised a young woman a wide world of opportunity and a crown of an empire. It suddenly dawned on me that the clue to this realization was right there in front of me all along in the name of the street. "Katharinenweg" means "Catherine's Path" or Catherine's Way" – the name of the street that geographically indicates the direction she once

took. “Weg” can also mean “gone”, “away” underscoring the person’s absence. She does not live here anymore. I very vividly experienced the sense of abandonment that those ruins seemed to have. In a way that was it. That was what I was searching for. The sense, the feeling, the energy... But was I looking in the right place?

When a historian studies an event or a person they travel in search of the hard, material evidence, written testimonies, the layouts of places where events took place in order to be able to describe them. When an actor needs clues and keys to a performance they look for energies – the energies of action, emotion, the energies of the circumstances affecting the characters in the here and now of the performance. Their primary source is the script. I am a playwright who wished to provide actors with appropriate resources for their performance of Catherine’s history – a script that would contain information and energies. Finding the information is quite a straight forward archival exercise but energy, on the other hand, is an elusive matter. It is in constant motion. I needed to find it, harness it. From this viewpoint that trip to Zebst was only somewhat useful for Catherine's character portrayal. But was there anything more to discover?

I decided to circle the hollow walls of the palace wing, to see what was on the other side. And there she was... A beautiful, slender, graceful, fragile young woman. Her bright and open face, as if that of an ancient Greek goddess, seems soft and calm and at the same time it radiates some unspoken courage, strength and determination towards something she sees in the distance... A statue is a gift to Zerbst from Russia (New Monument..., n. pag.). The inscription says “Sophie Auguste Friederike”. It is a portrait masterfully carved in stone. At first it appears as an idolised depiction made by an artist who obviously fell in love with his model. For instance she looks quite different under the brush of Louis Caravaque or that of Georg Christoph Grooth – different lips, different eyes... But it evokes immediately the description of Catherine left by her contemporary Claude Rulhière:

Her figure is noble and agreeably impressive; her gait majestic; her person and deportment graceful in the highest degree. [...] Every feature proclaims a superior character. Her neck is lofty, and the head finely detached. The union of these two parts, especially in profile, possesses wonderful beauty; and this beauty, in the movements of her head, she has the art of setting off to wonderful advantage. [...] Her hair is chestnut-coloured, and uncommonly

fine; the eyebrows are dark brown; the eyes hazel and extremely fascinating. The reflexes of light give them a bluish tint; and her complexion is dizzyingly clear. Loftiness is the true character of her physiognomy, taken as a whole. The softer characters of gentleness and goodness, which are there likewise depicted, appear, to a penetrating observer only as the effect of an ardent desire to please; and those seductive expressions discover but too plainly an intention to seduce. A painter who was desirous of giving an allegorical representation of this great personage, proposed to exhibit her in a figure of a charming nymph, presenting with one hand, stretched forth, a wreath of flowers, and holding in the other, which is thrown behind her back, a flaming torch. (26-27)

It seems that every artist, writer, historiographer, from her contemporaries till now, even when they ‘shy away’ from admitting it and prefer to speak of her in ironic or disdainful terms inadvertently fall under her charm. As did Aleksandr Bushkov, for instance, subtitled his book about her “A Diamond Cinderella”, or Valentin Pikul, despite writing in *The Favourite*: “O, how terrifying she would become in her inevitable old age!” (I:15). Her contemporaries who met her agree in one – that she possessed an irresistible attraction, a lure that went beyond the simple fascination with the position of power. The future king of Poland Stanislaw Poniatowski wrote this about the Catherine he had met:

She was twenty five years old. Recovering from her first childbirth, she blossomed so, as a woman endowed with beauty by nature could only dream. Black hair, delectable whiteness of the skin, large bulging blue eyes that told so much, very long black eyelashes, sharp little nose, mouth that called for a kiss, arms and shoulders of a perfect form; mid height – on a taller side, the gait extremely light and at the same time full of greatest nobility, a voice of a pleasant timbre, laughter as merry as her nature that allowed her to move from most playful, child-like careless games to the cryptographic desk...<sup>1</sup> (104-105)

In his description, Rulhière uses epithets like “noble”, “impressive”, “majestic”,

---

<sup>1</sup> All Russian language sources translated by the author. The original quotations are listed in the order of their appearance in Appendix.

“graceful”, “lofty”, “beauty”, “fascinating”, and “dizzily clear”. The man who admittedly was in love with Catherine all his life, Stanislaw Poniatowski, uses similar expressions – “beauty”, “nobility”, adding “delectable” and “perfect” to the extraordinary impression. Both of them also reveal the depth behind the “seductive expressions” or “merry” “nature”. Rulhière realises that, with all the gentleness and goodness of her character, inside Catherine remains cool and focused. His own ‘fascination’ and ‘dizziness’ set off alarm bells and he senses vague danger. Poniatowski marvels at the way she switched instantaneously “from child-like careless games” to serious business, which speaks a lot of Catherine’s ability to be always ready for focused work. The language of both memoirists reveal how their subject excited their senses, not only with her appearance but also with her actions.

As I looked at the monument hidden at the back of the Schloßgarten in Zerbst, it struck me that all of this admiration, amazement and respect were captured by the masterful artist, not in any allegorical sense, but directly and very realistically. This realism made it seem that any moment now the statue could come to life, that the black stone emanated that aura of ‘wonderful beauty’ that ‘nature could only dream’, as well as focus and determination. It had ‘radiance’. The sculptor did not cater for the painted images of Catherine that differ from each other but instead struck the essence of his subject – Catherine’s *energy* as it was described by people who knew her. And so the sensation of absence of Catherine in Zerbst, which I experienced earlier in the museum and among the ruins of the castle, was replaced by her tangible presence permitted by the liveliness of her image in stone. If a stone can support such extraordinary existence, this permeating energy, then theatre should be able to do the same. After all theatre is interested in living, in energy. So perhaps this energy could be a doorway to the history I wished to investigate. "This is not a bad place to start the search for a live Catherine," I thought...



*Statue of Sophie Auguste Friederike by Mikhail Vladimrovich Pereyaslavets  
Zerbst (Author's own photo)*

## Introduction. Sensing History.

“What is history? History is this kind of consensus hallucination...”

James Cameron *Titanic. The Final Word*

Theatre is a place of stories. And a playwright is a storyteller. However when theatre takes up a historical subject, another dimension is added on top of the usual dramaturgical and aesthetic considerations of storytelling. It is the dimension of historical fact. In order to tell history the theatre needs to accommodate the historical fact into its performance. By doing so it strives to become the place of history. The playwright, then, strives to become a history teller. This creates additional challenges and, in the case of my historical subject, who is quite accustomed to the popular representations but often left wanting of the historical fact, the challenge is even greater. Thus the following thesis is about a particular view point on history which is activated when history appears in a form of a theatrical performance.

My experience of what felt like a real energy at the foot of the monument to Catherine the Great in Zerbst gave direction to my research. The metaphorical representation of historical reality which manifested itself in the sculpture seemed to have a tangible aspect, an energy which could be related to the historical record. This experiential quality of a work of art appealed to me as a theatre maker. If a sculptor was able to embody it in stone, more so the actor should be able to use their craft to evoke this historical energy during the performance, granting that the playwright supplies the right material for them in the script. But how exactly is this historical energy supposed to be mined, recorded in the script and then reproduced in live performance? This question concerns not only the energy of Catherine the Great but any historical character.

Finding the answer required bringing together the research of my dramatic subject's history, as well as the history of dramatic depictions of her, combined with a consideration of the issues connected to the depiction of history in drama in general and then refracting it through the prism of the craft of acting. Viewed in conjunction with the recent scholarship that observed historical energies in theatrical performances on the textual and philosophical planes, this allowed me to formulate

my approach to writing about a historical subject, bringing forth the sensorial, experiential aspect of the depicted history. I call it *living history*. The notion of living history was first introduced by Jay Anderson in his article “Living History: Simulating Everyday Life in Living Museums” published in 1982. It refers to what Anderson calls a “movement” among active open-air history museums recreating everyday life within the historical environment, historical re-enactment groups or, for instance, archaeologists wishing “to measure the energy needed to pull a wooden mouldboard plow on a 1770s Pennsylvania farm” (290). Such living history museums or ‘historical towns’ that offer a view of the daily activities, especially arts and crafts, from the past are popular in North America, Europe and also present across Australia. You can see a working XIX century printing house in Swan Hill or visit a historic sails workshop in the port of Warrnambool. My *living history* operates on a different plane. It refers to the moment when particular historical energies, other than the kinetic energies required to pull a historical tool, the energies of historical characters and their interactions are activated during a theatrical performance. This is a complex multi-disciplinary concept and I will unfold it gradually. I will first discuss the issues at hand in the order of their appearance, which will introduce the rationale behind the play about my historical subject and the approach I used for writing it. Then, how these issues will be addressed in the layout of the thesis will be explained at the end.

When I began my research for writing a play about Catherine the Great, I studied her history, I made my field trip to her family’s home town, and, as a playwright, I looked at how other authors approached this subject before me. Almost immediately I was astounded by the sheer volume of dramatic works about the Russian empress. It appears that every decade, starting from the early nineteenth century, Catherine has been making at least a few new appearances in literature, on stage and then in film. The titles included in the Bibliography at the end of this exegesis give an indication of the scope of the popular dramatic productions featuring Catherine. While working on this project I saw two new separate major television series appearing in Russia alone. I am convinced that new scripts about her are being written and developed right now and will continue to appear. In fact I cannot think of another historical figure that would enjoy such a continuous life after death as a character in popular theatrical, cinematic and literary forms.

However it is a peculiar life. Catherine’s biographer Vincent Cronin noted



that “it is one of the paradoxes of Catherine that a life which is very well documented should be the subject of so many legends. Catherine's love affairs in particular have been vulgarized *ad nauseum*...” (14). Many of the myths about her go back to the last decades of the eighteenth century and were spawned by the hostile propaganda that took personal forms and, in Catherine’s case, it had sexual connotations and consistently targeted her femininity. There are many reasons for the existing mythology around Catherine’s character and they exist on both sides of the cultural divide. In the Western culture the myths go back to the anti-Russian propaganda that existed throughout Catherine’s entire rule and culminated in the days of the French revolution. In Russia the primary reason for perpetuating myths was the censorship on Catherine imposed by the monarchy throughout the nineteenth century. Catherine’s coming to power and the rumours of her son’s being illegitimate needed to be suppressed as a dangerous potential for destabilising the monarchy. Of course something altogether different eventually destabilised the monarchy while Catherine’s history remained largely in the realm of gossip for a century, and was written, as Valentin Pikul puts it in his book *The Favourite*, “with tar on lopsided fences” (6) where they carve the unprintable words.

The most salacious stories about her sexual exploits have been dismissed by serious scholars as gossip and, in Cronin’s words, “can be traced to a handful of French writers in the years immediately after Catherine’s death when republican France was fighting for its life against a coalition that included Russia” (14). Nevertheless, despite the ever-growing time distance to those events, the resilience of myths about Catherine in popular renditions is nothing short of remarkable. Examples are in abundance, starting with Mae West’s play *Catherine was Great* that premiered in 1944, which, according to John T. Alexander “impressed more deeply than ever in the popular psyche Catherine’s association with extravagant, theatrical sexuality” (338), to the 2008 Australian play by Tony McNamara *The Great*, which does away with historical facts altogether and creates a sexually charged rendition, seen by a Sydney based reviewer Brett Casben as a parallel to *Sex and the City*, and which could be viewed as a kind of a pinnacle of this sexualised tradition, in which history has been completely replaced by mythology.

It is indeed remarkable how very little those renditions have to do with the factual history of Catherine the Great, how many of them oversimplify and misrepresent a seemingly well-known and well-researched topic. Most of the titles,

with singular exceptions, belong to the category of discussion of Catherine described by Alexander as “long on gossip and drama and short on facts and context” (vii). By the casual and simplified treatment of history and of their subject, they very often offer their audiences tales that can be attributed to their historical protagonist with great difficulty. Thus a vast representational gap exists between the popular image of Catherine and her real history as it is presented in academic publications. We are literally facing the legacy of close to 200 years of destruction of the original historical character and replacing it with a sort of avatar in the most popular genres of representation. It was the ambition of this project to address and bridge this gap, to bring Catherine and her surroundings to life, that is to the live performance on the theatre stage and be as true as possible to the historical protagonists.

In his book *Catherine the Great: Life and Legend* John T. Alexander dedicated a separate chapter to dozens of theatre, film, television and literary titles that emerged in English language before the time of its publication in 1988. Utilising the advantage of my cultural and linguistic background, I will complement this study with the Russian language presentations that were released before and after the time of Alexander’s publication. All the Russian language quotations will appear in my own translation. The original Russian language quotes can be found in the Appendix in order of their appearance in the body text.

The review of this mythos reveals that the distortions of Catherine’s history and the myths about her have a wider socio-political historical background than just the anti-Russian propaganda created in France. Russia has its own history of Catherine’s popular iconography. It is politically charged and begins with the representatives of the first generation of the Russian intelligentsia in the beginning of the nineteenth century. In the introduction to her translation of two plays by Catherine the Great Lurana Donnels O’Malley discusses the attitudes in the post-Catherinian Russia towards Catherine’s dramatic and epistemological endeavours. She argues that “[b]ecause the advent of the Romantic movement in Russia became associated with the Decembrist revolt against Tsar Nikolai I, Catherine’s writings were out of favor both on literary and political grounds, as the fight against neoclassicism became equated with the fight against tsarist oppression” (xxi). Both O’Malley and Alexander also point at a certain “neglect” of Catherine’s history and literary works in the Soviet Union due to ideological reasons. However, when speaking of this “neglect” of Catherine II in USSR, Alexander (335), the only

scholar who looked at the mythology in popular representations, perhaps was not aware of all the developments over there. Considerable works appeared before as well as after Alexander's publication. The historiographic novels (*With Quill and Sword* (1972) and *The Favourite* (1984)) by Valentin Pikul, for instance, by virtue of the numbers of the published copies which count in the millions, stand out among all portraiture of Catherine as exceptional in their impact on the popular image of the Russian empress. Other examples include a play by Leonid Zorin *Tsarskaya okhota* (*The Royal Hunt*), which has been regularly returning to stages across Russia since its premier in 1974 and which was made into a film in 1988. Additionally films *Admiral Ushakov* (1953), *Vechera na khutore bliz Dikan'ki* (*Evenings at a Farmstead Near Dikan'ka*) (1961), and *Yemelyan Pugachiov* (1978) featured Catherine as a cameo character. They are virtually unknown to the Western public. In 1996 Lurana O'Malley pointed at the "renewed interest in Catherine's life and writings" (xxxii), citing, among others, Yelena Gremina's then new play *Behind the Mirror*. Indeed Catherine has seen a true renaissance for the past twenty years. New dramatic works have appeared in Poland and Russia, new films and television series have been released in Great Britain, USA, and particularly in Russia (the latest being two large television productions – a 12-part television drama *Catherine*, directed by Vladimir Menshov, which premiered on the Russian television in 2014; and another 12 part production *The Great* in 2015, directed by Igor Zaitsev). New Scholars took up the subject of Catherine's life and her rule and, notably, many of them are female. O'Malley notes, however, that "many [feminist] scholars today remain sceptical of attempts to apply Western feminism's concepts and frameworks to Russian culture" (xxv). O'Malley believes that "[l]ooking at Catherine from a feminist perspective enables one to analyse Catherine's various and intertwining roles as a woman, as a writer, as foreigner, as Empress of Russia" (xxv). Although, I do not attempt to approach dramatising the history of Catherine the Great from the feminist point of view, the female perspective is of utmost importance for a playwright's attempting to draw a female character. Thus, in my work on the script, the historical character analysis from female scholars, like Olga Yeliseyeva or Hélène Carrère D'Encausse, has played a central role.

Although there is a disparity in the mythologising that developed in the West from that which emerged in the Soviet Union and Russia, both the English-speaking and Russian cultural fields demonstrate the resilience of mythology, despite

refutations that appear in scholarly publications. Certain myths became traditions that freely travel from one form of popular culture to another and became a ‘common knowledge’. This urges to argue against historical untruths and misrepresentations in film and theatre. Every script could be scrutinised from the historical accuracy point of view. Catherine herself indulged in a similar exercise in her treatise *The Antidote* (1770) which, in Alexander’s words, was “a detailed demolition” of the book by L’Abbé Chappe d’Auteroche called *Voyage en Sibérie, fait par ordre du roi en 1761; contenant les moeurs, les usages des Russes, et l’Etat actuel de cette puissance, la description géographique etc.* and which “righteously rebuffed the French scholar’s arrogant ignorance and malicious stupidity” and “flayed the Frenchman’s misogyny (yet twitted his weakness for girls) as well as his titillating treatment of Russian marriage customs and bathing manners” but it “apparently found few readers” (133). As her own example seems to show, however, the disclaimer is not as attractive a reading as the raunchy original. So simply debunking the myths about Catherine was not my focus. Instead I wished to take stock of the mythologising of Catherine the Great, its nature in dramatic works. As a playwright I need to be able to recognise what is the myth and what is supported by historical evidence, as well as what is the popular view of my subject. This is the prerequisite for a more accurate portrayal. First of all I wished that my characters on stage would not do what they did not do in real life. Thus in the first chapter of the exegesis I will review the extraordinary vitality and different facets of the mythologising of Catherine, viewed allegorically as a kind of assassination of the historical character.

Since mere refutation of mythology is not an attractive option and, as can be seen from the scores of dramatic works about Catherine, not at all necessary for a successful new drama, the dramaturgical focus for the play must be placed elsewhere. The tenacious reappearance of inaccurate aspects of Catherine’s history does not necessarily imply the substandard work by the authors of the dramatic texts (from the theatrical point of view). It merely suggests that some authors might not have or might not care for sufficient historical research and rely purely on their right for *licencia poetica*, some, as it will be seen later, choose to ignore the historical evidence for the sake of a ‘better play’, or it simply shows where the authors’ interest lies. It definitely suggests that the dramatic form allows for such nonchalant treatment of a historical subject, at least this particular one. But what does this mean for the author’s relationship with and their responsibility towards their historical

subject and their reader? The questions about the tension between the historical fact and the fictional writing about it have been increasingly prominent as the public enthusiasm and demand for history has grown. Recently the journal *Text* dedicated a special issue to this topic. In the editorial “Fictional Histories and Historical Fictions” Camilla Nelson and Christine de Matos underline the “political and cultural importance” that history has gained today. In fact “[h]istory and memory appear to have become central to wider debates over democracy and justice – indeed, history has become the actual ground on which such issues are regularly contested” (1). Christopher Kremmer points out in his article “From Dialectics to Dialogue: Bakhtin, White and the ‘Moorings’ of Fiction and History” published in the same issue of *Text* that although “[h]istorians and historical novelists alike must imagine, interpret and speculate about the past in order to construct their narratives”, it is the historical novelist who is “permitted to invent historical ‘facts’ – particularly dialogue – in order to animate their mimetic representations of human consciousness in fiction” (9). Even more so the same can be said about historical dramatic representations which rely solely on dialogue. However Kremmer argues that although some authors “challenged to defend their versions of history” might shield themselves with the *licencia poetica* clause and say ‘I made it up!’, such explanation “might constitute a credible defence of a fantasy novel set in the future; but when the fictional narrative is constitutively indebted to historical referents and intended to recreate the particularities of a specific historical period and its people, then to say ‘I made it up’ seems at best irresponsible, and at worst disingenuous” (ibid.). After all there are certain histories, whose misrepresentations would not be looked upon so favourably. A drastic example of it could be the subject of Shoah, which, if misrepresented, mocked, or denied could lend the authors in jail in certain countries and definitely cause negative reaction in many others. This concerns every historical subject because as Tom Griffiths writes in “The Intriguing Dance of History and Fiction”:

The necessary and creative tension between history and fiction is not a turf war. The past is all we have. The present is but a breath, and the future doesn’t exist except as a projection of the past. The past – the full sum of human experience – is all we have on which to base our hopes and plans, and from which to draw our conversations, ideas and stories. (17)

It is important, then, before attempting a ‘truthful’ representation of Catherine, to engage, on the one hand with the responsibility of the author towards their subject, and on the other hand with the notion of truthfulness of fictionalised historiography and particularly with the notion of truthfulness in performing history on stage. The term truthfulness here refers to the evidence-based characters’ relationships, given circumstances, and the historically accurate actions. As will be discussed in the second part of the thesis, some scholars see this possibility as doubtful to say the least. The very nature of theatrical performance, its conventions and space put severe limitations on the depiction of historical events and characters, which makes it vulnerable to criticism from the point of view of written historiography even if the latter has accuracy issues of its own. As a result, theatre as a vehicle for historical accuracy and truthfulness has been challenged.

Acknowledging the general view that theatre performing history has a lot of leeway when it is concerned with the “historical truth”, I nevertheless take into account Frederick Jameson’s comment in *Brecht and Method* that “[t]he historical play is peculiarly allegorical and anti-allegorical all at once, for it certainly posits a reality and a historical referent outside itself of which it claims, with greater or milder insistence, to be an enlightening and thereby interpretive representation...” (123). That is it recognizes the symbolic nature of representation of historical events during the live performance on the one hand and also presents itself as an elaboration on that event by the authors, exposing their attitude towards it as well as the historical facts and personages related to the event, which makes striving for the “truth” of a history play a worthy goal. Thus the second leg of the journey of the history play about Catherine is the search for the ways of making a live performance about Catherine historiographic. Is it possible at all and if yes, how?

An answer to this question required a detailed look at the criticism of the historical validity of theatre. In the process of this analysis of the aspects of the historical in theatre a few recent scholarly works appeared crucial, one of which is a recent unpublished dissertation by Katherine Lyall-Watson. Titled *Biographical Theatre: Flying Separate of Everything* and submitted at the University of Queensland, it is of a particular interest for my own project because it is also a scholarly thesis with a creative component, it deals with the different approaches to the historical in drama, and the issues of a particular sub-genre of historical drama – the biographical theatre, which is relevant to the play about Catherine the Great, and

finally it examines the rationale and permission for ignoring historical evidence when writing biographical/historical theatre. When working on her commissioned history/biographical play *Motherland*, which told, among others, the story of the relationship between Alexander Kerensky, the Russian Prime Minister in exile, and his wife Nelle Kerensky (née Tritton), Lyall-Watson observed a “strange phenomenon”: “the director, the dramaturg and the producers all told [her] not to be limited by the research, but to change things as needed to make a better story”(1). I share a similar experience from the time I was working on my play *The Kursk*, which was a documentary drama based on the events surrounding the sinking of the Russian nuclear submarine in 2000. Time after time the dramaturg, the director, actors and producers convinced me that I would have to invent something because "it's theatre". Lyall-Watson found that theatre enjoys considerable freedom of such invention. Intending “to ascertain whether theatre has special properties that link it (more than other genres of creative expression) to the imaginative rather than the physical world”, Lyall-Watson observes:

One of these special properties might be called “permission to invent” and I am intrigued by its abundant use in theatre despite its censorship in the other media. Prose-based life writers have come under intense scrutiny over the veracity of their accounts and, in some cases, have had their books pulped and their contracts voided when untruths have been discovered. (6)

But that does not concern drama. As a playwright, Lyall-Watson wishes “to be true to [her historic] research while at the same time creating a dramatic work that will engage audiences” which leaves her in a “conflicted space” (3), because, as an artist, she wishes for the freedom of invention. This is no doubt the reasoning for her commissioners’ suggestion that she could insert anything into the story for the sake of the performance. Implied here is that an engaging dramatic work must involve invention, even if at the cost of the facts. In seeking “permission to invent” Lyall-Watson finds that one after another researchers and theatre makers come to doubt the truth and relieve the theatre from responsibility towards its historic subject. She observes that while authors in other biographical genres might face backlash or even legal consequences if they are found to have presented untruths, playwrights have more licence to invent than prose writers. In fact playwrights writing about historical

figures avoid calling their plays biographical “perhaps because [...] many plays do not attempt to stay close to the “truth” or “facts” of a life and labelling themselves as biographical might constrain their writers, as well as opening them to litigation”(5). In the case of my own project it can indeed be safely assumed that a loose treatment of the “facts” would doubtfully open this story to litigation. It is hard to imagine that the ancestors of the Romanov dynasty would come after this particular play out of dozens of others about this distant representative of their family tree, just as it is unlikely that the ancestors of Julius Caesar, had there been any to claim the relationship, would be keen to come after Shakespeare for his distortion of historical ‘truth’. Moreover the history of dramatic works about and featuring Catherine could be seen as supporting the argument in defence of inventiveness in treatment of history in drama. Nevertheless the same ethical issues which Lyall-Watson faces with her creation of biographical theatre remain important for my own play about Catherine.

Citing a number of scholars (among others Professor Janelle Reinelt from Warrick University and Stuart Young, the author of *Playing with Documentary Theatre: Aalst and Taking Care of Baby*), who doubt that historical truth is achievable on stage, Lyall-Watson points out that one of the chief concerns is the mediated nature of facts and evidence. Whose truth is being told? Does the truth exist at all? The very substitution of the historical human with an actor in theatre alone raises the issue of authenticity. This way, if we remember that documentary truth, as told by mass media, can be just as biased and prone to distortion as the documentary theatre, we may assume that truth simply does not exist, or rather the truth lies only in interpretation and transmission. Moreover, it appears that truth also lives within an individual outlook and belief. It is in the eye of the beholder (13-14).

Deprived of truth, however, theatre cannot exist. It would not have the appeal. This heightens the conflict. Lyall-Watson notes, for instance, that “the popularity of verbatim [that is the dramatised first-hand witness account] theatre shows us there is currency in truthfulness in theatre” (15). Audiences do seek truthfulness. This does call for responsibility on the part of the playwright, not necessarily in any legal sense but as an empowered figure of authority who delivers information about history to a wider public. If theatre is permitted any kind of poetic license, as Lyall-Watson finds it, and as it could be seen in so many dramatic



depictions of the Russian Empress which are driven by such license, and if indeed theatre is not the place where historical truthfulness should be found, what kind of credence then can be given to the actor who is supposed to be truthful on stage, if he depicts a lie? Perhaps it is about some kind of other, “higher”, or “underlying” truth, which Lyall-Watson mentions without specifying what those may be (36). She describes her playwright’s approach to the historical of her subject this way:

It makes sense of what I can only describe as “gut instinct,” which is the thing that causes me as a writer and a researcher to dig deeper and to speculate when the “facts” do not feel sufficient, when there seems to be something missing from an account. Writing my first biographical play, I sit somewhere between Marie Clements’ feeling of responsibility to the people she writes about and Guillermo Verdecchia’s desire for a good story, which takes liberties with literal truths. Verdecchia’s essay prompted me to consider my own practice and I discovered that the imperative, for me, is that I make “good” theatre, which means writing a play that is dramatic and interesting (26).

The imperative is to make “good” theatre. It is indeed of the highest importance. Every effort of staying true to the historical ‘fact’ would not redeem the result if it is a boring or bad piece of theatre that nobody would want to see. Lyall-Watson concludes that for her the play must come before the “facts”, even when it aims to tell a biographical story (27). That is, if she wished to present an accurate and factual account, she would have chosen a different medium. It seems that one medium can be more truthful than another. Indeed all the authors that are brought to stand by Lyall-Watson, like Sharon Pollock (*Walsh*), Christian Moe, Scott Parker and George McCalmon (*Creating Historical Drama: A Guide for Communities, Theatre Groups and Playwrights*), alongside of others like Tom Stern, whose argument I will discuss in detail, point at the very nature of theatre as a denier of factuality even when it is a verbatim script. No matter how you look at it, theatre remains a place of fiction. It is a place where someone pretends to be someone else, who has been conjured up by someone else, adjusted by yet another and, in the case of a history play, relies upon someone else’s rendition of the supposed subject, not to mention the problem of time and place of the presented rendition. Thus striving for that historical truth in theatre

could be like Sisyphus' task: arduous and unnecessary. Lyall-Watson describes her writer's impulse to go for "what if" instead of "and then what" motives in historical research for her biographical play *Motherland* due to the lack of historical materials about her characters on the one hand and, on the other hand, due to the view, shared in Claude Schumacker's *Staging the Holocaust*, that the 'true theatre', which is evident by juxtaposing the *trompe-l'oeil* of film and the heightened experience of the theatre, is one that does not try to be a replica of real life, but is instead the theatre that embraces possibilities of its form and showcases the craftsmanship of its artists (37).

Thus, despite having noted that although the *Motherland*'s characters are dead it "should not excuse nor condone [taking] liberties with their lives" (34), in conclusion to her chapter on ethical considerations in making the biographical theatre, Lyall-Watson states that "limited material available put [her] on the path to start inventing [her] own version of [her character's] life," that even uncovering later letters that "showed different reality to the one that [she] was constructing, it was easier [...] to ignore the evidence, than to start again" (89). This decision was conditioned by the findings of Lyall-Watson's research, namely that biographical theatre, which is a subgenre of history theatre, does 'fly' separate from everything and the playwright seems to have all the license for invention because of the nature of the medium of theatre itself and the lowered expectations from the audiences, concluding that:

Rather than there being a wrong way and a right way of writing a historical and biographical play, I prefer to think that we look for the best way to tell a particular story. (89)

In effect, in the case of *Motherland*, Lyall-Watson altered history for the sake of the best way to tell a story, because the general consensus allows theatre to invent, and, because of Lyall-Watson's experience at the onset of her project suggests that adhering to the historical facts is not necessary in theatre and might not even be expected. Theatre is "flying separate", it is allowed all the freedom of invention, and is not constricted by the rigor of scholarly historiography.

No doubt this is why Tom Stern, for instance, does not allow theatre the credit of a legitimate historical pursuit. In his article "History Plays as History" Stern dissects a question from a young theatre goer Anya who has just watched a

performance of *Julius Caesar*: “Did it happen like this?” Stern proposes a number of interpretations in order to see what answer could there be to this query. It is important to notice here that this question is a result of an experience which an audience member had during performance. In itself it suggests that whatever the history she was presented with it created interest on the one hand and presented something credible on the other, even though the viewer realised that there could be limitations to the accuracy of what she saw. In any case this is an achievement of theatre that this interest in history remained with the viewer in the aftermath. In his numerous interpretations of Anya's question, however, Stern does not find a way of giving a positive answer. Invariably all of those interpretations have a negative response. Theatre simply is not fit for history.

This seems to be telling a playwright to surrender and relegate to the place prescribed – the fiction shelf. Such compartmentalisation did not satisfy me, because of my staunch belief as an artist that theatre is not mere entertainment, and playwrights are agents of something more important, because “past is all we have”. When it comes to telling history do we not heed to Walter Benjamin when in his ‘Thesis on the Philosophy of History’ he says: “Only that historian will have the gift of fanning the spark of hope in the past who is firmly convinced that *even the dead* will not be safe from the enemy if he wins” (255)? What about the notion of truth on stage that every actor is aware of from day one of their training? What about the proverbial Stanislavsky’s “I don’t believe!” that every actor is dreading? What kind of truth is the subject here? Just the truth of the performance? After all, the actor portraying an historical person strives for the truth of their character – the historical truth – within the given circumstances of the script as well as within the historical circumstances of their subject. In James Cameron’s documentary *Titanic. The Final Word* all the actors who played historical characters speak of the importance of remaining true to their historical prototypes in order to pay respect to those people. This is a normal professional attitude of the trade. Historical truth is the currency of actors when they come on stage or before the camera to perform history and the task and liability of supplying them with it lies primarily with the author of the script. This also means that a playwright must account for the craft of acting when writing an historical script. The *Titanic...* documentary also revealed that most of the historically accurate enactments were cut from the *Titanic* movie because they made it too long and diverted focus from the main fictional love story. Historical fact

vacated the room for a 'better play'? Not quite. It is more accurate to say that the historical fact was not altered for the sake of a fictitious story in the first place but the amount of it was reduced in order to facilitate it. In this case the fictional story was inserted into the authentic historical background without disturbing the history. Moreover, James Cameron went to extraordinary lengths and with the help of a panel of experts put the results of his own historical research to the test once again years after the release of the movie. This was the case of making sure the author had not told something that would be known to have never happened. By staying true to the historical evidence, the fictional story had a strong potential to have possibly occurred.

In search of a resolution of the tension between the fictional nature of theatre and the ethical requirements of portraying historical 'truths', the first outcome for me was the decision to build the script on the events that were proven to have taken place and use invention within the framework of the historical evidence. In other words I wished the history to inform the story rather than using history to tell a story of my own invention. Previously I attempted a similar exercise when writing a documentary play *The Kursk* which depicted events surrounding the sinking of the Russian submarine in 2000. Most of the script was built from verbatim accounts and document quotations where the minutes of the rescue operation served as the backbone – the dramatic arc and the timeline for the story. Invention however was indeed necessary when constructing the dialogue on board the stricken submarine, since no crew survived in the end and no witness testimonies were available except for letters that the submariners left behind. However the investigation was able to determine with a great deal of certainty what happened on board, what actions the crew undertook and how they went about it. The depiction of this in the play was necessary for the audience to have a fuller picture of the events. With expert advice from Russian naval personnel, it was possible to build pieces of dialogue that, according to the available evidence could and should have happened between the surviving crew, like commander's orders and reports that would be given to the officers, which allowed the audience to hear the voices and phrases that would have been uttered. This way, the historical information was not altered.

Delivering the correct information, however, is not the ultimate goal of theatre. Theatre's strongest asset lies somewhere else, on a different level of communication, that of compassion and enjoyment, on the level of energy exchange,

on the plain that is rightly referred to by Katherine Lyall-Watson as a “good play”. *The Kursk*, however, was an example of when an engaging play did not have to come before the historical fact. It delivered information, but it affected the audience on the sensorial level, experientially. It was evident with the reactions from the Australian audiences who often remained behind in their seats in silence after the shows, but particularly from the experience of the Russian production of the play, when the viewers were much more aware of the circumstances of the tragedy and did not have to concentrate as much on the information delivered but responded to the emotional charge of the event directly. The video of the opening night at the Lomonosov Theatre in Arkhangelsk revealed it when the entire audience watched the final minutes of the play standing, in silence. Perhaps a play that traced very public events of such magnitude, and the very tragic events on board the submarine, particularly in compartment nine of the submarine, a play that depicted the struggle of both the submariners, their colleagues, their rescuers, their families and their nation for a gulp of air was able to resonate in the most immediate way because, as described by Vladimir Shigin in his book *ASMC Kursk. An Afterword to the Tragedy*:

There was so much written and said about compartment nine [in Russia] that it sometimes seems to me that Russia herself is in compartment nine right now. Suffocating because the lack of oxygen, in cold and on fire, understanding that there is no use in waiting for help from anywhere, she still continues to stubbornly fight for salvation, believing holily that she will overcome all the troubles and see the sun in the sky again... (406)

This emotional charge of course drove the playwright, the actors, directors, and was received by the audience. However the impact of the show was an indicator of something more specific. The work on *The Kursk* was largely the authors’ intuitive appreciation and response to the impact of an event of a great social magnitude, which was carried on to the audience by the art of actors who were able to reconstitute it into an aesthetic form and revive the experiences that the present witnesses remembered or heard of. It went beyond the mere reproduction of historical information to evoke and share the energies of the past event that were recognised and shared by the audience.

This energy could be a key to the theatrical experience and by this virtue to the historical in performance. In order to continue with my own goal for a potential historiographic play, I feel the need to find at least some way, or some interpretation which would make it possible to answer Anya's question positively. Stern's analysis stems from the point of view of the theatre's capacity, or lack of thereof, to compare with written historiography. What seems to be omitted is the account for theatre's experiential aspect, which is an essential and integral component of theatre's communication. Theatre indeed cannot be a replica of life because it is a life in itself. It is as vehicle for communal experience and the keys to its truthfulness must be searched there. This, in my mind, must be acknowledged in order to fully answer Anya's question. Thus, I will take a close look at Stern's argument and propose one more interpretation of his key question: "Did it feel like that?"

This sensorial aspect of theatrical experience, which comes before intellectual assessment of the event, requires accounting for the physical nature of theatrical performance, that is it requires accounting for the actors presenting actions on stage in the presence of the audience. Phenomena like this were described by Freddie Rokem. In his book *Performing History: Theatrical Presentations of the Past in Contemporary Theatre* he analysed performances that dealt with significant historical events, like the French Revolution or Shoah, which were capable through the art of acting to tap into the general energies of those events. Rokem placed the actor in the context of performing history as a witness, a 'Hyper-historian' before the audience, who helps to overcome, for the audience's sake, the separation from the past, and bring it into the 'here and now' of the performance, thus keeping the event alive, in the instance of performance as well as in the aftermath in the consciousness of the viewer, which was one of goals of *The Kursk*.

Freddie Rokem approaches this phenomenon from the point of view of energies that are created and shared during the performance. He capitalises on Stephen Greenblatt's view that the reason for the works of arts that were written hundreds of years ago to have a life today is, among others, the fact that they carry, like vehicles, social energies from the past and allow the audiences to experience these energies today. Developing this notion of energies, Rokem analyses modern performances about distant historical pasts and describes their ability, through the art of acting, to in fact, evoke, and make available for the audience's experience energies connected to particular events from the past.

Remembering Catherine's statue in Zerbst, the incredible connection that an inanimate work of art can have to historical texts, that is others' experiences, as well as this work's ability to transmit those experiences as energies inspired my thinking of an historical dramatic text's possible capability for even stronger regeneration of history through the live nature of its performance. Freddie Rokem provided me with a key terminology for the describing and understanding of energy as the currency of theatre's historical endeavour. With the help of his notion of the actor as a 'Hyper-historian' – a 'witness' before the audience to an historical figure or event, a central element to bringing the separation between the past event and the audience by way of presenting it live, I will reaffirm the place that the playwright takes in the chain of communication of history from the research to writing and then to performance and audience. Rokem introduces the notion of 'performing history' wherein theatre takes over the role of a professional historian but relies on different means than a historian in order to bring history to the audience, namely theatre relies on the ability of the actor to convince the audience that he presents history. For him the actor is the principle witness-historian, in the eyes of the spectator. Here lies a pitfall for the theatrical presentation of history. The actor relies on the text they are given and its historical accuracy. Thus the historical responsibility lies primarily with the author. I will place the playwright within Rokem's chain of theatrical circulation of historical energies as the facilitator between the original historical research and the actor – a link within the chain of theatrical elaboration of history. But I wish to add yet another dimension to it, that is the art of acting viewed through the prism of 'organic' actor training, which makes the command of energies and their flow an important skill to be mastered. This will help to reveal the 'mechanics' the energies' transformation from the script to the live performance. By 'filtering' Rokem's notion of 'restorative' and 'historical' energies through the acting techniques of evoking energies of the text, as outlined by the 'organic' school of acting with the reference to Robert Benedetti's exercises, I will elaborate on the sensorial aspect of presenting a historical text. I propose to look at one aspect of performing history as having potential for historical truth – the 'historical energy' restored to a live performance by the actor. I shall endeavour to demonstrate this with the help of my own dramatic text about Catherine the Great.

This is made possible by an alternative outlook on the issue of historical in drama which has been developing in the past few decades. What is not taken into

consideration very often when discussing the aspects of fictionalisation and historical accuracy of theatrical performance is the processes involved in the craft of acting, the tools employed for the creation of the character, and, as such, the very nature of theatrical endeavour. It is not a mere re-enactment of certain actions but a forceful and uncompromising engagement on the part of the actor into the circumstances of the story and character as well as the inclusion of the viewers into this engagement, who become part of the events by way of compassion and sharing of the actors' energy. Although the notion of energy has been a part of the theatrical discourse since ancient times, its historical quality began to crystallise in the scholarly vocabulary relatively recently. First Stephen Greenblatt looked at works of art from the distant past that 'carried' traces of social energies of the time when they were created. Next Freddie Rokem argued that dramatic texts dealing with historical events of great public significance "overcome the sense of separation from the past" (xi), recreate and make available for experience the energies of these events, and have restorative qualities. By expanding these notions of energy towards the concept of personal historical energies, I wish to 'restore' and 'revive' the historical character on the stage. This, I hope, will help theatre to regain its rightful place as a vehicle for histories. According to Rokem,

History can only be perceived as such when it becomes recapitulated, when we create some form of discourse, like the theatre, on the basis of which an organized repetition of the past is constructed, situating the chaotic torrents of the past within an aesthetic frame. (xi)

Thus the methodology for writing the play itself crystallised as a twofold process. The first stage involved the study of Catherine's popular mythology against the historical research of original documents, memoirs and scholarly studies on the subject, which incorporated not only the works by and about Catherine the Great, but also about other characters in the play, particularly about those who alongside Catherine were central for the action of the script, but also treatises about the life of the Russian nobility, the secret services and the police, as well as political history of the times of the action. This provided a wealth of information about the events and people. It allowed me to avoid the pitfalls of the commonly accepted myths and build a holistic insight into the characters, the events and the epoch. It made it



possible for the playwright to adhere to the responsibilities of a history teller, avoiding a misnomer and presenting event or relationships that are not supported by the historical sources. The second stage was the creation of the dialogue based on the research. This is where ‘invention’ or fictionalisation was required since very little verbatim dialogue survived since the eighteenth century, except for some snippets in the few memoirs. During this process the notion of historical energies was the key. By applying Rokem’s notion of energies of historical events and Greenblatt’s idea of energies being ‘encoded’ in the texts from the past, and drawing on the first hand written accounts from the era, particular events and relationships were identified, finally the decision making processes and dialogue was shaped. The first hand testimonies were central to identifying energies of historical characters. Thus the notion of historical energies was extended to the individual energies of historical personages which can be identified through historical research, encoded in the script of a play, and made available to the audience during the performance. In this sense a theatrical performance could have a potential to become historiographic. This evoking of historical personal energies in live performance is what I will call here ‘living history’.

*Living History: Myth, Representation and Dramatisation of Catherine the Great*, then, traces the road that the creation of the historical play about Catherine the Great had to travel. The overarching structure of the exegesis reflects the milestones on this road and the direction the research for the play has taken – from the overview of the wide field of popular representations of my principle character, through to the theoretical issues of presenting history in the form of a theatrical performance in view of the latest scholarship, and finally focusing on the particular approach for the historical in theatre, expanding, this way, the theoretical discussion towards the practical outcome. It begins with Chapter One which is dedicated to a study of Catherine’s mythology and her “life” in popular culture as the first step in the process, since the future play will exist exactly within the popular culture as an elaboration on a well-known subject. This chapter updates and expands the previous analysis of Catherine’s mythos made by John T. Alexander in 1988. It outlines the origins of the mythology connected to Catherine the Great in the late eighteenth and early nineteenth centuries in Western Europe and Russia. Acknowledging the similarities between the two mythologising traditions as results of political propagandist actions that used misogynist tools to achieve their goals, it underlines

differences between them as well. While the Western propaganda was aimed at the discrediting of Russia itself and attacked Catherine's femininity as the head of state, in Russia the new generation of intelligentsia criticised Catherine as a representative of what they perceived as an oppressive tsarist regime. At the same time a sense of nostalgia for Catherine's time was a counterpoint to her criticism in Russian popular culture as well. I give particular attention to the ways in which Catherine was represented during Soviet times. Despite Alexander's describing that period as characterised by a certain neglect of Catherine's history, it was then when her return to popular representations in Russia began. The chapter concludes with the latest developments in Catherine's iconography which could be described as a kind of 'renaissance' of interest towards her in the cultural field. This renewed interest is characterised largely by continued reinforcement of sexualised mythology in the Western culture, which is offset by a more thoughtful approach to history by Russian authors. Chapter Two develops the response to the allegorical 'assassination' of Catherine's character by the plethora of previous dramatic works, by searching for the possibility of a more historically accurate portrayal in theatre. This moves the discussion towards the theoretical considerations of presenting history on stage with particular emphasis on the latest scholarship dedicated to the criticism of theatre as a place for history and the responsibility of the playwright towards their historical subject. The chapter first looks at arguments presented by Stern who sees theatre as inferior to literary historiography and denies theatre historical validity. The discussion identifies problems with a literary approach to a live performance that leads to Stern's outcomes. Further questions are identified through an analysis of the recent dissertation on biographical theatre by Kathryn Lyall-Watson and the notion that theatre is not concerned with historical accuracy, which relates to the playwright's responsibility towards the history they portray. As a result of my analysis of the historical theatre criticism, I propose to account for the theatre's heightened mode of communication which includes emotional, sensorial responses and which come on top of intellectual assessment of the performance. This sensorial aspect is an inalienable part of theatrical experience and thus must be included into the analysis of the historical theatre as well. The chapter brings forward the recent scholarship by Freddy Rokem which introduces the notion of historical energies present in performances about events of the past. The discussion develops Freddy Rokem's collective 'historical energies' as a historiographic function of 'performing

history' into a proposition to search for individual historical energies to be identified from the history of Catherine the Great and used in the new play about her. The chapter concludes with a section which outlines the ways in which the personal historical energies can be identified and reproduced in performance through the art of acting, using what is called the 'organic' approach to acting as developed, among others, by Robert L. Benedetti. Finally Chapter Three explains how this notion of personal historical energies was developed into the draft script of a new play. Taking the example of the Prelude to the play as a recreation of historical events, it shows the use of the source material by the playwright in the process of discovering the historical energies in the source and encoding them within the script to be later used by the actor in creation of a historiographic performance. The theoretical part for the dissertation is followed by the practical outcome of my research. *Catherine's Beginning* is a play in three acts which depicts selected events within the Russian court during the times of the Seven Years' War with the then still Grand Duchess Catherine as a central figure. This way the theoretical discussion about the historical in theatre finds its way into a practical outcome in the form of the script.

\*\*\*

My fascination with Catherine II of Russia originated with a few books on Russian history – works of fiction about the life and times of the famous empress – that ignited my imagination and inspired me to bring her story to the stage. I realised that in order to achieve this I needed to thoroughly study my subject, to engage with documents and historical research on her, her circle of acquaintances, the dynamics of the political life in Russia and Europe during her lifetime and many other aspects of the related history. The historical research was quite straight forward however. There is a substantial bibliography of scholarly research that can provide enough information on the history of Catherine and her times. Works of Isabel de Madariaga, John T. Alexander, Hélène D'Encausse, Henri Troyat or Simon Dixon alone deliver the wealth of knowledge. My knowledge of the Russian language made the publications by Vasily Alekseyevich Bilbasov, Aleksandr Gustavovich Brikner, Inna Arkadyevna Soboleva, Olga Igorevna Yeliseyeva or Yevgeny Viktorovich Anisimov available to me and gave further and deeper understanding of the issues concerning the life of Catherine and her cultural environment. The most interesting, exciting and inspirational for my exploits as a playwright were the written testimonies and documents from the eighteenth century, beginning with Catherine's

own memoirs, those of Princess Dashkova, Claude Rulhière, Stanislaw Poniatowski, *Compte de Ségur*, the court journals of Catherine's secretary Khrapovitsky, Catherine's correspondence, manifestos, her dramaturgical works, etc. and, along with many dozens of written sources, I collected portraits, lithographs, drawings of the people and places that would appear in the drama. All that was a prerequisite to approaching the topic: the thorough investigation, a long look into the faces of my characters, into their eyes, 'immersion' in their lives, so that, in the quietitude of understanding, it would be possible to hear their voices, feel their pulse.

It is not my ambition to 'unearth' new evidence, some new explosive information about Catherine and her life for the scholars studying her history, although I do make a point of using some aspects of her life that have been overlooked even in historiography. Hundreds of scholars have done it before me, they are doing it at the moment and will continue studying Catherine because interest towards her does not seem to wane. As John T. Alexander wrote, she "led a life so full of varied activities in such exotic settings, amid so many dramatic events and memorable personalities" that even today, over two centuries after her death, "she still enjoys immense recognition" and "both the culturally literate and the ordinary public know her name and sense her fame and notoriety" (vii). Ultimately this dissertation is not about the history of Catherine herself. What I set out to find was how that historical research could lend itself to a playwright who wishes to create a new popular work that would speak about this remarkable historical figure, how historical evidence would allow this piece to shape up and how the notion of historical energies could be used in creation of a theatrical text.

In view of my research of Catherine's popular imagery and the renewed importance of the ethical aspect of writing about a historical subject as evident in the recent scholarship, my project strives to formulate a methodology for fictionalising history. An approach had to be found that would avoid the pitfalls of the commonly accepted myths and build a holistic insight into the characters, the events and the epoch, thus making it possible for the playwright to adhere to the responsibilities of a history teller, abstaining from a misnomer and presenting events or relationships that are not supported by the historical sources, while allowing and accounting for the inevitable fictionalisation, invention of the dialogue which a theatrical performance requires. This is an intervention in an ethic argument about what is a better history play, what degree of fictionalisation is acceptable and how to approach

fictionalisation, in order to position the historical playwright to respond to the material they are using with particular sensitivity, to deal with record rather than ‘making it up’. In hope that the playwright will engage with the record with that understanding, this thesis proposes a particular approach for fictionalising history through dialogue. In her article “Fictorians: Historians Who ‘Lie’ About the Past, and Like It” published in the journal *Text* Christine de Matos defines ‘fictorians’ as authors who construct fictionalised accounts of history and who

wish to move beyond the available historical evidence to be able to expose the injustices of the past, and understand those who contributed to those injustices by giving an emotional component to historical actors, real or fictionally representative, and by establishing an emotional connection to their reader as part of their own moral or ethical comprehending of that past. This means moving from describing an external world to recovering an internal one. (9)

She argues, however, that “an important difference” exists “between ‘lies’ for the purposes of narration – for example the creation of dialogue – and historical mistakes, which remain as unforgivable for the fictorian as the historian” (14). This thesis shares these concerns.

My search began with a feeling, perhaps somewhat nostalgic, but which reminded me of the relation between the artist and their historical subject. The feeling, the impulse is the trigger for a work of art and is the first note in the ‘score of the role’ for any actor. It gave me a push to understand the sensorial aspect of theatre and, by using my own background as a Russian as well as a beneficiary of the ‘organic’ acting training, to approach the historicity in theatre from a different angle.

And so let us begin.

**Chapter One. Assassination: Semiramida of the North Never Was. Murder, Bestiality and Character Assassination of Catherine the Great.**

Never did any state in the world, neither the Roman in the time of its greatest extension, nor the so called conquest of the world by Alexander, nor the Chinese Empire, never was any realm in universal history so colossal as that which submitted to the sceptre of Catherine. Thus in tsarish majesty and might was she the first subject in the species of humanity. Irrefutable truth demands from the impartial Historian the attestation, that the force of Her Spirit in a life full of achievements was equal to Greatness of Her dignity. (Anon., qtd. in Alexander 330)

She was admitted to the pantheon of greats already by her contemporaries (even though she refused to accept the title) as one of the most exceptional figures in world history. It is understandable then that her person continues to excite our imagination now, over two hundred years later. Indeed a girl from a tiny impoverished provincial principedom in Germany was brought to Russia to become a wife to the heir to the throne. Thanks to her vitality, intelligence, strong will, and common sense, she persevered through a loveless and abusive marriage, depression, navigated the pitfalls of court intrigue, defied death and enemies, won popularity among the Russians, educated herself preparing for the crown, which she took in a coup, in which two separate parties acted in her favour without the knowledge of each other. She became ruler of the largest land in the world and dedicated the rest of her life to the service of her adopted country, doubling its income, enlarging its population, its territory, promoting medicine, education, sciences, and arts, defeating its enemies and winning respect and appreciation for herself at home and for Russia around the world. She left the legacy of decades of the nation's dynamic development known as the "Russian Golden Age". The magnitude of this achievement drew admiration as well as criticism, benevolence as well as hostility, and praise as well as resentment. Catherine never exaggerated her own achievement but she cared about her public image that would remain after she would be gone. She wrote her own epitaph. In his novel *The Favourite* Valentin Pikul describes a moment when the French

Ambassador in St Petersburg Louise Philippe, comte de Ségur asked Catherine II what was the most important to her – the opinion of her contemporaries or the opinion of posterity:

History's opinion is more important to me [...]. Peter was hated and cursed in his lifetime and yet, for posterity, he remains in memory by the title of "Great". I know what they say about me... I know it all! But has there been a single day in my life when I did not think first of all about the glory and greatness of Russia? Let them judge [...]. I trust that my vices will be forgotten but my accomplishments will remain... (Pikul, 2: 490)

### **The Horse and the 'Prodigious Expansion'**

Despite Catherine the Great's self-assurance, her vices were not only remembered and denigrated but grew into myths of quite preposterous scope that permeate today's image of the empress. In Chapter Nine of her book *Empress: The Reign of Catherine II* Olga Chaikovskaya describes her as "the most slandered!" Alexander Herzen, who was the first to publish parts of Catherine's *Memoirs*, wrote of her in *My Past and Thoughts*, published in 1868, as of a woman "steeped in the blood of her husband", as "that Lady Macbeth with no remorse", "that Lucrezia Borgia without the Italian blood" (26). She has variously been labelled "an adulteress, usurper, murderess, tyrant, conqueror, oppressor, hypocrite, egoist, bad mother, nymphomaniac" (Alexander viii) who haunts the popular imagination as a spectre "roaming dimly lit palace corridors by night in search of new victims or lovers" (Cronin 14). George Bernard Shaw dismissed Catherine as having "no notion of the real history of her own times, or of the real forces that were moulding Europe" (6) and Aleksander Pushkin gave a scathing appraisal of her policies labelling her a "Tartuffe in petticoats and a crown" (93).

This imagery was pushed further during her lifetime and after her death by publications of an outwardly pornographic nature, satirical assaults in sexual terms, culminating with the infamous allegation that she died as a result of copulation with a horse. As Alexander explains:

The horse story epitomized only one variety of the scandal that dogged Catherine's posthumous repute. Russian revolutionary radicals joined with foreign critics of Russia to repeat the litany of charges against Catherine in campaigns to discredit the Romanov dynasty and Russian political prominence in Europe and Asia. (335)

Knowing how sensitive was Catherine towards slander upon her person, this, had she been alive to see it, would have probably enraged her to the limits. Alexander sees the 'horse story' as aimed at "undercutting Catherine's claims to greatness, by aggressively asserting that her primary motivation was unbridled sex, the excesses of which resulted in monstrous death" (333). It is intentional and exact revenge but it is beyond personal, unlike the one her son Paul exacted upon Catherine's death by pompously reburying his father Peter III next to her. Ironically, while wishing to 'punish' his dead mother and restore honours due to his dead father, Paul played a bad joke on both. The entire history of this royal couple's relationship suggests that Paul's father would have probably preferred to be as far from Catherine as she would have liked to be from him. This way he punished both. However, despite its ostensibly public expression, it was a personal family affair. Even if it might have appeared humiliating for some, it could not stand comparison to what was done to the empress' image during the following two hundred years.

The attacks on Catherine as the head of state, the destruction of her sexuality, morality, her political and personal reputation can and should also be viewed as aimed at destruction of her achievement and, as pointed out by Alexander, against Russia herself. In the clash of European imperial interests the propaganda took personal forms and, in the case of Catherine, it consistently targeted her femininity and had sexual connotations. It is largely to this misogynist tool of political warfare that we owe the tradition of the empress' mythologised popular culture portraiture. One of the early specimens of such assault is this satire on Russo-Turkish war – a caricature published by William Holland in London in 1791 titled "An Imperial Stride!".





*Courtesy of British Museum*

A colossal figure of Catherine II is stepping from Russia, represented by a rock on the left, to the minarets of Constantinople on the right. At the bottom, in between, are the figures of seven European sovereigns. They are gazing up Catherine's petticoats and exclaim their reactions: "To what length power may be carried", "I shall never forget it", "By Saint Jago, I'll strip her off her Fur!", "Never saw anything like it", "What! What! What! What a prodigious expansion!", "Wonderful elevation", and "The Whole Turkish Army wouldn't satisfy her". Disregarding an observer's political affiliation, the suggestion of Catherine's supposed wanton nature and the suitable reactions from her male counterparts are evident.

This "prodigious expansion" resonated through George Gordon Byron's *Don Juan* where Catherine was called the "greatest of all sovereigns and whores" (VI.92), Messalina (the promiscuous wife of the Roman Emperor Claudius) (IX.72) and Clytemnestra (the wife of the Ancient Greek ruler Agamemnon who killed her husband) (IX.80). It is hinted at by Bernard Shaw in the subtitle to his play *Great Catherine (Whom Glory Still Adores)*. "Whom glory still adores" precedes and rhymes with the line "greatest of all sovereigns and whores" in Byron's poem (VI.92) – obviously an intended pun. Irina Avkhimovich analyses the poem in her

thesis *Lord Byron's Critique of Despotism and Militarism in the Russian Cantos of Don Juan* (2008) submitted at the University of Missouri-Columbia. In her examination of *Don Juan*, she points out that "Catherine [in the poem] becomes the personification of her empire's ambitions" and "is represented as a monarch in whom political ambitions and sensual lust unite" and this ambiguity of Catherine's reputation allows Byron to "sarcastically undermine" her achievements and merits (5). Byron goes even further and, in effect, blames the deplorable, according to him, policies on Catherine's femininity and "develops the fact of females being the cause of wars into female genitalia being the ultimate cause of wars and everything else" making "Catherine's gender identity [...] inseparable from her official position" where "the former becomes an important part of the latter" (35).

It is no wonder then that explicit sexual renditions of Catherine appear in popular culture. In Alexander's *Catherine the Great: Life and Legend* two chapters are dedicated to the allegations of Catherine's nymphomania and the permeation of her supposed sexual excesses in popular portrayals, listing numerous depictions of pornographic nature in poetry and prose, as well as much more restrained, yet by all means sexually charged, stage and film productions about her, that appeared in English language. Among those most explicit contents Alexander lists *The Courtesans: The Carnal Confessions of Catherine the Great* by Hillary Auteur published in 1984 and calls it the "culmination of the sleazy stories about her", which is notably "utterly obsessed with the horse story from the first page to the last". Another specimen of "the neo-Freudian concept of polymorphous perversity" in Alexander's analysis is Sasha Sokolov's *Palisandriia* (1985). This one is a testimony of an obsession with the myth which is assumed as a given. The hero identifies himself with the horse that serviced Catherine's bestial tastes and is punished for causing her death in the process by being sent to the glue factory and being ground into a sausage (335). Whether addressing literary, dramatic, or cinematic depictions of Catherine, Alexander points out that all of them invariably concentrate on the empress' sexuality and promiscuousness or they offer comic treatment of Catherine's character at best (336-38).

### **‘Oppressive’, ‘Thoughtless’ and ‘Obsolete’**

When analysing the attitudes towards Catherine in Russia, on the other hand, Alexander sees “this critical tradition carried over into the Soviet period, accounting for the peculiar official neglect of Catherine that only recently shows signs of waning, especially in historical fiction” (335). In her book *Empress. The Reign of Catherine II. (Imperatritsa. Tsarstvovaniye Yekateriny II)* Olga Chaikovskaya sees the roots of this in the Stalinist propaganda philosophy which glorified Peter the Great as a reformer and an appropriate leader because of his “monstrous cruelty”, comparable, according to Chaikovskaya, to that of the historical Dracula, and thus justified its own brutality. Nevertheless she goes on to trace that fascination with the uncompromising strength and cruelty of Peter’s leadership and disdain for Catherine’s female ‘weakness’ back a hundred years to Alexander Herzen who wrote that Moscow “bowed before Peter [the Great] because in his savage paw was the future of Russia. But it met the woman steeped in the blood of her husband with contempt within its walls” (26). Herzen’s remark is interesting in itself because it juxtaposes the positive legacy of Peter who is known to have executed his citizens by thousands, some with his own hands, including his own son, and treats with contempt Catherine who merely is “steeped in blood of her husband” whom she did not kill herself.

What seems to be clear however is that an alternate historical reality, to that presented, for instance, by Voltaire or Derzhavin, who praised Catherine’s reign in odes and writings, was being created within the generation of the Western and Russian – and it must be noted – male intelligentsia born after the ‘Catherinian era’ who saw vestiges of that ‘era’ in the archaic language, costume and conservative outlook of the elderly survivors from the eighteenth century. This could appear as a natural generational tension, when the young reject the world of the old due to differences in interests, outlooks – everything that adds up to the generational gap. However, in her essay “Catherine’s Retinue: Old Age, Fashion, and Historicism in the Nineteenth Century” Luba Corbut explains that there is more to it than a merely generational conflict. What was happening after Catherine’s death, and what was in large part a direct result of her own reforms, was a civilisational shift in the society also driven by the new technological advances. Corbut notes that the Russian literature depicts “the men and women of the eighteenth century” still haunting the

“soirées, spa promenades, and city walks in Russia and abroad” as late as the 1850s, or even the early 1870s (782). This way “the new, regimented, and commercialized age” was “running parallel to, and at a much faster pace than, the old age of affection, libertinage, and court intrigue” (782). The tension between the two was vividly exemplified in Alexander Pushkin’s *The Queen of Spades* (1834) by the 87-year-old Countess, as a symbolic representation of Catherine II and her times, and the young gentlemen Hermann. Corbut argues that Hermann’s intrusion into the Countess’s intimate world “is parallel to, if not symbolic of, the intrusion and revisions cast by nineteenth-century modernity on the Catherinian ancient regime, and by the nineteenth-century, male writers on the occluded narrative spaces of eighteenth-century feminine interiority” (788). The countess is presented as stereotypically oppressive, thoughtless and obsolete, outright ugly and ridiculous to the eye of the ‘modern’ and ‘civilized’ young man that Hermann is. She is ridiculed for her dimness, lack of refinement, caprices and obstruction of her young protégé Liza and, as Corbut points out, “she bears a striking resemblance to the old ladies of Catherine II’s 1770s comedies: those Khanzhakhinas, Vestnikovas, and Chudikhinas [...]” (790).

She is stereotyped both as a copy of Catherine II and as one of those ignorant and hypocritical old ladies Catherine II, in her role as the enlightened monarch and playwright, had ridiculed herself. (790)

It is quite striking, if not to say ironic, how the stereotypes from Catherine’s own comedies of manners, the very subjects of ridicule by Catherine herself, became stereotypes in the view of the next generation of not only her times but, indeed, of her own person, strengthening the symbolic image of oppression represented by an old powerful female from the ‘old’ times, an old and loathsome past that stifles and holds back the youthful present. Catherine of course provided fodder for such satirical parallels at the end of her reign, in particularly, by her last affair with Platon Zubov, almost 40 years her junior. For the young male writers of the next generation this must have appeared not only ridiculous but also repulsive and plain wrong.

The final blow to the era of Catherine and its psychology came with Napoleon’s invasion. Symbolic of it is the fate of one of the “men of the eighteenth century”, the old Prince Bolkonsky, the father of one of the main characters in Leo Tolstoy’s *War and Peace*, who is known in the ‘society’ as “The King of Prussia”

for his austere manner, who wears eighteenth century clothing and who refuses to accept the news of Smolensk falling to the French invaders in 1812. The Catherinian epoch has taught him, as well as the entire country, to win, instilled into the consciousness that any enemy attack would be fought off away from the Russian heartland. So the swift penetration of the Russian territory by the united forces of Europe, the rape of her cities and villages fractures his understanding of the world. He suffers a stroke and dies with the words “Russia is lost”. Russia of course was not lost but her salvation came at a great cost. Prince Bolkonsky’s death, however, symbolises the end of the old Catherinian world that perishes in the great fire of Moscow which was lit by the retreating Russians themselves ahead of the advancing Napoleon. Now the new generation that did not remember the old times but vividly recalled the war came to reassess the legacy of the eighteenth century.

Parallel to this critical ‘tradition’ there existed a sense of romantic nostalgia for the ‘Golden Age’ whose end was spelled so dramatically in Prince Bolkonsky’s final words. Alexander Pushkin himself presented other juxtapositions of the spirit of the eighteenth century and that of his own in his historical novels, like *The Captain’s Daughter*, and his poetry, as was done in *To a Noble* where he expressed obvious longing for “Catherine’s times” with their “shapely gardens”, esteemed Muses and “noble indolence”. Nevertheless this did not fit the ‘new’ moral standards and Herten came to criticise Pushkin’s adulation of a Catherinian enlightened nobleman in his *Past and Thoughts*. Corbut notes that “what appears natural and harmonious in Pushkin’s poem, for Herten exposes as artificial and staged” and Pushkin’s noble increasingly resembles the Countess, who “flung themselves into pleasures, titivated themselves, loved themselves, good-naturedly absolved themselves of all sins, raised to a Platonic passion their gastronomy and brought down to some kind of a gluttonous delicacy their love of women” (797). This was a new down-to-earth, unromanticised outlook, a rejection of the past that soon would come to nihilism. Incidentally, it was Herten who first published parts of Catherine’s memoirs in Russian language and for him it obviously represented the full extent of the Empress’ corruption. The eighteenth century was truly over and the modernity created a new critical and mythical narrative of ‘Catherinianism’. Only in the beginning of the twentieth century the mythical cloud began to disperse in Russia, when first Vasily Alekseyevich Bilbasov published his study *Istoriya Yekateriny Vtoroi* (*The History of Catherine the Second*) in 1890-1896, which remained

unfinished, and then in 1907 when A. S. Suvorin published the complete and annotated *Zapiski Imperatritsy Yekateriny Vtoroi (Memoirs of Empress Catherine the Second)* translated from the Imperial Academy of Science's French language edition. But then the Russian revolution took place which destroyed the monarchy and brought around, yet again, a different attitude towards history.

### **'Dismissive', 'Inaccessible', 'Arrogant' and 'Absent'**

The Soviet period saw another turn in the criticism of Catherine in Russia and I can only partially agree with Alexander's view of the official neglect of the Empress during that era. Catherine kept appearing in popular presentations of the eighteenth century history in the Soviet Union – most notably in the film *Admiral Ushakov* (1953), a film version of Nikolai Gogol's *Evenings on a Farm Near Dikanka* (1961) and a popular play by Leonid Zorin *The Royal Hunt* (1974) which was also made into a film in 1988. Mostly the portrayals were rather unflattering. In both films she appears pretentious, dismissive, inaccessible and arrogant. Her short exchange with the hero of the Black Sea campaign Ushakov in *Admiral Ushakov* is quite revealing when, turning away from her interlocutor, she looks at her retinue, while still talking to Ushakov: "How do you get by without French? You're a bear. Just as you have been a bear so you remain." During her episode in *Evenings...* the empress says haughtily: "His Serene Highness [Potiomkin] promised to introduce me to the people whom I haven't seen so far." This, of course, was well-fitted within the framework of the communist revolutionary ideology whose default was the negative outlook at the ruling classes in the tsarist Russia and their arrogant detachment from the masses that fed them. Nevertheless Catherine kept appearing in film, drama and in novels. However what was a true neglect is described by V. S. Lopatin in "Letters without which History Becomes a Myth", published by the Russian Academy of Science in 1997 and available through the online resource Lib.ru. Noting substantial historiographic research by Western scholars like John T. Alexander, Isabel de Madariaga and Henri Troyat, Lopatin writes in 1997 about the virtual absence of Catherine's history in the Soviet historical scholarship. In fact he describes her as "persona non grata" in the Soviet historiography and argues that "it

is no wonder then that the first person who drew attention to Catherine in [the Soviet Union] was not a historian but a novelist [Valentin Pikul] (Lopatin, n.pag.). It is not to say that attempts to publish works on her were not made. In the appendix to his edition of Catherine's correspondence with G. A. Potiomkin Lopatin demonstrates, in my mind, quite well the issues that the empress's legacy faced in the Soviet Union.

The reasons for the sudden refusal by the management of "Literaturnoye naslediyе" ["The Literary Legacy" journal] to publish the already prepared linotype of the letters and Barskov's materials [analysis of the correspondence] are made clear in the note by V. D. Bonch-Bruyevich – the head of the Literary museum, the editor of the "Zvenya" ["Chain Links"] literary collections, a collector of materials on the history of Russian literature and culture. The old Bolshevik appreciated the significance of the correspondence. Not only had he purchased the galley-proofs but insisted on their careful storage, even though he wrote (in 1950): This study of "Catherine II's Letters to Potiomkin" with commentaries and introduction by Y. Barskov was not permitted for publication during the Soviet time. The time will come however when it will be published in our country. They require a sharp political introduction. I wished to publish them in the "Letopisi" ["Chronicles"] of the State Literary Museum. I got them back in 1932 and intended to include them in the "Zvenya" collections. I had to put them aside for the time being. Barskov's introduction is apolitical. He did not uncover in them all that abomination and desolation that reigned in the court of Catherine II and her circle – that culmination point of the degradation of the feudal nobility and aristocracy. If such an introduction is written then both these letters and the little memoirs of the grand whore will benefit the history... Perhaps I will manage to publish them in my lifetime. It is very important for me to write an introduction and shed political light on the behind-the-scenes court life of that time and characterise the main personages. (Lopatin, n.pag.)

This instance of "neglect" is explained by an improper political and ideological arrangement of Catherine's writing's presentation. Had the required forward been

available, the political editors would not have refused to publish the Empress's works. That, to my mind, is a more plausible explanation than Olga Chaikovskaya's reasoning which she proposes in the final chapter of her biography of Catherine wherein she argues that the Stalinist propaganda preferred the image of Peter the Great to that of Catherine as a historical icon because of his "monstrous cruelty". As mentioned earlier, Chaikovskaya traces this view to Herzen, who was a representative of the new generation of Russian intelligentsia, associated with the Decembrist movement in the first half of the nineteenth century, who protested the oppressive tsarist regime and the institution of serfdom. They accused Catherine of hypocrisy because, while professing the ideas of Enlightenment, she did not dismantle serfdom. It reflects a highly ideological view of history, which was directed at discrediting tsarism as a depraved and ill institution, and, in this case, needed to be served in a particular way to discredit one of its representatives – Catherine the Great.

### **'Ugly' and 'Grotesque'**

The list of works dedicated to Catherine in the Soviet Union is wider than outlined above and Alexander includes some of them in his Selected Bibliography, where, notably, he lists Valentin Pikul's *The Favourite* – a voluminous work concerning Catherine and Russia during her reign. Perhaps in 1988, when Alexander published his book he did not have the means to properly assess the significance of Pikul's publications for the popular image of the empress. He also did not mention Pikul's other novel *Perom i Shpagoi (With Quill and Sword)*, first published in 1972, which dealt with the times of the Seven Years War and Catherine as the Grand Duchess. Seemingly these are merely two titles in the long list of works written about Catherine the Great but their influence on her image and the image of her times cannot be overestimated in Russia.

My own adventure with the history of Catherine the Great began with these books, allocated by Alexander and Sebag Montefiore to the realm of fiction, thus alleged to be lacking the required rigor for historiographic scholarship and presumed to be a work of fiction, that is an artistic impression, a result of creative imagination,



rather than a serious study of history. In its literary form, Valentin Pikul's *The Favourite* is a novel where the author rarely provides reference to the dialogues and descriptions of historical events or people, as, for instance, Isabel de Madariaga or Simon Dixon do. Of course it is not enough to state in the foreword that "all the dialogues in the book have been derived from the historical correspondence and other documents of that epoch" (I:6) or that out of dozens and dozens of historical characters appearing in the narrative, one is fictional – only one – which was "based on authentic facts" (ibid.), in order for the work to be 'recognised' as scholarly. It is a novel. Nevertheless, taking into account the scope and fundamental nature of the text, and the potential for its popularity, the publisher back in 1979 found it necessary for it to undergo a serious independent collegial scientific review, "like an essential textbook", and only "upon a scholarly edit" was it "recommended for print". (II:602-4). The scholarly review was done by the Faculty of Russian History of the Leningrad State University, the Chief Researcher of the Leningrad Branch of the Russian History Institute of the Academy of Science of the USSR Dr Y.A. Limonov and the Chief Researcher of the Institute of Russian Philology at the Academy of Science of the USSR, Dr G. H. Moiseyeva (ibid.).

Pikul's literary talent, his ability for constructing a sweeping panoramic narrative combined with meticulous research in *The Favourite* put him to the heights of the Russian historical novel tradition, alongside with the classics like Aleksei Tolstoi's *Peter I*, or Alexander Pushkin's *The Captain's Daughter* and granted him an unprecedented circulation. According to Antonina Ilyinichna Pikul, the writer's widow, during his lifetime (until 1991) *The Favourite* saw the print of nearly 6 MM copies, while all his 28 novels sold over 20 MM. By the year 2008 over 500 MM copies of his works were sold, *The Favourite* being one of the most popular of them ("V Murmanske..." n. pag.). This text, which translates scholarly research into a popular form, by far exceeds any other fictional representation of Catherine in its popularity. It was adapted for stage and opened in Gorky Academic Russian Theatre of Crimea in 1988 (Dir. A. Novikov). It was made into a television series in 2005 directed by Aleksei Karelin. According to Antonina Pikul, as she stated in the *Pero i shpaga Valentina Pikula (The Quill and Sword of Valentin Pikul)* documentary, when she compiled the bibliography for *The Favourite*, it revealed 551 sources. In addition to the thorough research, the author collected portraits of every person he wrote about and 'listened' to them, tried to 'hear' their voices in the process of his

work on the manuscript. In my view, the scope, the insight, and wide influence of this book demands a place in studies of Catherine's popular representations but it is virtually unknown in the English-speaking world.

*The Royal Hunt* by Leonid Zorin, another significant dramatic work about Catherine, first published in 1974 is also missing in Alexander's study. It is a play that tells the story of Catherine's hunt for and the capture of the so-called Princess Tarakanova, an adventurer and imposter, who claimed to be the daughter of the late Empress Elizabeth and aimed at taking Catherine's place on the throne. The thoughtful and masterful play never left the Russian stages and still appears in repertoires of theatres around the country. It owes its success to a surprisingly rare, for Catherine's dramatic iconography, replacing of stereotypes of the Empress' character with realistic psychological drama. Catherine is given a voice and chance to explain her views on statehood, love and duty. This makes it, in my mind, a lot more interesting than the majority of popular renditions that simply follow a certain stereotypical trail. Stereotype does not offer the audience anything new, intriguing, or thought provoking. *Royal Hunt* carries deep meanings for today's Russia as it did for the audiences in the Soviet Union, because it deals with the notion of power, its demands for compromising principles, and its crushing weight on an individual. And so the phrase that Catherine addresses to Fonvizin in scene 7: "Russia, as you have probably realised by now, does not recognize weak power" is as timely today, as it was in 1775. In the beginning of the play, when Aleskei Orlov downplays the danger that Princess Tarakanova could present to such a great Empress and such a great power, Catherine argues her point symbolically on a philosophical level when she explains the secret mission that Aleksei Orlov is about to embark upon:

CATHERINE. It's not foolishness or insolence that is at stake here.

[Catherine speaks of the actions of Princess Tarakanova who claims the rights for the Russian throne.] Imposture is not a mere strive to rise to the highest position. That it encroaches on greatness is a small loss. But it arises from the wish to bring the sacred down to its level, it wishes to wipe off the border between lofty and mean and make them one and the same thing.

Aleksei Grigoryevich, I don't know what's worse –the threat or the temptation? For the first could be repulsed but the second, like an invisible ulcer, slowly devours the body. And this one sends echos around our land; I

don't even mention the reverberation on the outside. The other countries don't care that they deal with thieves. They use them to undermine Russia.  
(10)

We are also given an opportunity to discover what Catherine really wants from a man. In Scene 7 she has a conversation with her former favourite Grigory Orlov, who still suffers from her rejection. He reminds her of the times she was very tender towards him, resorts to accusations of female inconstancy and makes a weak attempt at psychological blackmail:

CATHERINE. Is it perhaps that you want to recall, Grisha, how you delivered Peter's abdication to me in Peterhof?

GRIGORY. I don't need to recall it. That day is ever real in me. (*Upon a short silence.*) Everything was only beginning then. Your reign and our love.

CATHERINE. No, my friend, you keep wallowing in recollection. Believe me that things are bad if you need to keep recalling.

GRIGORY. What can you do, those who have a soul remember. Those that don't...

CATHERINE. (*Interrupts him angrily.*) I don't know who's being forgetful here, but I see who has forgotten himself.

GRIGORY. Then I'm guilty, my sovereign...

CATHERINE. Indeed you are because you don't hear yourself, nor see yourself. My amiable friend! I'm not so inconstant as you think. Every consequence saw its cause. Spur your lazy mind and try to imagine a maid from a German province who found herself on this northern ice in the hands of a half-witted boor, given to him to rule over. A maid who, it seems, had nothing for this country except for a foreign accent. And yet it wasn't Peter's [Peter the Great's] daughters, not his grandson but she who became his true heiress – not in blood but in deed. While you, my dear, haven't managed to make yourself in ten years. You haven't got the taste for work. Ah, Grisha, bravery and beauty and willingness for battles of love are worth a lot but they don't turn a boy into a man.

How different is this Catherine to the frivolous Empress who escapes boredom by playing tricks with the bewildered foreigner from Bernard Shaw's *Catherine* (1913) or the Marlene Dietrich's expressionist creation in the dark and grotesque *The Scarlet Empress* (1934) who flings herself at guardsmen in desperation. We meet a stateswoman who makes difficult decisions and defends them, we see how she deals with crisis, how she calculates her moves.

Although there are other ambitious presentations of Catherine, such as the biopic *Young Catherine* directed by Michael Anderson with Julia Ormond and Vanessa Redgrave that can boast many awards and nominations and *Catherine the Great* directed by Marvin J. Chomsky and John Goldsmith with Catherine Zeta-Jones in the lead, Zorin's play remains a rare exception in the overall sexualised tradition, even though it cannot escape the generally accepted myth. Aleksei Orlov carries out Catherine's mission. He deceives Elizabeth/Princess Tarakanova by promising her the support of the entire navy in her bid for the Russian throne and by a fake wedding brings the imposter to St Petersburg where she is imprisoned in St Peter and Paul Fortress. Catherine wants only one thing – to know who she is, but Elizabeth refuses to speak unless Catherine sees her in person. This is the “mean” wishing to bring the “sacred” down to its level and it is too much for the empress. In Scene 7 Catherine is outraged:

CATHERINE. The insolence of this debauchee is beyond all limits. She dared to ask for my audience.

ALEKSEI. (*Grins.*) She doesn't know you well, Matushka.

CATHERINE. She's been obstinate for five days now. We don't torture so she persists.

ALEKSEI. We don't torture. We use the knout.

CATHERINE. What are you trying to say, count?

ALEKSEI. (*Quietly.*) Such a woman is not fit for your whipper.

CATHERINE. (*Rises. Growing pale.*) You pity her? Was it so sweet?

ALEKSEI. What has come over you, my sovereign?

CATHERINE. Sweet, was it? She's so good? Speak out! (*She slaps him on the cheek.*)

ALEKSEI. (*Indistinctly.*) What is there to say?

CATHERINE. Is she feeling sweet right now? Look at him, how sensitive he is. How kind-hearted! Satyr, centaur! In that case you will interrogate her yourself. Since you pity her. Without the knout.

ALEKSEI. I implore you for god's sake, spare me, my sovereign. How can I interrogate?

CATHERINE. The same way you caressed. You're skilled in cajoling, aren't you. Should I teach the master?

ALEKSEI. (*Stroking his cheek.*) Thank you. You reward generously.

CATHERINE. This has been given to you by a woman, count. As for the sovereign, be assured, she will reward you. (*She opens the door to her inner rooms.*) Come in, Aleksei Grigoryevich. Tell my Katerina Ivanovna to show you the way. She will. (*With a grin.*) They want start looking for you till the morning, will they?

*Aleksei bows and kisses her hand, walks slowly. With the same grin she follows him with her eyes.*

In the final two scenes Aleksei first goes to interrogate Elizabeth. Only then she realises that her beloved and ally Aleksei was not killed or imprisoned, that he has been deceiving her all the time and curses him, revealing nothing. This breaks Aleksei's spirit, he resorts to drink and loses his last friend poet Kustov, who disdains Aleksei for such a low act of betrayal. In the end Catherine, as the sovereign, required too much of her subject and the weight of guilt crushes him. As a woman, Catherine treats him no better by first ordering him to use any means possible to carry out the mission and then abusing him for the very same. Setting aside the fact that there is no evidence suggesting that Aleksei Orlov was ever Catherine's lover, it was his brother Grigory who was her partner for nearly thirteen years, what is presented to the audience is that very tradition of Catherinian iconography, originating with Byron, Herzen, or present in the views of Bonch-Bruyevich, which claims without evidence that Catherine used her sex in order to exert power and, in Avkhimovich's words, "is presented as a monarch in whom political ambitions and sensual lust unite" (5). And yet, this play, as I mentioned earlier, is an exception because in most of the relevant stage and film presentations across the two cultural fields – English and Russian – Catherine never appears so outspoken and psychologically rich a character.

Nevertheless this psychological richness continues to remain within the framework of mythology and looking for the historical Catherine in it is problematic. The success of the play, however, reflects both the resilience of the 200-year-old mythos as well as it reveals that historical accuracy is not a prerequisite for a successful play. Curiously, when the script was adapted to film in 1988 by the author himself the usual mythology of Catherine's proverbial promiscuity was pushed further. The film opens with an unknown naked man slipping away from Catherine's bed. Her character appears even colder with the help of the production means. From the beginning her appearances are filmed in a pale cold gleam that only partially lights her and her shady surroundings, which enforces the impression of chill that emanates from a masterful creation by Svetlana Kryuchkova. In an absolute moment of brilliance the director shows her in profile which suddenly is reminiscent of the famous 1763 portrait of Catherine II by F. C. Rokotov, thus enhancing the illusion of the 'real' empress that we see on screen. In conversations Catherine appears to be haughty, strict, and somehow remote. She is preoccupied with many problems and does not smile. This contradicts so many testimonies of her contemporaries who pointed out that the empress was energetic and sociable. Nevertheless she appears so at the final scene with Aleksei, which in the film is set during a masquerade at the palace at night with fireworks and music in order to underline the contrast between the merrymaking and the dark reality of the crushing power that punishes the beautiful, young, and sympathetic imposter Elizabeth, who is imprisoned and dying in the fortress, and the submissive traitor of his own conscience Count Aleksei Orlov. Catherine appears in the scene wearing Harlequin costume and thick clownish makeup. By the end of the conversation with Aleskei they are in her room, her makeup is smeared on her face and with the final words, which have been quoted above, the ugly and grotesque aging woman spreads her legs in front of Aleksei in a 'prodigious expansion'.

Catherine is presented as a cold, ruthless moral degenerate, who is deprived of compassion and humanity. This could be seen as the director's potent statement about his own attitude towards the authorities, a symbolic statement on the decomposition and corruption of the powers that be at the doorstep of the Soviet Union's collapse. It is an indictment. And the final scene, when Kustov, a loser, a drunkard, a deeply wounded soul (a typical Russian 'holy fool' brilliantly performed by Mikhail Kononov) that has been so loyal to his powerful benefactor, quits the

comfort and walks away, empty, into the wilderness, preferring to perish on his own than to serve this degenerate and unscrupulous authority, completes the verdict. Through the eyes of the Soviet intelligentsia this could be viewed as symbolic of the nation ‘walking away’ on their soviet rule. Although this mythology of Catherine’s own ‘degeneration’ is used as an allegory of the Soviet reality, it is an indictment of Catherine as well. The film poster by Vilen Karakashev is telling (*Plakat ‘Tsarskaya okhota’* n. pag.):



“The Royal Hunt” film poster (1990)

Thus both Pikul's historical novels and Zorin's play contradict Alexander's claim that "in the USSR she [was] ignored as an archaic embarrassment" (330). While Pikul approached his subject with a self-proclaimed cool eye of a researcher, beginning *The Favourite* with a quote from Vasily Osipovich Klyuchevsky saying that "[f]or us she [Catherine] cannot be neither a banner, nor a target; for us she is a mere subject of study" (qtd. in Pikul I: 13; Kluchevsky n. pag.), Zorin's play, at least, confirms Alexander's view that she was "attacked as a despotic foreign adventuress who mouthed enlightened phrases so as to mask tyrannous practices [...]" (330).

### **A Sex Slave Collector**

In the post-Soviet Russia the myth of Catherine's 'excesses' found a new incarnation in Yelena Gremina's play *Behind the Mirror*. According to Lurana Donnels O'Mally, it "has kept alive the vision of Catherine as a lover as well as a ruler. In the 1993-94 season, four separate productions of this play were running simultaneously in Moscow, including one starring diva Galina Vishnevskaiia" (xxxii). The play has only three characters: Matushka (Catherine herself), Sashen'ka (Catherine's favourite Aleksander Lanskoi), and Countess Praskovya Bruce (Catherine's long time close friend and the 'alleged' "*éprouveuse*" for her lovers). It takes place in the years of 1779-1784, which is already after Praskovya Bruce was caught in an affair with Catherine's favourite Rimsky-Korsakov and banished from the court for this betrayal of their friendship (Troyat, 234). Thus the play's relation to history is already problematic before it even begins. In the first scene Sashen'ka - a handsome, shy, and somewhat dull young man is introduced into Catherine's 'secret' bedroom by Praskovya Bruce. Countess explains to the prospect lover that he has been designated, chosen by the His Serene Highness Potiomkin for the service of the motherland. She instructs him how he should behave and what Matushka expects from her lovers. Bruce hints that the empresses love demands are numerous and multiple, and that Sashen'ka should be ready throughout the day. But there is a handsome reward awaiting, and the first hundred thousand roubles in gold are already waiting for him on the table right there. She also explains the workings of the elaborate mechanism that divides the bed in the bedroom into two halves. The partition is made into a mirror behind which is Catherine's private room where she



receives guests. When the guests are gone, Catherine sets off the mechanism and the mirror lifts revealing her sitting on the other half of the bed. Throughout the duration of the play Sashen'ka remains mostly in bed, he does not pronounce anything of note except repeating over and over the litany he apparently heard from his father: "Don't refuse the service. Don't ask for it." He also repeats that he is going to die anyway. Catherine appears to be absent and repeating herself as well. In fact all the characters seem to get stuck in a kind of a loop. The only development comes when in Part Two Praskovya Bruce brings Sashen'ka a 'special drink' that is supposed to make him 'mighty'. While Bruce is pushing the drug on to Sashen'ka, Matushka "radiantly" and "enthusiastically" shares with them her epitaph that she has written for herself. In the end Sashen'ka expires to Catherine's ranting about theatre. A favourite is portrayed as a prisoner victim of an aging predatory female, who collects sex slaves, and at the same time he is a literal victim of the conniving of the other powerful female, whose implied goal is to exert some sort of power over the empress by shortening the tenure of her lovers, even if that required poisoning them, thus preventing them from getting too close to her and gaining power themselves.

Scholars, beginning with Vasily Alekseyevich Bilbasov and Aleksandr Gustavovich Brikner, have long dismissed the most salacious stories about Catherine's sexual exploits as gossip that "can be traced to a handful of French writers in the years immediately after Catherine's death when republican France was fighting for its life against a coalition that included Russia" (Cronin 14), and recognised Catherine's importance and concentrated on analysis of her legacy. Isabel de Madariaga puts it this way in *Russia in the Age of Catherine the Great*:

The stories about Catherine's love life are legion; its drama has been inflated to the extent that it authorises more interest than her statecraft. It is as well therefore to stress that there is no evidence of any kind to support the more colourful tales, such as the alleged tests of virility carried out by Catherine's ladies-in-waiting, Countess Bruce, or Anna Protasova (the 'éprouveuse' of Byron's *Don Juan*), or the alleged vetting for venereal disease carried out by Dr. J. Roberson. There is also no evidence that Potiomkin chose Catherine's lovers for her, a story probably based on the fact that three of them had been his aides-de-camp, and that Catherine was more likely to notice young men

who were about the court. As for the tales of multiple orgies in Catherine's declining years, they can be dismissed as inventions. (355-356)

### **From “Erotic Universe” to Dragging Russia into Enlightenment**

Nevertheless these views, and the sexual connotations in particular, continue to find new expression in popular depictions and even the documentary genre, of which the 2003 documentary film *The Lost Secret of Catherine the Great* directed by Peter Woditsch about Catherine's alleged secret pornographic collection is a salient example. The film documents the search triggered by a confession made to the author by his father, a former Wehrmacht soldier, who, when in allied captivity, was shown photos (by another German POW) of erotically themed furniture allegedly belonging to Catherine II and allegedly photographed at the imperial sites near Leningrad during the German assault on the Soviet Union in WWII. Two former Wehrmacht soldiers confirm on camera that they saw something of that sort in a room in a palace back in 1941 and the author goes on the search near St Petersburg. Persons appearing before camera speak of rumours and anecdotes that they heard from someone else. Peter Woditsch stops short of stating that all the officials from the museums he visited in Russia, indeed the state itself conspired to keep the lost erotic secret of Catherine away from him. Despite exploring many leads that take him even to Vatican where someone, in secrecy, supposedly saw the artefacts in question, rumours remain rumours and the film ends with the same question it begins with. The whole is presented with the air of serious, even dark mystery that, by the evil will of someone, the Russian authorities perhaps, avoids being revealed. It is not the case of a negative result being a legitimate result. It is the research question remaining standing, like the question of the origin of the world. However just as such stories incited Peter Woditsch's imagination, they did and continue to do the same to numerous others. And so it remains perhaps for the next generations to explore and exploit, ask again and perhaps again come to the same conclusion that we don't know and perhaps blame the Nazis or the Allies or the Russian museum authorities for the conspiracy and destruction of the evidence. They never found the Amber Chamber that was stolen from the same palace and simply rebuild it from scratch. Perhaps something of that sort might have happened to Catherine's “Erotic

Universe” as it is called in the film. After all, despite the above quoted claims by scholars about the lack of evidence to the salacious anecdotes some keep digging.

It is no wonder, then, that such stories find themselves in the popular representations, and the apogee, in my mind, of this pornographic “tradition” of Catherine is the play by the Australian playwright Tony McNamara *The Great*. The back cover of the published version states: “Russian history? Well no, not exactly.” It is the story of Catherine the Great “re-imagined through the comic lens” of the author. So this is a comedy loosely based on the life of the Russian empress that is made to entertain us and perhaps say something about the subject of the play – Catherine herself. The annotation from the back cover (style and syntax as in the original) tells us (structure and punctuation are original):

When young Princess Catherine is taken to Russia to marry the half-wit Grand Duke Peter, she is transformed from sweet innocent abroad to the very apogee of Russian demagoguery. She may not like her husband, but she does like Russia. And she is very fond of Russian soldiers. As she learns the ways of the world, she survives her disastrous marriage to become Catherine the Great. A freewheeling comedy about love and punishment, how to grab power and retain it while bringing up children, dragging Russia into the enlightenment and trying to get laid.

It is almost what it says it is and more. It indeed has very little to do with history. Everything is an invention, except the names of the protagonist – Catherine the Great – and her husband – Peter. In the play Catherine comes from France, instead of Germany, and is a Catholic, not Lutheran, as was the case. She loves bears and wishes to have one, but finds herself in the environment of “cheesecake” jokes, talks of “that pink wet thing of hers”, rape, bestiality, vomiting and “juices running...” When it comes to organising the coup and the need to attract an influential general on their side, the conversation with Orlo (supposedly Grigory Orlov), Catherine’s lover is telling:

CATHERINE: I will not fuck him.

ORLO: Oh.

CATHERINE: You assumed I would.

ORLO: People are prepared to die for this, you are seemingly fearless to me, I did not imagine. And you would fuck me, I figured. [...] You have a way, you find a way, that is your greatness. (28)

This is when the title of the play is ‘unpacked’. Catherine’s greatness lies in her ability to “find a way”, even if it means sleeping with anyone. Catherine seduces characters one after another in order to organise the coup, to kill her husband, and her lover. The word “fuck” in its different dramatic forms is used 21 times in the script. There is a speech of Catherine, where she inserts it in every second sentence. She utilises her sexuality as a weapon coolly, offhandedly, just as she does murder. The second act opens on Catherine, “now in her early fifties”, astride Plimptov, “a young handsome banker in his forties”, having sex:

PLIMPTOV: Oh, Empress, how sweet you are, the nape of your neck, the scent of your –

*She stops and throws a look at him.*

CATHERINE: I’m just wondering why you think it’s ok to talk?

PLIMPTOV: I am filled with ardour for you, poetry fills my veins while you are astride me.

CATHERINE: It will not do. I have mentioned it before.

PLIMPTOV: But I love you.

CATHERINE: Say it again, your eyes are coming out. You are a fool, which I do not mind as you are aesthetically and functionally pleasing to me. You are however a loud fool. And that I despise.

PLIMPTOV: I feel a song when our eyes meet, I feel –

CATHERINE: You are one of my treasurers and it worries me this can happen to you, how safe is my money when some girl can turn your head this easily?

PLIMPTOV: No-one turns my head but you, you turn it three hundred and sixty degrees.

CATHERINE: I am certainly thinking of doing just that.

PLIMPTOV: I believe we could love each other, marry, and that every moment would be joyous and bliss.

CATHERINE: You are a preposterous little man. I have half a mind to drown you.

PLIMPTOV: I am not afraid of you as the others. I, George Plimptov, are not afraid, I feel you love me, dumpling.

CATHERINE: Dumplin? I will kill you, your parents, your wife and child, your horses, your dogs, your crops, your will to live, and then I will drink a cup of tea and have forgotten you before I finish it. (50)

The comedy is then further relieved first by the entrance of Marial, Catherine's confidant, and then by her previous lover Orlo, bringing some "urgent" news, and by their conversation while Catherine remains astride of Plimptov until she dismisses him. If to apply the previously mentioned Alexander's observation that while "the historical treatments [of Catherine] have oscillated between panegyric and pornographic poles, fictional and artistic works attempted to bridge the polarity in dramatizing Catherine's personality and life for broader audiences", Tony McNamara's *The Great* will stand as a kind of a pinnacle of this dramatic "bridging" of the previous, albeit sexually charged, but still relatively 'subdued' if not subtle renditions of Catherine's character in popular culture and the pornographic 'tradition' of Catherine's image. In his review of the Sydney Theatre Company's production of the play Brett Casben draws a parallel between *The Great* and *Sex and the City* as both dealing "with women learning to enjoy their sexuality and its congruent empowerment." *The Great*, according to him, "looks at Catherine's opening of Russia to the enlightenment of the West" (Casben, n. pag.).

Setting aside Casben's idea of the kind of enlightenment to which Catherine 'opened' Russia, this shows yet again that mythos is attractive, it seems to draw attention of authors and they often prefer to override history in renderings of Catherine as a historical figure. As a result the historical character disappears. In a way it is assassinated. It becomes almost indiscernible under the chaff of caricature and sexually charged narratives to such extent that it is no wonder that more often than expected interlocutors, upon learning that I am researching the life of Catherine, inevitably ask me whether it is true that she "did it with a horse".

### **The Two Greats**

Looking back at the criticism of Catherine, one more dimension of it can be identified, namely, the reasons for it lie within the conflict between two approaches

to reform and power: revolutionary – forceful and destructive, which is inherently male, and evolutionary female approach. Catherine is viewed in comparison to Peter I whose legacy she vocally praised and verified her own against. She was the only Russian monarch whose achievements could be compared to those of Peter. This rendered feasible the publication of Brikner's *Illustrated History of Peter I and Catherine II* in one volume in the early XX c. The two monarchs stand together in history as having the deepest impact on their country. While acknowledging the scope of their achievement, it is worth pointing out the difference between Catherine's and Peter I's methods. Peter was a violent and impulsive man. Catherine was a woman who used completely different means to reach the similar goals. H  l  ne Carr  re d'Encausse and Inna Soboleva note this in their respective studies of Catherine II. In her *Catherine II: Un   ge d'or pour la Russie (Catherine II: The Golden Age in Russian History)* D'Encausse speaks of Catherine striving to follow Peter's example in growing the might of the country but understanding it as "social benefits" (9). Soboleva, in *German Princesses – Russian Fates (Princessy nemetskiye – Sud'by russkiye)*, underlines Catherine's non-violence in struggling with barbarianism "not with barbaric methods, as did her predecessor Peter Alekseyevich [the Great], but with love as she did" (146). Indeed the Empress, following her inspiration which came from the encyclopaedists, worked tirelessly on creating an education system, cultural and legal institutions in order to change her society. She was famous for accommodating every interlocutor to the point of them feeling important and thus able to solve problems amicably, just like she kept winning over every spy that was sent to report on her in her time as the Grand Duchess. Yet, despite her best intentions she was not able to keep everyone on her side and it became clear at the end of her reign. Perhaps Valentin Pikul expressed it best in his *The Favourite*:

People who knew her closely were able to appreciate the empress as a person of state, forgiving her for a lot of things, for, when associating with Catherine herself, they saw: had she been thrice the autocrat, she still did not have unlimited means, on the contrary, she often ceded to circumstances that were beyond her. [...] But there was another view – on the part of the cultural Russia that did not personally know Catherine and generalised the fruits of

her reign much wider, sometimes blaming her where she was not at fault.  
(II:500)

There was another view of Catherine formed outside of the country that mixed the demand for pornography with the hostility towards Russia. However the “evolutionary” outlook on Catherine by female scholars is an important point of difference from the previous male-driven scholarly and fictional insights into the Empress’ character. The juxtaposition of the two – the male and the female – approaches deserves, in my mind, a separate study. Although this is not my subject here, I nevertheless wish to note that it is the analysis of Catherine’s character made by female scholars, particular those by Olga Yeliseyeva, Inna Soboleva, Hélène d’Encausse, Isabel de Madariaga, which inspired and informed my attempt at a new dramatisation of Catherine’s history, because they demythologise her and bring new light to and widen the understanding of the already known historical facts and myths as well as the issues of Catherine’s sexuality and every other trait of her character, circumstances, and her rationale. For a playwright writing about a historical female character, the female perspective on her is of outmost importance.

### **Semiramida of the North?**

It is worth noting that the scholarly view of Catherine is not entirely free of myth either. One of the examples is the allegorical title of Semiramida of the North that seems to be attached to Catherine. De Madariaga, an esteemed western scholar of the times and life of Catherine II cannot help but use this poetic title offhandedly in her narrative, when describing Diderot’s astonishment at Catherine’s generosity when in his time of financial woe she offered not only to buy his library but to leave it with him and pay him a lifetime wage as her librarian looking after his own books. It just seems only ‘natural’ to speak of her in elevated epithets and flattering terms: “At first Diderot lost his speech at this truly royal treatment but later, being a warm-hearted and expansive man, led the choir of praise for Semiramida of the North” (536).

There seem to be a problem with putting the words “praise” and “Semiramida of the North” in one sentence, particularly if to recall the way Leopold von Sacher-

Masoch used the symbolism of the ancient Assyrian queen in the words of his character Captain Choglokov: “But the most horrible of all of them remains “Semiramida of the North”, as Voltaire is so kind to call our current sovereign, Semiramida she is only as far as she ascended the throne over the dead body of her husband because the Asian one at least raised a purpura of great deeds and wise institutions over her crimes, vices and reprehensibilities.” Captain Choglokov also calls Catherine Medusa and Messalina (Sacher-Masoch n. pag.). Of course, Masoch’s character although speaking in 1767 was endowed with these words in hindsight by a XIX c. Austrian author to undoubtedly express his own attitude towards the Empress. Nevertheless it underlines a sort of cognitive dissonance in relation to the image of Catherine II, which is represented in the use of the epithet related to the legendary Assyrian Semiramida and the duality in her perception.

In his presentation *Pushkin and Byron: new remarks on the old topic* delivered at the Tynyanovskiye Readings in 2006 A. Dolinin dismantles ‘the myth of the myth’, if I may use this as a pun. The epithet ‘Semiramida of the North’ has been attached to Catherine, it seems, since the times of her reign and, travelling through works of literature and historiography, reached us today as a flattering expression of amazement, fascination and admiration (I am convinced that de Madariaga uses that epithet precisely to express this admiration felt by Diderot) towards the greatness and magnanimity of Catherine that came off the sharp and light quill of Voltaire. Indeed the relationship between the famous encyclopaedist and Catherine II was rich and filled with mutual respect and adoration, to which the vast correspondence between the two is the testimony. However it is the very respect for his reigning pen pal that prevented Voltaire addressing Catherine with the name of Semiramida. Dolinin traces the history of the title that appeared long before Catherine’s reign and convincingly shows that it had rather negative connotations to which Voltaire’s own play *Semiramis* (1748) is the testament. The ancient legend at the heart of the play describes Semiramis and Ninus as husband and wife, where the wife kills her husband and takes the power. Semiramis, discontent with her husband’s treatment of her and the country, asks a young and handsome army commander Assur to poison Ninus.

Voltaire, without a doubt, realised that for Catherine who had read and banned his “*Sémiramis*”, every comparison with the heroine of the tragedy



would be unpleasant and so he never used the dubious title of “Semiramida of the North” either in his letters to the empress, or his panegyrics for her and used the name of “the northern Minerva” in his poems or, at the worst, the new Amazon’s queen Thalestris. (Dolinin n. pag.)

The two traditions that represent the duality of Catherine’s image – the panegyrics and the severe criticism or ridicule – provide a complex picture of the various myths that surround this figure, more often than not at the expense of a genuinely historical understanding. Alexander recognises this duality as two types of discussion of Catherine: “broad popular treatments that are long on gossip and drama (belonging to “*biographie romancée* variety”, in de Madariaga’s words) but short on facts and context, and specialized scholarly studies that are often inaccessible to general readers” (Alexander viii). It is precisely this inaccessibility of the scholarly work to the general public that makes the popular portrayals the principal deliverers of the historical knowledge and the carriers of responsibility for the public image of Catherine, as well as the endurance of the myths about her. The dramatic accounts however tend to oscillate around Catherine’s sexuality and her drive to power. Effectively we are invited to witness the workings of her survival instinct during her young years or/and get initiated into her imaginary bedroom. This is indeed how Catherine the Great inhabits our collective public imagination.

### **Renaissance**

In 2009 Master-Film released a feature *Gosudarynya i razboinik* (*The Empress and the Rebel*) directed by Yekaterina Toldonova with Alyona Ivchenko performing the role of Catherine. The premise for the script, written by Alyona Ivchenko and Gennady Kayumov, is an imagined dialogue between empress Catherine II and the rebel Yemelyan Pugachiov who claimed to be the miraculously surviving emperor Peter III, Catherine’s late husband, and made an attempt to dethrone her by leading a revolt known as the Peasant War 1773-1775. Now Pugachiov has been captured, tried, and sentenced to be publically quartered by the high court. This exemplary revenge is against Catherine’s enlightened convictions. Instead of punishing she wishes to educate and an execution is not the learning aid

she wishes for. Catherine tries to convince the judges to spare the rebel's life, but the nobility, who were the primary target of Pugavhiov's bloody revolt, refuse to heed to her arguments. Even those who share her convictions do not support her as revealed in this conversation with Grigory Potiomkin:

CATHERINE. This means they have not heard me. Fools. POTIOMKIN. What did you expect, Matushka? Fourteen senators, four members of the Synod, six Collegium presidents, the generals, governors – the entire cream of the cream of our society judged that villain. What else could you expect?

CATHERINE. Mercy.

POTIOMKIN. That's a nice word, Matushka. Only when you pronounce it, I, for some reason, remember about our soldiers, who fought the Turks, sacrificing themselves for our greatness. And so well they fought that they earned eternal glory for themselves. And when the peace was signed, they, upon your order, and without a day of rest, marched against those rebels.

CATHERINE. Mercy, Grisha, is not a word. It is admittance of your own guilt that the world you're live in is cruel and inhuman.

Later on she exclaims: "Grisha dear, even you can't understand. I am all alone."

For the first time Catherine's conflict with the nobility is explored in depth, revealing Catherine's loneliness in her struggle against the wall of entrenched apparatus of oligarchy who staunchly defend their privilege and right to own other people. She stubbornly tries to avoid spilling more blood and the nobility reacts with hostility, speaking to her from the position of power. She appeals to the church and the clergy does not want to hear of mercy. They do not wish for forgiveness.

CATHERINE. Why are our authorities so unscrupulous? Why are they so impudent, so immoral? Why do they treat their people this way? They have besieged them, like beasts, with courts and laws. Why aren't they afraid? They aren't even afraid of me. Should I emancipate the peasants today, they will rush at me and hang me on the first birch, and the peasants emancipated by me won't have the time to enjoy freedom before they are made slaves again.

In her monologues/reflections, while writing at her desk, Catherine reminisce the hurdles she had to overcome in order to prosecute Saltychikha, a landowner widow who was infamous for her elaborate cruelty towards her serfs, personally torturing and killing them by hundreds. The case lasted for years with uncertain prospects, despite overwhelming evidence. Saltychikha was from an old noble family and the nobility “rubbed each other’s back”. As a result the court did not sentence her to death for multiple murders and even attempted to pardon her. Catherine interfered backed by the Royal Guards and Saltychikha was sentenced to life in prison. In this dream-like sequence in the film, Catherine finds herself in front of defiant Saltychikha who is tied up to the pole of shame. The women look at each other:

CATHERINE. Why are they treating their people this way? As if these people have been conquered by them? Having crushed and stomped them, they do not hear them, nor do they see them. [...] The authorities have deprived the people of everything, but most of all they deprived them of the future.

At these words Saltychikha frees herself, rushes at Catherine, and begins strangling her, the other stabs her lower belly with a knife. Catherine watches the blood running down her hand. “Where is justice?” The blood turns into ink of her future laws.

CATHERINE. If one day the authorities in Russia begin to care for their people, if they stop treating their subjects like conquerors who have enslaved their people, if they begin to think of them, not as a figure of speech but truly indeed, if the people stop feeling that they are mute cattle and see themselves as creators, then they will judge me and the memory of me.

Catherine realises that in order to save Russia from a revolt of the rubble, it is important to save her from the “barbarism and cruelty” of the authorities. This is the reason for her arguing for clemency for Pugachiov. The bloody cycle must be stopped. However the army which fought the revolt is also against her this time. For them the refusal to execute the rebel would amount to treason. In the end Catherine cannot do any other but sign the death sentence. One thing she manages to do is to buy off the executioner so on the day, instead of the promised quartering, he simply

cuts off Pugachiov's head. This is the extent of mercifulness she managed to achieve in the circumstances.

The film is a philosophical parabola which explores the issues of power in Russia during the times of Catherine and beyond. One of the central themes is the limitations of the ruler's power. The conflict arises from the historical fact that, as a sovereign of in the eighteenth century, Catherine was first and foremost the guardian of the interest of the noble oligarchy. Trying to also defend the interest of the lower class was revolutionary and bred hostility. Facing deep moral challenges, Catherine does what is possible.

Although there were a number of other television and theatre productions about the empress (for instance Maciej Wojtyzsko's play *Semiramida* (1996), a film by Ilya Khotinenko *Golden Age* (2003), Russian television series *Favorit (The Favourite)* (2005) and *Perom i shpagoi (With Quill and Sword)* (2007), a musical *Catherine the Great. Musical Chronicles of the Times of the Empire in Two Acts* that opened in Sverdlovsk Musical Comedy Theatre in 2008, as well as the latest twelve-part television series *Catherine* premiered in Russia in 2015), this film stands out as one that presents a serious fictionalised historical study of Catherine the Great, which is very different from most of the dramatic presentations available to the public.

The complex legacy of polarised meanings attached to the character of Catherine weighs on an author who wishes to take up the subject of Catherine's history. However the renewed interest in Catherine and her history that can be observed, and the contribution from the new research of Catherine and her times, pave way for qualitatively new dramatisations. As will be shown in the coming chapters, new approaches to creation of dramatic texts can also increase the potential of such a dramatic depiction.

## Chapter Two. Living History.

Perhaps not everything of what we are going to tell happened exactly like this in reality. This is not a chronicle or a report. Genuine however are the feelings, thoughts, people's actions, and events that already belong to history.

*Taming of Fire (1972). Mosfilm.*

Some authors admit their deliberate diversion from history for the sake of a theatrical parabola about history. For instance, the webpage of the recent award winning musical *Catherine the Great. Musical Chronicles from the Times of the Empire in 2 Acts* by the Sverdlovsky State Academic Theatre of Musical Comedy informs that “*Musical Chronicles of the Times of the Empire* are not a “mirror image of Russian history. [It] is an attempt to create a contemporary “artistic myth” about one of the most vivid periods of our country’s history. This is why the authors did not aim at a meticulous following the “historical truth”. They were interested in following the history of the soul, the study of the character [...]” (“O spektakle”, n. pag.). Indeed it would be difficult to expect a musical to be an accurate depiction of history but what about performances in other genres of theatre? As was discussed in the previous chapter, very few dramatic depictions of Catherine the Great could be viewed as historical. In fact many of them are counterfactual, existing within various mythological traditions that can be observed throughout the entire history of such dramatisations, or at best they treat the historical subject quite lightly. In response to what very often amounted to a character assassination of Catherine I wished, ironic as it may sound, to create an alternative history of Catherine the Great in the form of a play. To be an alternative to myth such a play would have to be historiographic. But is it possible in theatre? What does it mean to bring history and particularly someone's individual history to stage? The theatrical history should be, it seems, a fusion of historical evidence and a live performance by actors. Additionally a live performance needs to account for the audience, since no such performance is possible without it, or rather it would not, then, make theatre. This is where many problems with history in theatre begin. This is also where some extraordinary

possibilities for history could be found.

After the discussion of the particular dramatic histories of Catherine the Great, this chapter, then, is dedicated to the broader issues of retelling history in theatre. A lot has been written about history in theatre but very few scholars have attended to the issue which is at stake here, that is the experiential aspect of theatrical history, or history lived, or, what I would like to call, living history. That is why I will take a detailed look at the works which relate to it. I will begin with an article by Tom Stern “History Plays as History” which, in my mind, gives an idea where the criticism of theatrical history exists within the written historiographic approach. However Stern’s research question in relation to the history performed “Did it happen like that?” is of particular interest. It, will present an opportunity to springboard from the literary towards the performative. In order to develop the notion of living history and to address this issue as a playwright, as well as an actor, I will first look at this particularly evocative question. I believe it strikes at the very core of theatrical endeavour. Yet, in trying to answer it, Stern, seems to miss the very nature of theatre – its experience. History as a discourse is usually perceived as an elaboration on the events past based on literary and material evidence and produced in a form of a written narrative. History in the theatre exists in a form of a live performance that is an experience shared by a group of people within a performance space. It is this experiential aspect of history which interests me. The idea of living history is a complex issue which exists beyond the realm of the written historiography and within the field of the heightened form of communication during a live performance. It involves more than just the historical evidence and also communicates more than just information. An attempt to explain this extraordinary nature of history in theatre is made by Freddy Rokem in his book *Performing History: Theatrical Presentations of the Past in Contemporary Theatre*. It is a work which develops the notion of performing history based on the analysis of historical energies evoked by performances of history. In opposition to the view of theatre's deficiency as a vehicle for history, Rokem argues that theatre performances can be historiographic. For him this historiographic quality is found in the art of acting, and it is the actor performing history who is, then, a historian, or, in Rokem’s words, a hyper-historian. The actor enters this capacity when they evoke the energies of historical events on the stage. This idea of energy in performance is central to my own notion of living history wherein I wish to identify and place the role of the

playwright. Performances are almost always, unless they are improvisational, based on a script provided by the playwright. In order for it to be a performed history, it needs to be an evidence based script. Wishing to provide theatre makers with such a script, in search of keys to creating a living history, I see Rokem's analysis of the history performed and his approach to what is historical very useful. Thus, in order to place the playwright within Rokem's performing history framework, his analysis will be expanded towards the practical approach to acting, utilizing my own acting training background with the help of Robert Benedetti, which, in turn, will allow to introduce a more precise notion of individual historical energies as the building block of living history.

### **No History for Theatre**

Stern's article "History Plays as History" was triggered by a question placed to him by a young theatre goer Anya who had just watched a performance of *Julius Caesar*: While contemplating the performance she asks: "I wonder if it happened like that?" Taking every bit of acquired knowledge about the life and death of Julius Caesar and about the standoff between the Empire and the Republic, Stern treats this question seriously because it is about the "relationship between the performance and the past" (285). He elaborates on its validity, pointing out that Anya is not necessarily treating the performance as a kind of documentary testimony to a historical event but rather, in wishing to know something about the play's relation to the past, Anya "might be asking because she would find the play more impressive (as a literary achievement) if it were historically very accurate", in addition to all its other literary and theatrical merits (286).

Stern places himself in the shoes of the proponents of various possible approaches to answering this enquiry positively. He gives a brief mention to Georg II Duke of Saxe-Meiningen and his 'archeologically' corrected productions of Shakespeare's Roman plays for the sake of history lessons, to Lukács who viewed Shakespeare to be truthful towards the "collisions" within the Roman society, and to Agnes Heller who placed Shakespeare among serious historians and philosophers of history. However, parting with Georg II's antics, he also dismisses Lukács' support of the bard's historical insight because of the former's Marxist view

of history which “we [perhaps Stern means himself] no longer accept” (287). He also rejects Heller’s focus on Shakespeare’s “historical sense” as narrow. For him this eliminates the “yes” answer to Anya’s question from the equation altogether. Nevertheless, before giving a negative response, the author entertains the idea that perhaps the very question is wrong and invalid because, if to take Aristotle’s view that drama must treat universals, not the historical particulars, the question should be reformulated into: “Would it happen like this (necessarily for the most part)?” (287).

Suggesting that a straightforward question, like Anya’s, is wrong would be a clumsy avoidance technique – one that would point at crafting the question for a particular answer. Stern however entertains such possibility for the sake of the argument and his answer would still be a “no”. Interpreting Anya’s question as an enquiry about the relationship between fiction and history and responding to it by explaining that the two are quite one and the same thing does not work for him either. In fact he dismisses the idea of “the collapse of the history/fiction distinction” by stating that “despite the significant insights that the proponents of such views have offered [...],” he shares “the common view that the more radical conclusions have not been firmly established yet” (287). Stern goes on to entertain another possible erroneous nature of the question. Anya might have mistakenly assumed that “the apparently historical claims in *Julius Caesar* have been asserted, when in fact they were not” (288). The play was inspired by the historical events but it is a work of fiction so she should not look for historical truth in it. It should be and best is viewed and enjoyed as the work of fiction, not as a work of history.

This begets another question, this time in response to such a view: if *Julius Caesar* is a work of fiction wherein we should not look for historical truths, if it is an allegory for its own artistic literary sake, why call it *Julius Caesar*? Why pretend that this is about an historical figure while it should not even be viewed as such? Why didn’t Shakespeare call it, let us say, *The Game of Thrones*? It would be safe to believe that that is because Shakespeare wished to say something about Julius Caesar, Ancient Rome, and its history, the ways of power then as well as this history’s relation with his own times. So he must have looked for at least some historical truth. There is another problem with such an approach: dismissing Anya’s question as irrelevant on the grounds that she does not understand the fact that *Julius Caesar* is a work of fiction and looks for its relation to history is plain arrogant and Stern recognises that. However his answer (and it does not only concern *Julius*



*Caesar* but history plays in general) is again “no”. It would not happen like that.

At this point it is important to clarify what constitutes a history play. Stern proposes these criteria: 1. History plays use proper names that refer to real people and real places; 2. History plays depict events that really happened. Pointing out that playwrights invent characters, meetings, and conversations, Stern says that “they do so in the process of depicting something that *happened*.” There is more to his definition of a history play. The events depicted in history plays must be public. Otherwise how would we know that they happened? History plays also require of the playwright “a responsible engagement with the sources.” Finally, history plays must be distinguished from counterfactual plays (289). This seems to suggest that, generally speaking, if a play conforms to these criteria, it tells history, in broad brush strokes at least, and strives to present the events in a manner that would make it worth asking whether “it happened like that.” Stern writes:

If a key feature of a history play is that it uses historical sources to depict central, historical figures taking well-known, documented actions, then one has to take Anya’s question more seriously; one has to wonder, in fact, whether it is a question which (in some form or another) has guided the authors of history plays, ever since such plays have been written. (290)

This, in my mind, should be the case with any author writing about history. However, according to Stern, we should not look for history in plays (285), and it is evident in his dissection of a young person’s sincere query about the relation between history plays and history. For Stern there are two possibilities of its interpretation based on two readings of the term “history”: history as events that took place and history as a scientific discipline. Thus one question is unpacked into two different possibilities:

1. The eyewitness question: Would it have looked and sounded like that?
2. The history book question: How does my understanding of the event, having seen the play, compare to my understanding of the event if I were to read a history book?

The answer to the first query, he suggests, to be quite obvious and it is a “no”. The events portrayed on stage did not usually happen in a theatre filled with audience,

nor were eyewitnesses present to see those happenings the way we are in the audience, and even if they did they would not make so much sense out of what they saw as we do of the organised, structured performance. Stern stresses that the theatre audiences know in advance far more than any eyewitness would to make sense of the reality. History plays retell a familiar story so, since nothing can be further from a retelling of the familiar than the experience of an eyewitness, they “do not turn audience members into eyewitnesses” (292). What if – Stern entertains a dream-like possibility – it is a kind of experience for Anya that she would have if transported in time back to Rome to follow the events as they unfold. Then she would need a guide, a translator, an interpreter who would lead her through the streets and rooms, and introduce all the people involved, and translate from ancient Greek and Latin, and sift through the events, in order to choose only the important ones, etc. This time the travel guide is the playwright, whom Stern calls a *Super Virgil*. This might allow Anya to become a witness of sorts. For Stern, this points at the second interpretation of the question rather than the first:

For what is the Super Virgil—the guide, the explainer, the translator (if necessary), the one who selects and emphasizes the historical events for our benefit and understanding, the one who explains the differences between our time and the time in which the events took place—what is he, if not the historian? (292)

A playwright writing an history play is a historian, as implied by the rhetorical question above. With this interpretation Stern could potentially tap into the core of theatrical experience which operates in the realm of "what if", and this is where, in my mind, the historical in history plays could be looked for. However Stern diverts from this opportunity to view theatre as an experience. For him, this raises the need for a comparison of the playwright's and historian's work instead and breeds another question: can a play give a better understanding of history than a history book? Stern answers negatively. Moreover he argues that, in the case of a play, this understanding is “significantly worse” (295). In other words, a playwright is a historian but not a very good one simply because the theatrical medium does not allow for ‘good history’. However he needs to deal with a claim to the contrary. It comes from Karl Georg Büchner, the author of a history play *Danton's Death*

(1835). In the letter concerning the play the playwright writes:

The dramatist is in my view nothing other than a historian, but is *superior* to the latter in that he *re-creates* history: instead of offering us a bare narrative, he transports us directly into the life of an age; he gives us characters instead of character portrayals (Characteristics); full-bodied figures instead of mere descriptions. His supreme task is to get as close as possible to history as it actually happened. (qtd. in Stern, 93-94; Büchner, "Letters..." n. pag.)

Coming from a playwright's point of view on historiography and engaging with the notion of history performed, Büchner's words, as quoted by Stern, seem encouraging. Nevertheless Stern criticizes the 'young' playwright for them. While pointing out that historiography and history theatre share common features like, for instance, the narrative structure and the need for selection and sifting of facts and figures for the sake of clarity (precisely what Stern sees the role of a Super-Virgil to be), he singles out Büchner's claim that theatre is 'better' in giving us the characters than written historiography and doubts that that is true. "...There's no reason to think", he writes, "that theatre could claim to portray them (characters) better than written history, if indeed it can portray them at all" (297). Büchner's statement, which the other wrote in a private letter defending the 'bad' language of his characters, is seen as problematic, wherein this juxtaposition of the two historiographic media – theatre and written history – is the most salient pitfall. Not only a playwright cannot claim to be a better presenter of historical characters but they might not be able to do it altogether. The reasons for that, according to Stern, are numerous: starting from the fact that histories are 'played out' within a formal context of a theatre and finishing with doubts about the colour of the pieces of clothing that the actors wear on stage as opposed to their supposed historical prototypes in the circumstances. Additionally actors must speak with their particular timbre of voice, particular manner and emphasis. What is questionable is the accuracy of many aspects of characters that could be unknown and thus 'filled in' by the efforts of playwrights, directors and actors, making the historical accuracy dubious at best. But would not this process, this filling in of the sensorial gaps, have to happen largely in the imagination of the reader of a history book anyway? In this instance the theatre, by physicalising the aspects of the historical characters, replaces

the process that happens in the imagination of the reader of a written history. If so, perhaps, the theatrical history has a slightly different function than the mere delivery of historical fact? Stern does not account for that. However his arguments point at valid historical accuracy problems that accompany the performance of history and one of the most serious arguments against Büchner is that in theatre “there is no way in principle of knowing, from the performance, what has been invented and what has not.” Theatre asks us to suspend much of this disbelief. Stern concludes then that “Büchner was claiming, as benefit, the effect of one of the very features that makes his play worse, not better, as history” (298). Theatre can offer a ‘good story’ but it is ‘bad history’.

Katherine Lyall-Watson’s research, which was discussed in the introduction chapter, seems to confirm that. Theatre is “a strange place for truth seekers” (11). Thus the phenomenon of mythologising of Catherine II, also discussed, is not necessarily the result of poor research of history on the part of the script writers. It is the result of the need for ‘a better story’ forced on the authors by the objective pressures of the medium and, perhaps, by their idea of what the audience would like. It is inevitable. If so the very concept of a ‘history play’ becomes dubious at best. Lyall-Watson’s findings reflect the blur in the meaning of “historical” in theatre, which can be seen in the disparity between hers and Stern’s interpretation of the terminology attached to history in performance.

Lyall-Watson uses the term ‘biographical’ to describe plays about real people living or dead, that have facts as their basis (9). This is important for my own project as a play about Catherine the Great may fall within the biographical genre. Her definition places the biographical genre neatly within the requirements for the genre of history play outlined by Stern. Lyall-Watson uses a slightly different term which has the same meaning as Stern's and observes that biography play appears to be a sub-genre of a wider category of “historical theatre” (10). So is the factual nature then a requirement for “historical theatre” as well? Not exactly. According to Lyall-Watson, Paul Collway’s *Realism* is a play that could be classified as “historical” because it is set in Moscow in 1939 with a backdrop of “real historical events” but since all its characters are fictitious, presenting a fictitious, “invented” event of a rehearsal of a production for Stalin’s birthday, “it would not be considered biographical” (10).

A similar example is a play called *The Monster's Apprentice* by John McIntyre that premiered in 2013 in Launceston's Princess Theatre. The play is set in the same period. It tells the story of a relationship between Stalin's son Vasily and a fictitious acquaintance of his. The play uses the 'backdrop of real historical events' and elements that could be related to historical evidence. So it could be considered "historical" but not "biographical", since one of the characters is fictitious. But the other protagonist is a real historical character. Can that make it a biographical play? If to apply Stern's criteria of a history play, no. Both of the examples must fall out of the serious historical consideration altogether due to their non-factual nature and because they do not "depict[...] something that really happened" (289). They belong to the "nonfactual" category. Nevertheless, in Lyall-Watson's view, "historical" does not need to be "factual". Having this as a definition, we could call Bernard Shaw's *Great Catherine* a historical play, because Catherine did exist and was an empress of Russia. With this kind of separation of 'factual' from 'historical' it is understandable that scholars like Stern refuse to allow theatre historical credence. When Lyall-Watson quotes Irving Ridner who says that "the first objective of a dramatist is to entertain, but if the subject is history he must be a historian" (qtd. in Lyall-Watson 11) and when she admits that "the popularity of verbatim theatre shows us there is currency in truthfulness in theatre" (15), and yet argues that audiences do not go to the theatre looking for truth (79), it indeed places her into a "conflicted space" not only as a playwright but also as a scholar trying to define genres of historical theatre. Her removal of factuality as a prerequisite for historical theatre, saying that there can be only one truth – that of an author, makes it difficult to speak of "historical" theatre altogether.

In my case of writing of what essentially falls under Lyall-Watson's definition of a 'biographical' play, it was the very 'inventive' approach in so many previous popular works about Catherine the Great that prompted me to pick up the topic of the historical in theatre. In thinking about history theatre I prefer to use Stern's points about its factual nature and responsible engagement with sources and letting the history, rather than my own invention, shape up the story. This is why in my approach to writing the script invention enters after and on top of the historical evidence and is employed for devising the actual dialogue, otherwise unknown, on the premise that it does not depict something that we know for sure did not happen.

In fact I was very interested in deducing the dialogue from the factual material in order to achieve something close to historical ‘reconstruction’.

If theatre can “engender strong impressions of authenticity among audiences” (qtd. in Lyall-Watson 44), then it should make a playwright doubly responsible before both the audiences and the playwright’s subject matter. It is not necessarily a responsibility in any legal sense, but in the sense of conscience and the position of power, the responsibility which the author of theatre that engenders strong impression of authenticity should have. After all, was the playwright Nikolai Gogol just paying lip service to himself with Mayor’s words in his play *The Government Inspector* (1836):

[...] He’ll spread the story to the four corners of the earth! I shall be the laughing stock of the country. And then some hack, some penny-a-liner will come along and stick us all in a comedy. That’s what I can’t take! They’ll spare nothing! [...] I’d like to get my hands on those scribblers! Penpushers! Dirty liberals! Grass-snakes! I’d trample over the lot of you, grind you down to powder and scatter you at four winds [...]. (109-110)

Or did Mayor voice a legitimate concern? The concern that a “penpusher” has a great power, thanks to the power of live theatre, to convince? Make some truth public? Or tell lies about you? The responsibility of a playwright stretches beyond the mere need to entertain because of the perception that theatre has a power to influence opinions and because the audience might be actually looking for truth in performance. I do not see the morals and ethics as constriction but as the duty of care for any writer who is putting into the public arena a story of another real human. Instead of limitation, this responsibility prompts us to study the history further and discover more. I believe it is the historical characters and their actions that should inform the story, not the other way round, at least in a history play.

Perhaps the core of the argument lies with what we want to see. What do we wish to watch characters entirely removed from reality like in *Great* or do we want to try and understand history? In this light I believe that Anya’s question in Stern’s paper: “Did it happen that way?” is the most significant achievement of theatre. We are looking for a best way to tell a particular story but I argue that if we tell a story of an historical figure, as opposed to an imaginary plot, we have responsibility towards

the spectators who should be able to expect an honest and truthful performance, and towards the ghosts we call upon, as per Walter Benjamin's "Philosophy of History":

The Messiah comes not only as the redeemer, he comes as the subduer of Antichrist. Only that historian will have the gift of fanning the spark of hope in the past who is firmly convinced that even the dead will not be safe from the enemy if he wins. And this enemy has not ceased to be victorious. (255)

Lyall-Watson describes how she chose to ignore evidence that demanded a change of her story, the nature of her conceived relationship between the characters (89). This is not a question of the fictitious nature of the theatre by default. This invention was not required by the medium but by the writer's idea of a "better story", as well as the research that confirmed that a playwright can do what she likes without serious consequences. This is a conscious replacement of fact with fiction, manufacturing a distortion in audiences' perception of this particular history. Lyall-Watson argues that "rather than there being a wrong way and a right way of writing a historical and biographical play, [she] prefer[s] to think that we look for the best way to tell a particular story" (89). It would be more correct to say, then, that it would tell a different story altogether. A substitution of the historical evidence with invention – at least in this case – is telling a different story, the same way so many other playwrights did in the case of Catherine II. But Lyall-Watson's research shows that the playwright has all the permission to do whatever they like with history, or rather they are not held liable for telling untruths. This means that onus of historical authenticity lies on the playwright unchecked.

In a way this could resolve the tension between my desire to make a true story of Catherine and the impossibility of achieving what scholars call historical truth. If truth is unattainable, perhaps I should simply abandon the search for it and surrender to the inevitability of writing a mere work of fiction. But if I, at best, contend to say something about the historical people and events, this would require finding at least some possibility of giving a positive answer to Anya's question. In the search for it, let us first return for a moment to Stern and his criticism of Büchner.

Büchner puts a distinction between 'characters' and 'character portrayals' or, as it is formulated in the original German text, between *Charaktere* and

*Charakteristiken* (characteristics) (Büchner. *Letters...* n. pag.) – the living breathing figures and written descriptions – the very difference between history theatre and historiography, which for Stern is, in fact, the theatre’s downfall as history. I do not wish to claim that one is better or superior in any way than the other, but I would like to stress this differentiation and add another dimension to the debate.

We are dealing with two qualitatively different approaches to the narration of history – literary and performative. The theatre is capable of granting the kind of physical presence to history in a way that no museum or definitely no written historiography can. It gives the voice to people of the past and allows them to come to life in front of us. It lets us be witness to their actions, indeed hear their voices – the voices of the ‘dead’ – with full admission of the fact that what we hear is also the voice of the playwright, director and the actor. Nonetheless, it has the potential to deliver to us the traces of the voice of the historical person, when certain conditions (whether it is verbatim dialogue or the “responsible” adherence to historical evidence) are fulfilled. By dealing with some material historical aspects, like the colours of cravats or timbre of voices, by way of representation, performance does away with the descriptive part of historiography, the one that has to be done inside the reader’s mind, and “frees that space for the sensorial experience of history.” Instead of the evaluation of historical events on a pure intellectual level through reading the historiography and analysing the historical evidence, theatre invites the spectator to experience history on the emotional level in real time of the performance, to “live” through it, and allows the intellectual evaluation to come into play in the aftermath.

This must be held in mind as well when analysing Anya’s question. She first experienced the performance, where she followed the trials and tribulations of characters and, granted the performance was good and engaging (otherwise she probably would not have asked the question in the first place), connected with those characters and their fates on the emotional, deeply personal level, she *felt* for and with them in the shared environment, and now, with full knowledge of the fact that they were historical *Charaktere* presented by actors playing out historical actions within a building of a theatre that has nothing to do with the times of Ancient Rome, now she wonders if those experiences she had correspond in any way to history, if they could potentially be historical. Only then she will be dealing with the *Charakteristiken* that will be forming in her mind. After all the adjective “like” in



Anya's question refers to resemblance or similarity as opposed to identity. We should remember that drama exists as words on the page of the script, that is on the literary or intellectual level, only before it is performed. In the instance of the performance, it exists in a different dimension of human experience. In Robert Benedetti's words: "The theatre is a physical place, and all its meanings, philosophical or psychological insights, emotions – all that may be communicated by a play – first reach spectator as the physical sensations that the actor creates" (18). After the curtain falls drama returns to the intellectual level as it is pondered on by the spectator but it happens with full appreciation of the memory of the sensations experienced during the performance. This is one aspect where the theatrical history should be searched for.

Granting this extraordinary potential of a theatrical performance to affect us not only on the intellectual but, first and foremost, on the physical and emotional levels, Anya's question from Stern's essay has a capacity for another interpretation: "I wonder if it *felt* like that (when it happened) (had I been there with this knowledge of a Super-Virgil)?" It seems that the scholarship needs to account for this experience, the shared feeling that theatre operates with. In the case of performing history this makes an interesting case.

### **History Belongs Here**

Performing history is one of the primary and oldest functions of the theatre. The oldest plays known to us were history plays and historical subjects remain central to theatrical endeavours as a vehicle for the collective need for reliving, reassessing of the past. Reliving by way of retelling cannot avoid a degree of fictionalisation because even two different eye-witnesses would give different accounts, not to mention two historians or playwrights. But history is not just the 'minutes' of what happened, not a mere protocol of the past events. Had it been just that, there would be little value in it. It is only when pondered on, analysed in constant striving to understand it, imagine it, that history becomes a sensible pursuit. As a discourse it is a contemplation upon the events past, their meaning to the author and the audience, which helps to understand the present and to project into the

future. Drama's interest is in experiencing history. It situates an individual or a group of individuals within history, based on the historical evidence and the author's and actors' performing in the 'what if' conditions. By default, history plays imagine and fictionalise. In a way without that fictionalisation aspect history does not really exist, or rather it does not make sense. This fictionalisation, the voice of the researcher, interpreter – Stern's "Super-Virgil" – "the guide, the explainer, the translator, the one who selects and emphasizes the historical events for our benefit and understanding, the one who explains the differences between our time and the time in which the events took place" (292) – is necessary for the sake of the audience, unless the audience is a researcher or wishes to become the researcher, interpreter and Super-Virgil themselves.

The difference between history plays and historiography in prose, then, is not that one is really better than the other but that they are different in one key aspect: one happens live in front of the audience, it is a shared experience with added heightened sensorial component; and the other 'happens' inside a single reader's imagination. Perhaps this is what Büchner meant when he idealistically wrote of 'superiority' of a playwright as a historian. It is this 'living' aspect of history, represented by the physical presence of his *Charaktere*, that argues for a different historiographic quality of theatre than what Stern means by the '(written) history' (298). Thus the shared experience between the actors and the audience must be accounted for in historical theatre.

It is worth to note that Büchner wrote *Danton's Death* "on the heels" of the publication of Diderot's *Paradox sur le comédien* (written in 1773-1777 but published posthumously only in 1830) where the author gave sensibility a physicality, a kinetic form of vitality and thus the ability to be transmitted (Roach 121). The idea of "travelling" energies instigated by the performance was not new. Already Socrates compared the transmigration of the spirit through physical bodies to the effect of magnetic force on pieces of metal. The encyclopaedist Diderot gave it the new language of physics and eventually Joseph R. Roach outlined it in *The Player's Passion: Studies in the Science of Acting* this way: "the god inspires the muse, who in turn inspires the poet, who inspires the rhapsode, who, in the authenticity of his transport, inspires the spectator. It is, in the language of physical chemistry, a process of *ionization*" (40). In this light Büchner's *Charaktere* could be seen as, "in the authenticity" of transport of their "rhapsode", evoking the energies of

the historical characters that can “inspire the spectator”. The rhetorical question then is: in the case of performing history, what is more important for the sake of the “historical truthfulness”, for Robespierre or Caesar to wear historically accurate attire during the theatrical performance, for the actors to speak with their historical timber of voice, or for them to *live* the historical events before us?

In my mind, in understanding of the perceived tension between a playwright writing a history play and a historian writing about history, Stern came very close to pinpointing the very nature, and thus the very difference of the former from the latter, and called the playwright, even if slightly ironically, ‘the Super Virgil’. However he did not pursue this alley. Freddie Rokem found a different and, in my view, a more precise term.

As I have mentioned before, there is not a lot of scholarship available that deals with the historical qualities of energies evoked during a theatrical performance. Therefore it is worth looking at one that allows us to look at the history performed in this light in detail, which will allow me to develop my own approach to writing a historical dramatic text. Freddy Rokem’s book *Performing History: Theatrical Representations of the past in Contemporary Theatre* is dedicated to “the complex collective efforts of playwrights, directors, designers, and actors in creating [...] theatrical energies connecting them to a specific historical past” (2). He observes how figures from the particular pasts are “resurrected” in the *here* and *now* of theatrical performances. Rokem articulates the theatre’s place within the historical discourse:

The aim of historians, on the basis of the available documentation of these past events, is to present their authorized version of the past, usually in different forms of narrative writing. The theatrical performances about historical events are aesthetic adaptations or revisions of events that we more or less intuitively (or on the basis of some form of general knowledge or accepted consensus) know have actually occurred. The theatre, by performing history, is thus redoing something which has already been done in the past, creating a secondary elaboration of this historical event. (6)

The theatre elaborates on and investigates the past on behalf of and for the benefit of the viewer. Elaboration however is the key. It is a way of rethinking and

understanding of the past. And its secondary nature places it after the scholarly history as its beneficiary.

One of the aims of performances about history is to make it possible for the spectators to see the past in a new or different way, to view, “to compare and measure against each other” the events of the past, “for pedagogical, or rhetorical, or ideological reasons” (17). One of the examples of such a play is *The Last Night of the Last Tsar* by Edvard Radzinsky, a Russian writer and historian, who was inspired to pick up this story after he found in the archives the original report on the execution of the Romanov family. Comparing the reports made by other participants in the events leading up and surrounding the execution, Radzinsky identified inconsistencies in the evidence. After publishing it in a popular periodical, he received a great deal of response from around the Soviet Union, which provided additional evidence for his investigation. Eventually, according to Radzinsky, the written testimonies that came from all the witnesses created something like a “video report recorded from different viewpoints” which recreated the scene, and allowed the author to present the findings in a form of a play. But the story of the play went beyond a simple recount of the events. “I could not finish [it] for a long time,” says the author in the documentary dedicated to the 90<sup>th</sup> anniversary of the execution. “I thought it was about a murder, but it was about forgiveness, about the return of the cut down Christian commandments to the profaned country” (*The Last Night...*, n. page.). Not only the play sheds a new light on the murder of the last Russian tsar thanks to the discoveries of archival documents, it enters the ideological dispute between the uncompromising revolutionary “Jacobean-style” violence and notions of compassion and conscience imbedded within the Orthodox Christianity, not only in relation to the victims but to the perpetrators themselves. Another example is a recent Australian play *Prehistoric* by Marcel Dorney written to confront the all but forgotten by the mainstream culture dark realities of the Joh Bjelke-Petersen era in the history of Queensland of the late 1970s. Despite its being “a work of imagination” (5), *Prehistoric* has a historical aspect that only theatre can grant. The makers of the play collected testimonies from the witnesses to the events of the police brutality against the underground music scene in Brisbane, created their own band, and imagined themselves being in that era (5). They tried to share their own idea of what it felt to be amidst that history.

In both examples the actor(s) recreate certain parts and aspects of history in

the here and now of the performance. Rokem envisions such an actor as a ‘witness’ for the audience. Using Brecht’s essay “The Street Scene” as an analogy as well as a departure point for understanding of the notion, Rokem argues that theatre performing history is closely related to Brechtian “‘natural’ epic theatre” as demonstrated in the “traffic accident” scene. This is a different reading to Stern’s attempt at looking at the audiences as witnesses “of sorts” to the history played out (292). Of course the audience is not a witness to the history. It is the actor performing history who stands as a similar kind of witness to the historical event for the spectator, as a witness of a traffic accident is for the crowd of bystanders. However there is a difference and Rokem underlines it. The actor performing history has not necessarily experienced the events they demonstrate to the audience but acquired the knowledge about them as a researcher and historian through different sources, and, through that knowledge, becomes, this way, a “witness” to a historical event or figure portrayed. “As a witness the actor does not necessarily have to strive for complete neutrality or objectivity in order to make it possible for the spectators, the “bystanders” in the theatre, to become secondary witnesses, to understand and, in particular, to “form an opinion” about the forces that shaped the accidents of history” (9). With all their own baggage of opinion, the actors bring the figures and events of the past to ‘life’ in performance and:

[b]y “performing history” it is possible to confront this sense of separation and exclusion, enabling us to believe in the witnesses who have seen what in some way has to be told again. What other possibility remains unless we are willing to submit ourselves to a discourse or a theatre totally devoid of references? The theatre “performing history” seeks to overcome both the separation and the exclusion from the past, striving to create a community where the events from this past will matter again. (xi-xii)

This way another difference between the theatre and the written historiography is brought forward. Theatre creates a ‘community’. Its experience is shared. This is also precisely what the performance of *Julius Caesar* did for Anya from Stern’s essay. It established a connection to the past for her as part of a communal experience of a theatrical performance. In the process of creation of this community and re-establishing of our connection to the past the actor is the essential element. It

is the actor who serves as the “connection link between the historical past and the “fictional” performed *here* and *now* of the theatrical event”, makes it possible for the audience – even taking the fictionalised nature of the theatrical performance into account – to “recognise that the actor is redoing or reappearing as [...] someone who actually has existed in the past”. In doing so, according to Rokem, the actor becomes “a kind of historian” – a “hyper-historian” (12-13). Here the prefix “hyper” is used in its Greek meaning, that is “over”, “above”, or the Latin “super”, stressing the actor’s historical elaboration’s secondary nature to the historiographer’s. It also implies an additional, excessive to the usual, charge of the term placed behind it. It implies energy – in this instance, the energy of performance.

In the case of performing history this energy is “restorative”, that is, with the help of aesthetic and physical means it strives to recreate something that has been “irretrievably” lost, to recreate it on the imaginative, intellectual and emotional levels, thus restoring the loss within us (13). This way,

[t]heatre performing history partially takes over the role of the professional historian. But the means used by the theatre are indeed very different from those used by academic historiographers. Instead of relying on the documents used by the historian, the theatre relies primarily on the ability of the actors, during the performance itself, to convince the spectators that something from the “real” historical past has been presented on the stage. (24)

The actor, in turn, relies on the text provided by the playwright, who, if he wishes to say something about the “real” history, has to rely on the documents and the work of the professional historian. And this history is only as good as the playwright’s work. Although Stern’s *Super-Virgil* refers to the playwright and Rokem’s *Hyper-historian* refers to the actor, I find Rokem’s term to be closer to the nature of the theatre’s historical endeavour. It can and should be applied to the playwright who supplies the actor with the blueprint for the energies required for performing of history.

Thus the actor performing history on stage helps us to overcome the separation and exclusion from historical past, and helps us to reconnect with that past. The theatre performing history, in this instance of reconnecting to the past, acts as a historian. This ‘connectivity’ and these ‘restorative’ powers of the theatre are my primary interest as a playwright. Because the goal of a playwright who undertakes a

historical subject is to recreate the events and to make them matter again, to hear the dead tell, to 'seduce', as Rokem calls it (xii), to believe that it is possible for the actor to become witness for the dead, or rather, by being a playwright, to facilitate this seduction, to make the audience wonder the way Anya from Stern's essay wonders: did it happen like this? In a way, perhaps, I simply wish to be seduced by the theatre myself. I, the playwright, dream of being in the audience and share those pleasures of theatrical seduction. Does this make me such a 'hyper-historian'?

One of the important functions of theatre performing history, as well as historiography in general, in addition to overcoming 'separation' and 'exclusion' from the past, is facilitating the understanding of various aspects of past events, searching for some causality in the chaos, organizing it in a form of a narrative, which might help us to gain meaning of existence in the *here* and *now*. It is a psychological necessity on individual and social levels. The ability of the theatre to create this connection between the past and the present, allowing the past to 'gain full meaning in the present' in a social circumstance of the audience and actors, the theatre's ability to create the 'restorative energies' is its crucial function which has always interested me. In my previous work on creating a theatrical text about 'The Kursk' disaster as a prominent historical event I made a point of using the very 'live' and social nature of theatre in connecting the past with the present (present being the instance of performing) that helps to 'keep the event alive'. I used its 'restorative' powers to 'resurrect' the particular figures in the performance who were dead in a similar way as described by Rokem (2, 5). The theatre is a living thing. It allows a unique opportunity to witness the past with full appreciation of its shortcomings as history. To 'relive' is its key concept – to experience the feeling, albeit as an illusion, of the history not set – open – while the performance lasts. On the emotional level this restored connection to the past in the present, I argue, evokes compassion – such an important notion for any *socium*.

In *The Kursk*'s case the question "did it feel like that?" was not needed. The time between the event and the play about it was relatively short (7 years) and for the majority of the spectators the headlines were still fresh in their minds. They remembered what they felt when they saw the news and were able to recall it. In fact, in the case of the Russian production of the play in 2010, the relatives of the protagonists of the characters on stage were present in the audience. The play became, in a way, an agent for the emotional healing, as well as for delivering new

information about the tragedy.

The story of Catherine, however, is placed in a distant past and it will require the 'overcoming' of the 'separation' between the now and the distant past. The theatre appears the right place to do it because the actors, involved in performing history, create the energies that restore the loss, and "through their creative energies are able to stand for the dead" (97). However it is a collective effort and, in this instance, the actor is the final link, or a portal if you wish, in a longer chain responsible for evoking these energies. I would like to reinforce this point here that prior to actor's ability to stand up for the dead, yet totally depending on it, is the playwright's ability to supply the actor with the action text as one of the first stages of this collective effort. Thus the playwright's task is to identify, 'extract' the traces of historical persons through the study of the available documents and to place them within the historical context, to develop their features on the basis of the historical evidence, indeed to hear the dead first, prior to hearing the actor speak for them, and, this way, to supply the actor with the material that allows them to evoke the historical energies. This means, then, that a playwright acts as a historian, or a Hyper-historian. In the context of creation of the play about Catherine the Great, I definitely can position myself as a sort of mediator and facilitator between the historian or historiographer and the 'hyper-historian' actor, as I needed to study the historical and historiographic sources, extract and organise the information for the purposes of a workable script. But that is not all I needed to do.

As a playwright, I wished to identify the energy that comes from the life of Catherine the Great, from her own words, and from the baggage of the knowledge about her, which could be found in what others have written about her. Next I needed to find a way of facilitating the releasing of that energy, as 'restorative', by way of communication passed on to the next persons in the chain of the collective production of the cultural practice, namely the director, the production team, and the actors who, in turn, will release that energy unto the world. This is an alternative description of the process of writing a historical script. But what does it mean to identify the energy? Where is it stored? How is it to be retrieved? How does this facilitation take place?

In the final chapter of his book, Freddie Rokem argues that "[...] by examining the question of theatrical energies – in particular how the actor commands and communicates these energies – from the specific perspective of performing



history, it is possible to focus on certain aspects of theatrical communication that have only rarely been examined in detail” (188). Rokem notes that the notion of theatrical energies is quite frequently used in discourses about performance. “It is used to depict how an uncompromising engagement on all levels of theatrical communication, but mainly through the art of acting, is achieved” (188). A way to answer the above questions, then, lies in the art of actor’s preparation for the role. It lies in the actor’s craft, which will be useful for my further elaboration. In order to develop this subject, a few words must be said about the developments of the thought about the historical energies in theatre.

While the concept of energy is largely associated with the machinery, mechanics and physics and the production of labour, it also concerns human will and actions. It is a term closely related to performance – “not only the performance of cars or computers, but a whole range of human actions in all conceivable fields” (188-89). The notion of energy in performance has a long history, beginning with its rhetorical origin in Aristotle’s *energia* and *enargia* and its Quintilian’s interpretation in *evidentia in narratione*. It is related to the ability of presenting the facts so that an illusion of reality is created, and, thus, it has a direct relation to performing history. Just like in Aristotelian or Quintilian courtroom, the role of the witness on stage is “crucial in bringing back the event from the past to the spectators” (189-90). If, in addition to that, we remember Plato’s comparison of the poet’s own inspiration and his ability to inspire others, or the actor’s ability to trigger something within the spectator, to the power-fields of a magnet, thus endowed with a very physical quality, than “artistic creativity in general, and acting in particular, seems to carry a strong transgressive potential” (190). This is how theatre can have influence on other spheres of human activity – social or ideological. This influence is physical and, in the case of a historical performance, it must flow from the history in question.

In his survey of the theatrical energy field, Rokem acknowledges the work of Stephen Greenblatt and his insight into the ways that theatrical texts from distant pasts (Greenblatt is concerned with Shakespeare) carry the “social energies” from those pasts and make it possible for us to appreciate their aesthetic power in the present. In *Shakespearean Negotiations: The Circulation of Social Energy in Renaissance England*, Greenblatt argues that the fact that literary works from four hundred years ago have a “life” is the “historical consequence” of the *social energies* initially encoded in those works” (6). Greenblatt examines contemporary textual

evidence of specific social practices at the time of Shakespeare and how these texts can serve today as intertexts with the Shakespearean masterpieces in search of the traces of these social energies in his plays. Rokem expands Greenblatt's issue of actors being "able to communicate the energies embedded in these texts [from the distant past] to today's audiences" in order to "include the sense in which the actors are able to bring the energies of a specific historical event to the audience today" (194). Thus we have two distinct historical energy instances: one is a play or a text written in a distant past that carries the historical social energy, and the other is a historical event that "continues to be present" and "reverberate in contemporary plays and performances" about it. When speaking of historical events that continue to reverberate today, Rokem means the French Revolution, the WWII and Shoah. In the same sense the life of Catherine continues to be of interest today and, with a particular approach to writing a new script about her, her history could have a potential to 'reverberate' today as well.

The understanding of the performance and its reflection of the real episodes in life is very important for creating a script as a blueprint for such a reflection. Here is, in my mind, the key helpful idea from Rokem which strikes at the core of theatrical living history: "since such revolutionary [Rokem speaks of the French Revolution and WWII, and I am concerned with a world war and a revolution in Russia in eighteenth century] events, in history as well as on stage, as a rule are intentional and stem from a single individual or collective of individuals (as opposed to earthquakes or volcanoes, which are outbursts of energy caused by nature), they are also closely connected to instinctual drives and their articulation in different social contexts..." (194-95). Thus the actor who recreates this drives by his art, also recreates the energies which these drives originally produced. This makes the art of acting one of the principle instruments for understanding of historical energies on stage and the performance's historiographic potential.

This historiographic quality of a performance is achieved by the actor's evoking the historical energies through his art. This art is achieved, in turn, through training which, by dealing with energy, reifies the process of acting. Since energy both instigates and results from action, it is an integral part of it. Vocal action is physical. Physical action originates as a result of mental activity. Energy is present throughout the entire chain, and, as the elementary physics teaches, it never disappears, it only changes its qualities. Thus "[t]hought has physical aspect: its way

of moving, changing direction, leaping – its ‘behaviour’ in fact’. This aspect also has a pre-expressive level which can be considered analogous to the performer’s pre-expressive work, that work which has to do with presence (energy) and which precedes – logically if not chronologically – real and actual artistic composition” (qtd. in Rokem 198). Pre-existing to performance is the energy (of thought/action), otherwise known as the impulse, that need to be discovered and owned by the performer. In this case it is the driving force of the chain of actions, which a theatrical script is.

This is directly related to my notion of a theatrical text carrying the history into the future, “keeping the event alive”, or, what I wish to call, living history. Nothing we do, not even a single thought disappears into the void. Even a thought, since it is also manifested in a discharge of electricity, is the energy that does not disappear but changes form and characteristics. We do not need to measure it in amperes. The physical aspect of thought, its energy results in physical action. In the instance of a performance, this energy is heightened, greater for the sake of the audience’s reception. The energy is released through thought and action of a performer. But it does not originate there, unless the performance is an improvisation. In case of a scripted performance it comes from the text and, by way of deduction, from the thought of the playwright. The energies enclosed in the text are ‘unpacked’, “transmitted and transformed” by the actor and ‘received’, ‘felt’ by the audience. I guess one of ways to measure it is the strength of the applause or booing or the deadness of silence in the audience at the end of the performance. If dramatic texts from the distant past, can be viewed as “vehicles” that contain energies which can still make them relevant to us, the new dramatic texts about those distant pasts can be viewed as attempts to uncover those energies as well. Then what else is my work as a playwright if not uncovering these energies for mediation for the future ‘transmission’ and ‘transformation’ of them by way of the art of acting?

In his review of the theatrical energy field Rokem also notes how theatre practitioners like Brook and Blau use a “quasi-scientific” language to explain the movement of energy within the performance space. They are interested in the moment of release and receiving of the performance energy. They speak of “explosions” and “ignitions” that are interestingly reminiscent of the ways the Renaissance rhetoric explained acting with the notion of *pneuma*, as Roach wrote: “[i]t was widely believed that the spirits, agitated by the passions of the imaginer,

generate a wave of physical force, rolling through the aether, powerful enough to influence the spirits of others at a distance” (Roach 45). The energies released when performing history can be viewed as a result of the flashes of memory from the past transformed into theatrical images on stage.

In this light I would like to return to Anya’s question in Stern’s essay. Knowing that the historical event presented for us on stage cannot of course have any visual or even audio resemblance to the historical original, can it give us a similar feeling, an idea of what it felt like? If the key notion of performing history is energy, if the actor is the “witness”, if the witness transmits the energy of the event he is telling about, if Rokem speaks of the very aspect of performing as the conduit of the historical energy, if the energy – the historical energy – has a physical component capable of stirring emotional responses within the audience, then the answer is yes.

So where lies the origin of the energy being transmitted? Not within the actor alone, which is clear from Rokem’s argument. The playwright, as one more “witness” or rather investigator, and the encoder that, together with the director, brings the witnesses on stage, belongs to this equation.

A playwright knows, at least a conscious one does, and certainly an actor has a full appreciation of this, that theatre possesses certain special power of communication. A word read is different to a word 'read out'. The uttered word is a physical manifestation of a character. It carries energies, built-in within its communication, across from one person to another, or whole groups of people, and amplifies them by way of sharing those energies with multiple recipients. This is the intrinsic component of the actor's craft – to allow the text, the word and the corresponding imagery to filter through their physique, prompt particular physical and emotional responses within the body, and to release these responses in the instance of performance so that the audience can appreciate the character’s intentions and actions and share the emotional responses, intended by the playwright’s arrangement. This also means that the written word possesses these features and energies *in potentia*, ready to be evoked and released by the actor, and thus to become the word *living* or *lived*. It is in the script. Robert L. Benedetti gives this advice to the students of acting in his *The Actor at Work*:

The script is both your starting point and your final judge; it is a finished verbal product which you take apart in rehearsal in order to rediscover the process of its creation; then, by embodying this process in your performance, you arrive once again at a living expression of the text. [...T]he playwright's choice of words for each character reflects his entire concept of that character. (89)

This also means that a playwright needs to anticipate this process of 'rediscovering' by the actor, in order to facilitate it. In the case of the historical or/and verbatim record, in addition to the energies of the playwright, who arranges it into a dramatic form, the word, I argue, carries the historical energies of the person who put down or uttered it in the first place. The playwright's task is to supply the actor with appropriate text for such release. There is a potential here for the written history to become the *living history*. When the playwright uses historical documents, as Büchner used Danton's and Robespierre's original speeches, they allow the actor, with sufficient knowledge of the given circumstances and the character's history, first to detect, then to appropriate, to 'own' and finally to release energies very similar to those that the historical people who uttered them did. Those energies where "encoded" in the words and described actions in the time of their origin within the historical person within the historical circumstances. The actor recovers these energies within the imagined historical circumstances within the circumstances of the performance. In this context the playwright uses the historiography in order to facilitate actor's 'building' the historical *Charaktere* out of the historiographic *Charakteristiken*, and his *living history* is only as good as the written history he uses as a source. When a playwright uses the historical words, they let the historical prototype be the concept of the character. In fact a verbatim record from the historical prototype carry their choice of words, thus their expression, their historical energies. This is the plain of engagement with history where Buchner's saying that theatre is a better historian begins to make sense. Rokem describes the origin and the kind of moment of currency that the actor possesses. But the actor relies on the energies within the dramatic text. And so the dramatic text can be viewed as the origin or instigator of the energies created on stage. And a historical text adds an additional historical dimension to these energies. With my focus on the part that playwright plays in this broader process – the part which always has that historical

energy *in potentia* – I would like to use my own acting training and experience in order to see if and how it can work. To do that we need to identify ways in which the actor “decodes”, “unpacks” those energies and where they find them. Every component of that process is part of that circuitry of releasing the energy.

### **History Is Energy**

The ancestor of every action is a thought.

*Ralph Waldo Emerson*

How then could this notion of ‘living history’ be applied to my own theatrical text? Of a few directorial quotes about theatrical energies presented by Rokem in his ‘theoretical chapter’ on performing history one, by Peter Brook, comes as particularly useful:

The central point in any theatrical event is [...] to fine tune the different energy sources of actors as well as the spectators in order to make them flow within the new collective which has been created, the aim, of course, is to make these energies visible and understandable for the spectators, to make them communicative on the aesthetic as well as emotional and intellectual levels. (qtd. in Rokem 199-200)

In other words a performance must create certain energies, or their representations that would be readable to the audience and ‘draw’ them in, let them share these energies as a collective, evoke their compassion and also inform them, and, in the case of a history play, it must be saying something about the history. As has been discussed earlier, these energies “flow from the art of acting” and have currency in the instance of the performance. However, in order to fully appreciate the origin of these energies, we need to ‘extend’ the map of their circulation and see where the actor draws them from. The next link ‘up’ the chain, or the wider sphere around the energy cauldron which a theatre performance is, is inhibited by the playwright who needs to account for the art of his primary agent of delivery – the actor. Thus, before

searching for the historical energies connected to the life of Catherine and in order to help identify the channels along which the energies flow in this context, I need to undertake a short detour into the acting profession.

I am a beneficiary of a specific acting training program developed throughout many years at the University of Southern Queensland, which incorporates, among others, elements of Stanislavsky's system, Rudolf von Laban's notions of physical states and Kristin Linklater's voice work with elements of circus, which is described as "organic acting training", initially inspired, among others, by the work of Robert L. Benedetti which is particularly useful when explaining energy. As shown in Benedetti's lessons, an organic approach to acting is based on realisation and acknowledgement of the physical, physiological and energetic nature of communication as human interaction. The actor builds the character and prepares for the role by searching for the physical aspects of the actions, and emotional journey of the play. The stage action or gesture, as "any external sign of a feeling or thought", whether "bodily or vocal", including "verbal" and "nonverbal" (64), are perceived as the result of an "impulse" that releases "energy" from the "centre" via the physical system of actors body. The actor trains to discover these impulses and energies through exercises then uses text analysis to identify them in the script and again via physical exercises further identify their qualities and placements and the ways they can be released in the form of dramatic gesture. It must be noted that other acting approaches, may use different paths to creation of this dramatic gesture, but ultimately they are not mutually exclusive because they do strive to achieve the same outcome – a believable performance. Benedetti writes: "The main question about the actor's creation of externals is whether they should be treated *as* externals and approached "from the outside" or viewed as the necessary result of an inner state and approached "from the inside." Different schools of acting adopt an emphasis on one or another, but rarely is one point of view taken to the complete exclusion of the other" (74). Benedetti uses the examples of Kabuki physical tradition and the Stanislavsky's psychological system as illustrations of the two approaches in order to say that "[b]oth approaches [the Kabuki external and Stanislavsky's internal], reasonably used, are pathways to the same objective: *aesthetic control over external form supported by a vital involvement in the "inward significance" of the character.*" He stresses that one form is useless without the other: actor's inner experience is unreadable without external expression, "a precise external form" and

the other way round: an “external form, no matter how precise, is empty unless filled with the real experience of the actor.” The real experience is discovered and distilled from the text and then communicated to the audience based on the communality of human experience (75). As I mentioned above, my own training is based on the physical-to-psychological approach and, taking into account discussion about the physical aspect of thought and energy in the previous chapter, is useful for the explanation of the energy transmigration from the script into the performance.

In preparation for the role the actor first scores the text, identifying the “outer” phase of action – the ‘units of action’, the verbal and non-verbal expressions, movements – and the “inner” phase of action – the inner monologue, the individual thoughts of the character in their sequence, their ‘direction’ to, away from, or around the point of action (this is, for instance, where the character’s decision not to act is discovered), the impulses that cause actions etc. This is achieved with a set of exercises, some common to all acting schools, some specific to particular ones, but drawn by the actor on the individual basis of what works or does not work for their particular process and a particular character at hand. Commonly however, the actor assumes that dramatic text contains outer actions which Benedetti calls “natural or organic extensions of the character’s inner action.” This way the task is to “work back from the given externals” – the verbal and nonverbal actions described in the text – and, by way of understanding of the characters decisions and choices, to make way “all the way back to the original stimuli that motivated the action” – to the character’s inner action. The actor must experience these stimuli, allow their own “personal energies to mingle” with them, to own the original impulse and then *live* through the “process that leads back to the external activities required by the form of the play” (197).

The physical aspect permeates through every stage of the process, between the “inner” and the “outer” stages of action. The energy of stimulus triggers thought, finds its way into the symbolic expression of speech, which, in turn, is a physical action of muscles. Benedetti stresses that “this highly physical aspect of speech is especially important to the actor, since the *written* language of the text is only a representation of the *spoken* language envisioned by the playwright” (88). The stimulus creates ‘needful energy’ that makes the actor/character to “*survey alternative course of action*” which could satisfy the need, then make the choice to act or not to act and thus release the “pen-up energy into the outer world in the form



of *purposeful activity*” (198). The energy of the actor’s/character’s stimulus finds its physical expression and affects their partner in the scene and the audience, for whom it results in the reactive stimulus which in turn finds its way into an action: for the scene partner it is the action within the framework of the play, for the audience it is an emotional response.

Thus the physical aspect – the energies of characters and of the play – is embedded, indeed encoded, within the text of the play. It originates with the *playwright*. So a playwright themselves identifies and organises the physical aspects of communication, thus embedding the energies within the text to be ‘discovered’ by the actor and ‘unpacked’ into his character’s physical action. Benedetti designs a separate lesson (Lesson 10 “Diction”) for a student actor which shows that “the playwright’s choice of words for each character reflects his entire concept of that character.” The dramatic text is the blueprint for its ‘living expression’, for the physical actions of its characters, “each character in a play is a source of energy having a specific function in relation to the whole; the personality of the character serves to filter that energy as it passes into the play as activity, endowing it with those qualities that make it contribute most meaningfully to the movement and purpose of the whole.” Thus the process of action is “*a purposefully focused energy arising in response to a stimulus, which, through a process of choice, results in directed activity toward an objective, creating an event*” (198). And the sum of these actions is the main action of the play – “the deepest and truest source of energy motivating and shaping the life” of each character (177). The actor is the conduit of energy that originates in the text and flows through him into the event of performance. In order for him to become this conduit, he needs to use techniques and exercises that allow to ‘retrace’ the process of creation of the text all the way back to the original stimulus for the character’s action – the stimulus originally discovered and ‘encoded’ into the text by the playwright – and then reconstitute the entire process as the embodiment or life of the character during the performance.

This is where, in my mind, the ‘organic’ approach to acting and Rokem’s notion of “historical energies” meet in the context of performing history. When a play is ‘so-called’ fictional, that is it tells of imagined or personal non-historical characters and events, the energies it contains originate primarily within the playwright. We can also speak of the ‘social energies’ of the playwright’s times and background (as described by Greenblatt) it might hold. However when a playwright

uses historical record of speech, as it was the case with Büchner's *Danton's Death*, they let the historical prototype be the concept of the character. In fact the words recorded as said by historical prototype carry their original stimuli, their choice of words, thus their expression, their historical energies, which can be 'rediscovered' and 'reconstituted' by the actor. When the verbatim record is unattainable, the historical knowledge of the event is used to add another dimension of historical fact to the performance in order to carry the historical energy. This way we can speak of a performance which carry historical energies. I believe this is what Büchner really had in mind when he wrote that theatre is a better historian. However, as I already said, I do not see this juxtaposition as appropriate. I believe that the two discourses that deal with the same issue – history – have very different approaches and indeed the theatre, as Rokem rightly puts it, offers a 'secondary elaboration' of history. But it does not exclude historical truth, which Stern seems to imply. It can offer something which the written history might struggle to achieve – historical energy.

## **Chapter Three. 'Resurrection'**

### **Bringing Catherine Back to 'Live'.**

My play was thus written in response to the study of Catherine the Great's popular image, as well as to the impetus to trial a new approach to historical playwriting based on discovering and transmitting historical energies. One of the primary considerations during the creative process was the responsible engagement with the sources, which in my case involved a cross-examination of the primary historical records in the form of memoirs and official documents with historiographic analysis of them made by scholars. The imperative was to avoid telling something that we would know for sure did not happen. Thus the historical evidence shaped the plot of the play. Additionally, having in mind the map of historical energy circulation and the process of their decoding and releasing by the actor as discussed earlier, I wished to see how, as a playwright writing about Catherine the Great, I could tap into her historical energy and reconstitute it into a text for the further 'embodiment' and transmission in performance. I will use the first scene, "Prelude", from the play for demonstration. In order to do this I first have to say a few words about my decisions on the plot in general. Not all of the information below needs to be vital for the actor who will be detecting and unlocking the historical energies from the text of the play, although researching it would be definitely conducive for a performance well grounded in the given historical circumstances of the characters. It is however essential for the playwright who wishes to discover, identify and arrange those energies as the text for the actor's performance.

In my approach to writing the dialogue and depiction of characters I wished to follow Catherine's Memoirs as the testament of the epoch and the people as she saw them. Naturally the scholarly approach to the material requires critical cross examination of her testimony and so the works by other contemporaries as well as those of prominent scholars of the subject must be my point of reference. Yet, as a playwright, I needed to filter the evidence and the scholarly findings through my own views and visions and mould them into what is called a "fictionalised" depiction of the people and events.

Catherine's life was rich in events and significance in the history of the eighteenth century. To try to bring it in its entirety to a dramatic form, even if an enticing idea, did not appear a viable dramatic option and was not my aim. Although an attempt to do it was made in the form of a musical (in 2008 *Catherine the Great: Musical Chronicles of the Time of Empire in 2 Acts* by Sverdlovsk Musical Comedy Theatre, Russia), I was interested in a more detailed portrayal of historical characters that would require a different stylistic approach and timeframe. I decided to narrow the choice down to a particular period in her life for a dramatic presentation. The decision on which of the events of Catherine's history would be the subject of the play, in turn, informed the choice of the principal characters. My aim was to let history, as it presents itself in the memoirs and scholarly historiography, inform the building of the dramatic story line. The times of the Seven Years' War drew my interest for a number of reasons. First of all that was the formative period for Catherine as a political figure as well as a grown up woman. It was marked by serious crises in her life, in the life of her country, as well as for the rest of the world, and it was then when she came to power. This period, in my mind, was crucial for Catherine's entire life and its understanding was of high importance for Catherine herself as evident from the fact that throughout all her years on the throne, time after time, she returned to writing and rewriting her memories about that very period. These *Memoirs* are of a particular interest for story and character building. Indeed the clues for character energies are best seen in their personal writing, and Catherine delivers plenty of exciting material. However the value of Catherine's writings becomes even greater when it is realised that this was a very private exercise, a deliberation on her own beginnings, which was never intended for a public eye. Olga Yeliseyeva writes in *Young Catherine*: "Many times the sovereign returned to working on this manuscript; it could be said she worked on it all her life, making additions, honing a point or crossing something out or swapping fragments..." (3). She points out that the many revisions of the *Memoirs* were made at the crisis moments of Catherine's life, when, having lost a certain ground, she was alone in the face of danger. It is as if she looked for clues in her own personality, for the strength that allowed her to survive; and she would put away this work in the times of a "sharp turn in her life", when she would receive the necessary support (4-5). The writings were not intended for an audience; only some of the editions where

specifically written for a close person, like Count Stanislaw Poniatowski or Countess Praskovya Bruce.

Catherine's memoirs were the single most gripping first-person record of female life and power in the eighteenth century. In her erudite and thorough preface to the new English translation of the *Memoirs*, Hilde Hoogenbloom emphasizes Catherine's reluctance to publish them. Not only was Catherine understandably unwilling to expose her son Paul's questionable parentage, she also shared, according to Hoogenbloom, the Enlightenment prejudice (clearly not shared by the likes of Rousseau) against exposing one's *histoire particulière* to contemporary judgement. (Slavic Review 68. No 4, 788)

Thus Catherine's *Memoirs* is a very intimate personal exercise in self assessment rather than in self presentation which would have been the case if it were intended for publication. This gives us more confidence in them as the source of true historical energy of their author.

Because of the suspicious circumstances of Peter III's death and the ascension to the throne of Catherine who appeared to be the obvious beneficiary of her husband's death and whose relationship with him was known to have been difficult to say the least, the notion of Peter's murder and Catherine's direct involvement in it became wide spread. One of the most notorious examples of denunciations were the writings of the French adventurer and spy Rulhière who was followed by many. The fact that Catherine, for instance banned such writings in Russia were seen in Europe as proof of the guilt and the fear of the usurper. I would say "fear" – perhaps, "guilt" – perhaps not. If to trust Catherine's own description of Peter and life in marriage with him, Peter was on the road to his own demise for many reasons. However, as Soboleva explains, the very negative depiction of Peter in her *Memoirs* is regarded as the sign that Catherine "maliciously distorted the bright picture of her husband by painting him as the reason for their unsuccessful marriage and by that justifying his unlawful dethroning and murder." Soboleva goes on to give examples of such arguments and argues that the proponents of this view ignore the information about the deficiencies of Peter available in the *Memoirs* and other sources. "If to take that [information] into consideration," she writes, "everything that Catherine writes receives confirmation. So if the chief argument of

those who doubt the truthfulness of the Memoirs is false then Catherine's writings can be trusted" (Soboleva 64-5).

Bilbasov shows throughout his work that Catherine's word could be relied upon as much as we could rely upon her memory at the time of writing of her Memoirs. He speaks in detail about the negative examples of Peter's behaviour which appear at times too astonishing to be believable:

All those details, often indeed incredible for a youth of 19 and already married, are pointed out in Catherine's "Memoirs" and until the publication of the instruction [which prescribed the behaviour norms for Peter and Catherine] were regarded by many as exaggerations with which Catherine wished to justify her later deeds. (I:222)

In his *History of Catherine*, time after time he gives word to Catherine and then puts that against other sources. The overall verdict is that there is no reason to doubt Catherine's sincerity in her writing. Sometimes she finds her initial judgement to be wrong as in the case of her attitude towards her first Ober-Hofmeisteress Choglokova, whom she describes as a woman "stupid, spiteful and mammonish" but had later a chance to discover that Choglokova was possible to deal with..." Bibasov sees this as the fault of not so much Choglokova herself but the instruction which she had to carry out. "Whoever would have to carry out such task, would have left bad memory of herself with Catherine" (I:230). At most she left something out but did not lie. This is an important finding for depicting her character in the play.

What stands out as the most important story resulting from this writing is the journey of the physical and political survival of Catherine in the seemingly unwinnable situation of the oppressive and treacherous environment of her royal marriage, the court intrigue of the competing parties set to destroy her, and her difficult and tumultuous relationship with her 'mother-in-law' or 'aunty' Empress Elizabeth I. One of its most striking aspects is that from the point of total mistrust and open animosity and abuse on behalf of Elizabeth, which drove the young and still inexperienced, ill equipped to handle such psychological tremors, Catherine to a suicide attempt, the two women came to a point of mutual understanding, if not that of trust in the end. It took long years and a lot of effort, determination and maturity from Catherine to be recognised by her 'aunty' as a worthy and a preferable heiress

to the throne instead of her husband Peter. Naturally Peter himself is the essential part of this power struggling triangle. Thus, the central drive of the narrative is the story of relations between Elizabeth I of Russia, her ‘daughter in law’ Grand Duchess Catherine and her nephew, Catherine's husband and the heir designee of the Russian throne on the one hand, and their direct relation to power on the other.

Their situations are shadowed and pressured by the existence of another potential contender to the throne the former Emperor Ivan VI (imprisoned first in Kholmogory and then in Shlisselburg), the court parties, foreign influences, and finally by a world war. It is the history of struggle for the Russian throne in the middle of the eighteenth century and the chief conflicts, character intentions are conditioned by their relation to power. That was their circumstance of life. It is a story about power.

In accordance with Freddy Rokem’s interpretation of Peter Brook, the “central point in any theatrical event is [...] to fine tune the different energy sources of the actors as well as the spectators in order to make them flow within a new collective” (200). This is achieved by the actors making these energies visible and understandable for the spectators, thus opening the energy flow within the new collective. This must be done in the beginning of the play for a successful communality of the experience because, according to Peter Brook, “the first step in a performance is a process of gathering and focusing the dispersed energies of the audience” (qtd. in Rokem 200). Thus I had to choose an instigating event which at the same time would introduce the audience into the relationship between the main characters, possibly avoiding the need for too much exposition, as well as set up in some way the subsequent action of the play. At the same time I wished to search and identify the historical energies that need to “flow within the new collective” and be “communicative on the aesthetic as well as emotional and intellectual levels” (200-201).

One occurrence came to my attention as it was described in the book “*Young Catherine*” by the Russian historian and writer Olga Yeliseyeva. In making a comparative critical analysis of different editions of Catherine’s *Memoirs* Yeliseyeva stresses the importance of one particular conflict that arose between the Empress Elizabeth and Catherine over an alleged affair that Catherine was accused of having, while she was expected to produce an heir to the throne. Due to her young age and a degree of naivety, Catherine allowed herself to be compromised by her ill-wishers in

the eyes of Elizabeth, which resulted in a heated dressing-down, “screaming and near beating” (158) and an attempted suicide. The heated tirade of the Empress included accusations ranging from lying to her, infidelity towards her husband, sabotaging her duty as the future mother of the heir to the throne and no less than high treason – all the alleged crimes were political (158-60). Yeliseyeva describes this as “the first political defeat” in Catherine’s life:

Catherine felt its [defeat's] taste and, since experience had not yet cooled her passions down and had not yet forged her character, she took it excessively hard. In time more dangerous situations would not bring up tears or the need to be bled, nor... suicide attempts. This time however an entire array of emotions spilled out. The young woman got entangled in someone else’s scheming and found no other way to untangle the knot but to end her life (158).

Catherine described this scene in a few editions of her *Memoirs* but only one of them, addressed to Stanislaw Poniatowski, her first true love and close friend, have a mention of her suicide attempt: “I was in so great a despair that [...] I decided to commit suicide...”, wrote Yekaterina and called it "прекрасный поступок" ("a beautiful deed") (490). The descriptions of Elizabeth's rage during this encounter is quite vivid in Catherine's writing (86-7; 488). The empress mentions the most essential issues in Catherine's life prior to the event: her arrival to Russia, the disgrace of her mother, her relationship with her husband (as of course perceived by Elizabeth) and her 'duty' as the Grand Duchess, her purpose in Russia, which is to produce an heir. It allows a dramatist to visualize and build the scene complete and without much invention to provide the actors with required energies to build on and share on the one hand and a lot of information for the exposition to the audience on the other hand. In case of Elizabeth's rage I merely needed to 'unfold' what was already there in descriptive form in Catherine's own writing and transform into a first person monologue. It must be reiterated that we rely on Catherine’s memory, but this memory was very strong as she returned to that scene in different reductions of her *Memoirs* and, even though her reported speech differed in details, the general picture is vivid and powerful. The empress’ behaviour fell into the recognisable pattern of similar nervous breakdowns. Yeliseyeva argues that:



The empress could be anything: kind, generous, compassionate; but it seems that she was constantly on edge, ready to pick at any word. In this case Catherine was without a doubt guilty of both a political game and an unwary behaviour. It cannot be denied, however, that it was the dressing down by Elizabeth, which contained “a thousand vile slanders” and looked like screaming on the verge of beating, pushed the grand duchess to the fateful deed. (159)

After severe accusations and threats from the sovereign Catherine was so distorted that she first became ill and within hours decided to kill herself with the first thing she could find which turned out to be a knife. Whether the knife was not sharp enough or, which is more likely given the circumstances of her earlier bloodletting and a drastic emotional shock, Catherine was severely weakened, she was not able to pierce the corset of her dress and a maid who came in stopped that attempt at a ‘beautiful deed’. Catherine just turned seventeen.

This is a scene in itself and in the first draft it was built as such. I decided to finish it with the maid taking the knife away, calming Catherine down and Catherine making the maid promise she would never tell anyone – exactly the way it is described by Catherine. The scene also delivers a lot of important information and strong emotional tension. Because of this high tension, it almost read as a climax of the previous episode of the drama, which is what I wished to achieve in order to indicate that we, the audience ‘enter the room’ onto a living event, like the ghosts in Aleksander Sakurov’s motion picture *Russian Arc* (2002) walk in on Peter the Great pulling someone by the ear or any other action in the Winter Palace to be a witness of an historical event. In *Russian Arc* one of the ghosts is a foreigner and is deprived of the reference knowledge and does not know the people in front of him. The other one is the *Super-Virgil* who explains who they are witnessing. Here the characters are introduced within the action. But we understand that there has been the previous life, immediate and not so, for these people and we are going to witness only fragments of it in the *Scenes from the Russian Court in the Times of the Seven Years War*.

From the point of view of historical accuracy as argued by Stern, this scene is riddled with problems. Neither do we know where this took place, apart that it was in St. Petersburg, which house (not the Winter Palace for sure as it was not yet built),

what the room looked like, what the participants were wearing, nor the timbres of their voices. We can't even rely on Catherine's memory to deliver the exact verbatim dialogue that took place. But we have a good chance to answer the question: "How did it happen?" and "How did it feel?" in order to, in turn, let the audience wonder: "Did it feel like this?" with a possibility of a positive answer to this question as well. It is so because it is precisely the feelings that Catherine describes and, barring a bad job from the actors, we can safely assume that the energies described as memory can be evoked on stage by the art of acting and further evoke compassion within the viewer. In the process of bringing the text to performance, the actor will reverse the process of communication by deducing from the written expression the original impulse to act or to speak, thus recreating the impetus which qualitatively will be very close to the original as it flows from the primary source. The challenge for the actors here, particularly for the one playing Catherine, is to build, thought after thought, the dramatic psychological action that would culminate in a suicide attempt to let the audience realise what Catherine describes this way:

I found myself in a state of such great a despair that, if to add to it the romantic disposition that I had, it drove me to the decision to end my existence; such a life filled with worry and so much injustice towards me all around and no view for a way out enforced my thinking that death was more preferable than the life like that; I lied down on a sofa and after a half an hour of deepest sorrow I went for a big knife that was on my table determined to pierce my heart with it, when one of my ladies entered, for some purpose I don't know and found me at that beautiful attempt. The knife that wasn't either very pointed or sharp could barely pierce the corset I was wearing. She grabbed it; I was half conscious... (489).

In further rethinking of the dramatic viability of the scene and its characters, I decided to get rid of the maid's character against the historical evidence. The reasons were purely pragmatic. In the entire play this was the only and tiny episode where this character appeared and had no bearing on the story other than interrupting Catherine's already unsuccessful suicide attempt. If left it could be used in order to further underline Catherine's wish to conceal her "beautiful attempt" but ultimately it is the fact of interruption that was historically significant and I decided to keep the

‘interruption’ but remove the maid. In this case it is possible to speak of the medium of theatre creating a practical tension in the process of creation of a script and forcing the author to adjust historical fact for the sake of a better way to tell a story, or, if to use Stern’s analysis, the author, in the role of a *Super-Virgil*, sifted through the evidence and chose the most important one for the sake of clarity and practicality.

The story had its further development as Catherine continues to reminisce in her *Memoirs*. The same people who wished to discredit Catherine in the eyes of Elizabeth tried to do the same in the eyes of her husband (86-9). Yeliseyeva informs that he had his room next to Catherine’s and “heard a part of his aunt’s dressing down” and came in (162). “The Grand Duke [...] found me in tears...” Catherine wrote (486). This way we have the ‘interruption’ required. Thus in the play Catherine conceals the knife behind her back instead the maid’s taking it away. This, shown to the audience during the ensuing conversation, has a symbolic representation of the development of Catherine’s relationship with her husband throughout the play. In her own words, he came in wishing to find out what happened then left then returned angry to give her his own piece of mind about her alleged indiscretions. Catherine convinced him that those were groundless allegations – that was a typical scene between the two (486-87). Once again historical testimony provided me with an opportunity and I was able to introduce one more character in this scene. However this is also where fiction had to meet history. There were two conversations between them with some time passing in between. For the sake of the flow of theatrical performance I needed to turn two encounters into one. Yeliseyeva pieces together the entire fateful day. Peter first wrote an angry note to Catherine asking her 'not to bother to sleep with him tonight' but his tutor Stelin intercepted it and made his pupil go and try to reconcile with his wife. So Peter began softly by expressing his wish to be loved by his wife as strongly as her alleged lover is. The conversation played out like a tennis match which Catherine won without much trouble because the allegations were not true and there was no need to lie (161-3).

This dialogue gives actors the required clues and 'charge' in order to evoke, 'resurrect' and 'transmit' the historical relationships. In this case the text is charged with those energies and is ready to be 'unpacked' by the actors for the sake of the spectators. On the empathic level we are able to physically experience the situation

and the emotions of the characters which clearly demonstrates that thought has a physical aspect. The 'organic' school of acting, as was discussed earlier, is based on this idea of physical approach to text analysis as a gateway for releasing its energies. So the dramatic text is the source of this energies and an historical dramatic text by the same token is capable of carrying the historical energies. The playwright can first experience this energy within himself by way of 'feeling' it, through compassion, then apply it in a dramatic text of dialogue and stage directions as instructions for the actor to make this energy, this 'feeling' available to the audience by way of compassion. In this case historical documents provided me with the information I needed to reconstruct this event. However, this 'reconstruction' is not a criminal expert style precision laying out of the locale and the word-for-word verbatim dialogue with exact physical placement of the participants and a fraction-of-a-degree-tight bullet entry angles. This is a stylised theatrical elaboration on a memory. Only the energy here is truly historical.

Thus, by using Catherine's description of the scene between Elizabeth and herself (taking into consideration that it is a recollection, coloured by personal attitude of the memoirist who also says that there were a lot more to the scene that she could remember), analysing the giving circumstances of their relationship prior to the event on the basis of historical evidence, with the luxury of the hindsight of developments that followed, we can 'tap' into the event itself and, I believe, reconstruct its 'spirit', if not its photographic resemblance, with a great deal of accuracy.

This is the example of the play's design and inner workings where a playwright attempts to facilitate the release of historical social energies. In this case I combine two events as they are described by Catherine – her suicide attempt driven by the unbearable conditions and hopeless situation of incarceration combined with false accusations of infidelity and treason on the one hand, and a non-existent relationship with her husband on the other. Thus Peter Brook's notion of the 'central point', as described in *Rokem*, is embodied in the script. I made a point of constructing the first draft the way the historical evidence presented it. The second draft incorporated Brook's idea of the need for 'fine tuning' the actors and the audience by not only describing to them the relationships but by inviting them to feel the tension between the characters, which is the reflection of the historical tension between them. This way the exposition of the play becomes the exposition of the

energy, not only that of actors but of the historical energy of the stage characters' prototypes. It is here that the role of the playwright lies in the chain of evoking historical energies. Stern would perhaps argue that this is not history, Lyall-Watson might say that this is a perfect example of fictionalisation, not only permitted by the medium but indeed required for a successful engaging theatre, and they both would be right. Nevertheless I do see this exercise as a type of 'energy archaeology' that only theatre could allow.

In this case there is no 'mystique' (Rokem 201) about this energy created by theatrics. The volatile situation is in front of the audience and it is not set whether the knife is going to be used again the way the proverbial gun hanging on the wall should. It is a symbolic representation of the historical conflict that is about to be played out before the audience. It is important to stress that the 'historical' truth is not substituted here by fiction for the sake of a 'best' story, as Lyall-Watson did in her *Motherland*. On the contrary, the historical evidence is the provider of the story. The dramatic text, thus, is designed to facilitate what Rokem calls "the energies of acting [as] the theatrical mode of telling the present-day spectators about these historical [...] energies" and these energies are conjured up by a playwright to allow them to be "conjured up by the energies of acting..." (201). The energies of acting are the aesthetic embodiment of the historical energies, making it possible for the spectators to "read the energies on the stage metaphorically as a kind of displacement or transposition of the historical past" (201). Rokem argues that by showing these energies on stage the actor becomes a hyper-historian. I wish to add to this definition that the actor becomes so also by way of facilitation from the hyper-historian playwright.

In her dissertation Lyall-Watson analysed *The Kursk* and pointed out that although the play posed itself as a documentary, there were moments in it, namely the events on board the submarine, that raise questions about the validity of the genre attribution. Since nobody survived on board, how could we know what they said during their ordeal? It is a good question, the answer to which in this instance lies in the sources used for the creation of the dialogue: the results of the investigation that pieced together minute by minute the events on the stricken submarine and the actions of the people involved and put against the testimonies of the naval specialists and the protocol of actions drilled by the crew in case of emergencies like that. Only those words that are presumed by the common protocol in the named situations were

used in the script. The exception of course would be the dialogues between two main heroes, but they were also conjured up based on the events and actions as discovered by the criminal investigation in the aftermath of the catastrophe. Nevertheless, there are many “unknowns” that remain about that tragedy and await their solutions and the play was supposed to prompt thinking of them.

Similarly James Cameron’s *Titanic* was not only a mere romance but also a thorough historical investigation of the events of the famous disaster. In the documentary features of the latest release the people involved in what became an almost twenty-year-long project ponder on the impact the movie had on the historical research of the tragedy. Not only it rekindled the interest in the events that took place a hundred years ago, but it also prompted a new and vigorous reassessment of the research into the technical aspects of the catastrophe by many specialists and the director himself. Questions regarding the accuracy of the 1997 film led to a new expedition to the wreck and a series of documentaries. Cameron himself made a point of revisiting his new findings with the help of a panel of history and technical specialists who used the newly available technological achievements and models to correct the errors made in good faith in the film.

This is, in my mind the very nature of and the reason for a film or theatre performing history. This resurrecting, rekindling, evoking, reconnecting with the past lies in this one question from Anya in Stern’s essay: “Did it happen like this?” The question itself, the very fact that it has been asked means that the connection with the past has been re-established and the dead have come to life.

## Conclusion. Eternity.

I began by wishing to create a detailed dramatic rendition of Catherine and her life that would be a response to the previous portrayals that did not satisfy my own views on historical accuracy in drama. From the very beginning I wished the historical evidence to inform the building of this dramatic depiction. In my survey of thought on historicity on stage I found that the notion of historical accuracy in the medium is put to doubt at best. I recall that when a few years ago I worked on my play about the Kursk disaster and spoke about it with directors and producers during the script development stage, I more than often heard them saying: “You can’t keep it all documentary. It’s theatre for crying out loud. You got to invent something.” I half jokingly answered that the mass media are already doing that job for me and it was time for something different – something real and truthful. However that suggestion of the need for invention concerned the ‘free’ invention in disregard of historical evidence because “it’s theatre” and it seems to be the usual view that theatre, by its very nature, is unable to contend for historical accuracy and we should not search for historical truth there. We saw it most vividly in Lyall-Watson’s conviction that the demand for a “better story” prevails over historical evidence and in Stern’s argument that if we are looking for history we ought to go somewhere other than the theatre. And yet the historic subject has always been the interest of Western theatre throughout its own history which spans the history of the civilization itself. The oldest surviving ancient Greek play is *The Persians* by Aeschylus which deals with an historical event. A lot has been written about the way history is depicted in theatre or more precisely about the problems that the theatrical medium presents as a depiction of history. And yet theatre stubbornly claims its place in historical discourse despite the assertion that it is not fit for it. Of course the above views are absolutely valid because, as we can appreciate it, theatre does require invention – invention of *mise-en-scène*. It is conditioned by the physical constraints of the venue and the art form. However this invention should be juxtaposed with substitution. It does not have to require diversion from historical evidence. What it requires however is the reality of human experience shared through the art and this is achieved through sharing the energies.

It is remarkable that whenever theatre is described, energy is referred to in one way or another. Energy, in its many philosophical facets, pervades Joseph R. Roach's *The Players Passion: Studies in the Science of Acting* – a history of the art of acting in the view of development of philosophical thought. Energy is one of the central issues in Robert Benedetti's text book for actors. For him creating and sharing the communicative energies is the key function of theatre. Energy is life and so is theatre and this how they are inseparable. But it is with the works of Stephen Greenblatt and then Freddy Rokem that we may begin to speak of *historical energy* in theatre, the historical energy that is infused into theatrical performance through the dramatic text. Greenblatt refers to the social energies of the time of the playwright. He notes how the aesthetic modes of these energies have been "encoded in certain works of art" and indeed "continue to generate the illusion of life for centuries". (7) Rokem pushes this further and proposes the notion of collective historical energies that flow from grand reverberating public events like the French Revolution or Shoah and are made evident in performances about those occurrences today. He points out that "by examining the question of theatrical energies – and in particular how the actor commands and communicates these energies – from the specific perspective of the performing history, it is possible to focus on certain aspects of theatrical communication that has rarely been examined in detail" (188). His examination shows how theatre can recreate collective energies of an historical event; indeed how they could get out of hand as it was the case during the filming of Peter Brook's *Marat/Sade*, when the violent historical energies of the French revolution cultivated by the cast for a long period of time reached the boiling point and resulted in their assault on the director as their oppressor. The same way theatre should be capable of focusing even further on recreating historical energies of a person. Almost like an archaeologist who unearths and shows a piece of ancient pottery, theatre can uncover historical energies and then perform a function of a historian (or hyper-historian) in the here and now of the performance, presenting the findings to the audience. I attempted here to do just that with my script.

Recognizing first the existence of and then the need for identifying the historical energies that flow from the personal accounts of events and relationships, with subsequent "transposing" them in the form of a dialogue for the further identification and embodiment in the instance of a life performance through the art of acting was the basis of my approach to writing the play about Catherine and her



surroundings. In this particular case my work was made easier by the existence of ample historical research and writing on the subject and the task consisted primarily of sifting the evidence from the myth in search of the genuine characters and their personalities and rationales in hope of touching upon their historical truth.

Of course the question is “what is historical truth”? An archival record, a written document, a stone tool dug out from the ground, bones in a grave, carvings on a cave wall – all that give a researcher certain information about the way things were, how people looked and worked in a given period of time. Everything else is an opinion. But historical truth can have another peculiar aspect – sensorial. It is when a piece of history, whether an object or information, evokes an experience within the observer/examiner. Such experience is an energy resulting from a trigger or rather, in physical terms, from another energy that originated outside the observer and within the historical object. A good example of this is the testimony of Bill Souder, Director of Research, RMS Titanic Inc. that he gave in front of the camera in James Cameron’s documentary *Titanic. The Final Word*. Souder describes what became for him the thing he would “remember till the day [he] died”, when examining objects recovered from the sunken Titanic the lab personnel opened a satchel that contained perfume:

When you recover stuff from the Titanic it’s rust and it’s rotten. And the smell that comes off is perfectly alien, perfectly fetid. You know it’s a kind of death you’ve never experienced. And so the lab is kind of unpleasant. And over a sudden somebody opens up this satchel, this leather satchel and out comes the fragrance of heaven. It’s all these flowers and fruity flavours and it’s delicious; it’s the most wonderful thing you’ve ever had... Ahm... It was just a complete overwhelming experience. It was like all of a sudden the fragrance from heaven [unclear]... [holding back tears.] So, instead of being surrounded by all of these dead things,... ah .... for those few minutes the ship was alive again [breaks into tears]. (Titanic...)

Not only was that “overwhelming” for Souder but it remained with him forever after it had taken place, and was triggered once again at the moment of his recalling it in front of the camera for James Cameron so he could not help breaking into tears. He, who had been dealing with the dead remains, the victims who disappeared four miles

below the surface, suddenly felt transported in time and onto the deck of the long dead ship in a strikingly vivid moment of experience. This is the result of a sensorial impact on a person that has a deep connection with the subject of their research. And this is the everyday tool of an actor working on any play, with a particular case of the creation of an historical character who left tangible traces of themselves. The key notion of acting is to allow the circumstances of the character, and the emotions which result from the dramatic text, to affect the actor, who puts this experience on like a coat for depiction. The scenes described earlier that originate from Catherine's own recollections of such emotional moments are these tangible traces, the coat of experience that actors must wear, allow to affect them and, through them, affect the audience.

Such tangible traces of historical events as theatrical energies and the ways the actor commands and communicates them from the perspective of performing history were the central subject for Frederick Rokem's study. I wished to expand this so rarely indexed notion of historical energy to the next ontological sphere – the role of the playwright in transmission of these energies. I tried to use it in a practical sense of creating a dramatic text. If life is energy, so is theatre. And it is life itself that we observe there, where the “encoded” energies are “released” through our perception of the work of art. They take shape within the spectator in a form of emotion, which is already, as we can see demonstrated by the organic approach to acting, a form of energy and, at least on the individual level, could be subjectively “measured” in physical terms. As a result of communication, we can feel the chemical responses of our body, one of them being a subjective sense of changing temperature. In the instance of experiencing a performance we may be “moved” in these terms, because observing of the actions of others affects us, and if we witness the actions of a great actor, it affects us even more. Furthermore the actor draws on the resources provided by the text in order to produce actions and “decode” and “transmit” the energies embedded in the text, onto the audience. In case of fictional texts these are the energies of the author and the “social energies” of the author's time. In case of a performing history, it is also the energy of the historical event, as Rokem describes it. In case of a dramatic text which investigates an historical event, the playwright is the first witness at the stand, as it were, before the actor takes it over, and thus the playwright is too a hyper-historian. If every experience is the experience of one consciousness, then the one that wrote it down left not only the

factual trace but also the very physical trace of energy. By trying to imagine it, the actor enters the sphere of that consciousness' experience thus allowing a witnessing.

A brief look at the concept of historical energy in performing history offered in this exegesis reveals it as a vast and complex issue whose examination should involve many different spheres of knowledge.

[...T]he concept of energy seems to be situated at the threshold of a number of different discourses related to the theatre just like the notion of performing history. Its vagueness is at the same time both a weakness – since it is frequently not clearly defined – and a strength, because it joins aspects of human experiences and social practices which are usually separated into distinct categories of description and analysis. (Rokem 189)

Despite this difficulty of definition, it does have a very vivid aspect of experience and this makes it accessible to everyone. But because it reaches beyond our usual understanding of physics and biology it is difficult to define in scientific terms. And yet the concept of centre and the energy flow to and out of it is an important component of acting training. It is also a working notion in the eastern medicine. It is the key to the energy healing system as laid out in *The Ancient Science and Art of Pranic Healing* by Master Choa Kok Sui. In his teaching books he designs exercises that train the senses to recognise the energy flow and at the highest level of preparation to see the energy with a naked eye, allowing the experience of tangibility of energy.

What can be said now, however, is that theatre is one of the highest forms of human social interaction – it incorporates all the ontological spheres of social existence and as such it should be viewed holistically and interdisciplinarily and the issues of performing history should be viewed from the spectator's, actor's and the playwright's perspective, as well as in general terms of human culture and consciousness. History for theatre is first of all a history of relationships. It is the traces and the dynamics of those relationships that a playwright searches the material evidence of. When pondering on the past, for most part, it is not the details and precise numbers or colours that are the most important for understanding of history, it is their essence, their experience. This is what theatre, unlike any other art form, can do for history.

# CATHERINE'S BEGINNING

Scenes from the Russian Court in the  
Times of the Seven Years War

A play in three acts, twenty two scenes, one prelude, a  
prologue, three interludes and a finale

by

Sasha Janowicz



## CHARACTERS

### In order of appearance

**Catherine**, the Grand Duchess Catherine Alekseyevna, later Empress Catherine II of Russia, born in 1729 as Princess Sophie Friederike Auguste of Anhalt-Zerbst.

**Elizabeth**, Yelizaveta I Petrovna, Empress of Russia, the daughter of Peter I the Great and his second wife Catherine I, born in 1709.

**Peter**, the Grand Duke Peter Fyodorovich, later Emperor Peter III of Russia, born in 1728 as Prince Karl Peter Ulrich of Holstein-Gottorp, disfigured by smallpox.

**Zubarev**, Ivan, prisoner of the Secret Chancellery.

**Semion**, master torturer.

**Inquisitor**, Count Aleksandr Ivanovich Shuvalov, the first cousin to Ivan Shuvalov, Field Marshal and the head of Secret Chancellery, born 1710.

**Shuvalov**, Ivan Ivanovich, the favourite of Elizabeth. Born in 1727.

**Sivers**, Count Karl Sivers, Ober Hof-Marshal of the Court.

**Shkurin**, Vasily Grigoryevich, Royal Stoker, a lackey, valet to the Grand Duke and Grand Duchess. Shkurin, according to some sources was first a stoker and then was appointed to the Young Court.

**Bestuzhev**, Aleksei Petrovich Bestuzhev-Ryumin, Grand Chancellor of Russia, Count of the Russian Empire, Count of the Holy Roman Empire, born in 1693, hardened alcoholic.

**Ivan**, Emperor Ivan VI Antonovich of Russia, born 23 (12) August 1740 to Prince Antony Ulrich of Brounsweig-Lüneburg and Duchess Anna Leopoldovna of Meklenburg, proclaimed Emperor on 17 (28) October 1740, dethroned during the coup d'état staged by Elizabeth with the help of the Royal Guard on 6 December 1741, imprisoned ever since, also called **Prisoner Grigory** and **the Known Prisoner**.

**Chekin**, soldier of the Royal Guard guarding Ivan.

**Vlasyev**, soldier of the Royal Guard guarding Ivan.

**Vorontsov**, Mikhailo Illarionovich, Count of the Holy Roman Empire, Vice Chancellor, later Grand Chancellor of the Empire, born in 1714.

**Williams**, Sir Charles Hanbury Williams, Ambassador Extraordinary and Plenipotentiary of Great Britain to Saint Petersburg, born in 1708.

**Poniatowski**, Stanislaw August, secretary to Sir Charles Hanbury Williams, born

1732, a refined and handsome young man, quotes Francesco Petrarch and Voltaire.

**Austrian Ambassador, Count Esterhazy.**

**Saxony Ambassador, De M. Prasse.**

**Mardefeld**, Ambassador of Prussia.

**Hedviga**, Hedvig Elizabet von Biron, the daughter of the Ernst von Biron, the Duke of Courland, born in 1727.

**Teplova**, Matryona Gerasimovna, the wife of Teplov, the niece of the Razumovskies.

**Liza**, Yelizaveta Vorontsova, sister to Princess Dashkova, niece to Chancellor Vorontsov, "fat", the colour of her face is unclear "it seems to be dirty", difigured by smallpox, born 1739.

**Grigory**, Grigoryevich Orlov, born 6 (17) October 1734, one of the five Orlov brothers, lieutenant of Royal Semyonovsky Guards Regiment, adjutant to General-Feldzeugmaister (the Chief of artillery) Piotr Shuvalov.

**Alekhan**, Aleksei Grigoryevich Orlov, his brother, the future Count Orlov-Chesmensky, born 24 September (5 October) 1737.

**Panin**, Nikita Ivanovich, the governor of the little Grand Duke Paul, born 29 September 1718.

**Posier**, Jeremia, the Royal jeweller to Elizabeth I, Peter III and Catherine II, born 1716 in Geneva.

**Ambassador of France L'Hopital.**

**Gudovich.**

**Stroganov.**

**Baryatinsky**, Ivan Sergeyevich, prince, Colonel of Izmailovsky Royal Guards Regiment, Fligel-Adjutant to Peter III, born 23 February 1738.

**Shvanvich.**

**Teplov**, Grigory Nikolayevich, husband of Teplova, born 20 November 1717.



## PRELUDE "1753. 'A Beautiful Attempt'"

*A room in a palace.*

**Elizabeth.** (*Off stage.*) Where is she? You! Where is the Grand Duchess? Ah you don't know? Out of my way, damned idlers! (*Commotion.*) Where is the Grand Duchess?!...

*Catherine enters stage right. She is wearing mourning attire.*

Get out of here!... I said: out!... Where? In there? Out!

*Door opens. Elizabeth storms in stage left. Catherine curtsies.*

**Catherine.** (*Bows.*) Your Majesty!

**Elizabeth.** Show me your face. (*Takes Catherine by the chin.*) Eyes are red. Have you been crying? What made you cry? Ah? ...

**Catherine.** I mourn the death of my dear father, Your Majesty...

**Elizabeth.** Don't hide behind your dead father. He wasn't a king so you shouldn't be in mourning for more than 40 days. (*She forcibly pulls a black veil off Catherine.*) I know why you're crying. Young wives that don't love their husbands cry. (*This is an unexpected twist for Catherine.*) Your mother assured me that you wanted to marry the Grand Duke and I would never have forced you if you didn't. Did she lie to me?... Did you lie to me?!... (*Catherine shakes her head.*) So don't cry now!

**Catherine.** (*Humbly.*) I'm guilty, Matushka.

**Elizabeth.** Are you...? Of what...? I know! Your mother is liar and so are you. You love another man!

*Catherine is shocked at this accusation. She goes to contradict but Elizabeth doesn't let her utter a word. As Elizabeth gets excited she paces the room stopping at pivotal points.*

Do you think I don't know? You think "auntie Elizabeth is so stupid, I can play her

as I wish" Do you? Do you think you can play me as you please? That I won't learn about your every move, your every word? Do you think I'm stupid?! I'll show you games! I know your every trick and lie and I see through you. Did your mother give you instructions to betray your husband?!

**Catherine.** (*Pleading.*) Your Majesty, please...

**Elizabeth.** Silence! Did your mother teach you to spy against me for the Prussian King?

*Elizabeth begins pacing away and back towards Catherine. Sometimes she comes very close and it feels she is about to strike her.*

Answer me! Do you realize what high treason is? Do you know what that means?! Your bitch mother and you came here without a rag to wear. I gave you everything! And she repaid me by slandering me, my family and Russia and by delivering secrets to Frederick. My worst enemy! Have you been writing letters to her in Prussia? Don't you dare to deny! You feed off me, you live off me. And you betray me! Where is the heir? You've been married for nine years! Don't you know what a woman must do with her husband to produce a child? Ah! Your mother didn't teach you that! She only taught you how to deceive and lie! Where is the heir? This is what you were brought here to do! This is your sacred duty! But you just want to whore around, don't you?! (*Catherine begins shaking her head and tears pour out of her eyes.*) You little slut! Listen to me, from now on you are forbidden to see anyone, talk to anyone! And don't you even dare to write a single letter! I must have your child! If you don't change your wicked ways, remember – you'll be talking to the Grand Inquisitor. And then it's a monastery in Siberia! Or a cell in the Schlisselburg Fortress! You'll disappear like that Braunschweig scum!

*Elizabeth storms out. Catherine weeps.*

**Catherine.** (*Weeping.*) Oh, what am I to do?! I'm no Mother Mary... Help me someone... Help...me...

*Catherine falls on her knees near the table. She weeps violently. She writhes in extreme grief, choking on her tears.*



...I'm alone...

*She looks around as if searching for help.*

...I'm alone...

*Notices something on the table. She grabs the knife off the table and stabs herself in the stomach. But the knife doesn't go in. She goes at it again, forgetting that her corset is too strong. She stabs herself repeatedly to no avail. Eventually she stops and slumps on the floor.*

*Doors swing open. Peter enters followed by his soldier friends. He is wearing a Prussian black uniform with an enormous sword dangling at his waist. The others are in Prussian uniforms too. They are roaring drunk and laughing.*

**Peter.** Ah! There you are. I've been wondering where you were. You are missing out on the fireworks. So much fire! So much fun! Why are you on the floor?

*Catherine gets up. She hides the hand with the knife behind her back. It is visible to the audience.*

**Catherine.** *(Calmly.)* Your Highness, I am sorry. I'm not well.

**Peter.** You're not well? Call for a doctor.

**Catherine.** No need. I will be alright. I'm sure you could continue the celebrations without me.

**Peter.** *(To the boys.)* Can we? This must be the corset. Have you tried one of these on? They make you breathless.

*Roar.*

*(To Catherine.)* Have you been crying? *(To the boys.)* Women. Always crying. *(to Catherine.)* Don't you worry. I am here to protect you!

*Peter awkwardly pulls his sword out of the scabbard and swings it involuntarily*

*almost hitting Catherine who has to duck in order to avoid being cut down. She is fit. Peter's sword hits the table or something else on the way and that throws him out of balance. He falls down.*

Oops.

*Peter laughs. He gets up with difficulty.*

Women are weak and cry all the time. You cry all the time. I don't cry. Because we, soldiers of Holstein never cry. *(To his officers.)* Right? *(Roar of approval.)* I stand to every advers...

*He tries to raise his sword but swings it around again, scaring his party, and is thrown out of balance again this time into the hands of his officers.*

Women ought to be flogged regularly! Then they won't cry so much. Ha!  
Gentlemen, attack!

*The boys laugh and attack through the door.*

Cavalry! From the flanks! Attack!

*Peter stops at the door and turns around. He's more sober than it seems.*

M'lady, please don't bother to sleep with me this night. It is too late to try and deceive me.

**Catherine.** *(Calmly.)* Your Highness, have I made you angry?

**Peter.** *(He becomes confused. Pause.)* Can we...? I don't...eh...I..eh... I would like...

I wish you loved me like you love Chernyshov.

**Catherine.** There are three Chernyshov brothers in the court. Which one am I suspected of being in love with and who told you that?

**Peter.** *(Even more confused.)* Don't give it away, please, but Lady in Waiting Kruzeh told me that you love Piotr Chernyshov.

**Catherine.** *(Holding back tears.)* This is a horrible slander; I have almost never even

spoken with that lackey. It would've had more logic to suspect me of attachment to your favourite Andrei... it was he who you used to dispatch to me all the time, I kept meeting him in your rooms as well, I spoke to him, you and I joked with him all the time.

**Peter.** I'll be frank... It's true it was difficult for me to believe. And it was really annoying that you didn't tell *me* that you preferred someone else. But I can see now that it was all wrong.

**Catherine.** Thank you for your kind tone, sir. I can only say once again that I swear that I never even thought of Piotr Chernyshov.

**Peter.** Yes, it's absolute nonsense, of course. They want us to quarrel. But we are better than that, aren't we?

**Catherine.** We are.

**Peter.** Thank you. I... I... eh... I'm sorry. I... I better go.

*He turns to leave but then turns back.*

Who is the Brounschweig scum?

*Pause. Peter is embarrassed.*

I don't know either.

*He leaves. Catherine looks at the knife clinched in her hand and drops it on the table. Fireworks.*

## PROLOGUE "22 January, 1756. Ivan Zubarev"

*The dungeon of the Secret Chancellery. Ivan Zubarev is hanging on the rack. He is unconscious. Enter Semion. He is dressed in a linen shirt and pants and is wearing a leather apron.*

**Voice.** Bring him down.

*Semion frees the rope and Zubarev falls down on the floor.*

**Voice.** What's with him?

**Semion.** He's fainted, Aleksandr Ivanovich.

**Voice.** Didn't I tell you, idiot, to be careful and not to burn him too much?

**Semion.** Yeah, I tried a bit too hard. Not to worry. He'll come to in a moment.

*Semion pours water from a bucket on Zubarev. Zubarev begins to cough. Semion crosses himself.*

**Semion.** Lord be praised! He's come back to life. Have some of this extract, dear. You'll feel better.

*Semion holds Zubarev in his arms and brings a cup to Zubarev's lips.*

**Voice.** Tell me, Semion. I meant to ask you. What is that miracle extract of yours?

**Semion.** It's herbs, special, specially prepared, with a secret.

**Voice.** What is the secret?

**Semion.** *(Smiles.)* It wouldn't be a secret if I told you.

**Voice.** I can order to hang you on the rack like this one, you know, and you'll quickly tell me all your secrets.

**Semion.** *(Offended.)* Why do you insult me, Aleksandr Ivanych? Every trade has its secret. Our torture trade is hereditary. My grandfather got this secret from his grandfather. That passed it on to my father. My father taught me from when I was a wee sprout how to soak a lash, how to draw it, how to strike so that it only burns the skin or else cuts to the very bone... It needs years of practice. And only after I'd mastered everything, my father entrusted me with the extract recipe. He said that I

can give it only to my son, and only when he learns the torture trade. To him and none else. Because then any idler will want to be a torturer. And our art will be lost...

**Voice.** It's alright, don't get upset, Semion. Your art is worthy. How's our darling? Awake yet?

**Semion.** He's awake alright. *(To Zubarev.)* Can you hear me?

**Zubarev.** I hear you.

**Semion.** He's fine.

**Voice.** *(To Zubarev.)* Well, will you tell us about your villainous plot or shall we hoist you up once again?

**Zubarev.** *(Quietly.)* I will.

**Voice.** We can't hear you.

**Zubarev.** I'll tell.

**Voice.** Now that's nice! Have a seat.

*Semion helps Zubarev up on a bench.*

**Voice.** Thank you, Semion, make us coffee in the next room, will you?

*Semion exits.*

**Voice.** State your name?

**Zubarev.** Ivan Zubarev.

**Voice.** I can't hear you.

**Zubarev.** Ivan Zubarev. An artisan from Tobolsk.

**Voice.** So, Ivan Zubarev of Tobolsk, tell us: how did you stoop to scheming against our Matushka, god bless her days, the Empress of all the Russias Yelizaveta Petrovna.

**Zubarev.** Where do you want me to begin?

**Voice.** From the beginning, my dear, from the very beginning.

**Zubarev.** A year ago I was arrested for a false denouncement... There was this lass, you see...

**Voice.** Keep going.

**Zubarev.** Pretty she was. I wanted to marry her. She was really nice. But there was this guy swivelling around her. I thought I'd get rid of him and denounce him to the factory owner as a thief.

**Voice.** That's nasty, Ivan.

**Zubarev.** That's why I was arrested. Before they began torturing me I escaped and ran abroad. I found myself in Königsberg in Eastern Prussia.

**Voice.** How did you, Ivan, manage to get all the way from Tobolsk to Königsberg, without papers, as a fugitive, and not get caught? That must be some 3000 versts.

**Zubarev.** 3451.

**Voice.** Even more so.

**Zubarev.** The world is not without kind people, sir.

**Voice.** Aha. We'll talk about these kind people sometime. Now we want to know what happened in Königsberg.

**Zubarev.** They tried to recruit me there into the Prussian army, because I'm strong and of a good height. I was introduced to a certain Manstein who told me that he had been in the Russian service under Field Marshal Munnich but that the Russians didn't know how to appreciate a good man and he'd made a wise decision and fled back to Germany and is now the general-adjutant of King Frederick.

**Voice.** Do you know that Manstein was denounced as a deserter and sentenced to death?

**Zubarev.** Yes, he told me that. He was very proud of it. That Manstein took me to Berlin and then to Potsdam. But first he spoke to me for a long time, trying to find out everything about me, just like you, only he kept giving me wine with vodka, you treat me with fire...

**Voice.** Don't digress.

**Zubarev.** Forgive me, kind sir, but what do mean by that?

**Voice.** Don't forget where you are and continue.

**Zubarev.** Ah. He wished to make me drunk or something, asked me all the time: Are you really Ivan? tried to catch me out. That Manstein is not very clever thinking he can get a Siberian drunk and stupid and it's a good thing that he fled. There'll be less fools in Russia. Let the idiot serve Frederick.

**Voice.** Stick to the story, Ivan.

**Zubarev.** Aha. That Manstein invited another man into the room and asked me: Do you know this man? I says I don't. This, he says, is the uncle of Ivan Antonovich that

was your emperor. (*Re-enacts Manstein's manner. Starts pointing finger in the direction of the voice.*) You, he says, gave an oath to him but betrayed him. You, he says, are traitors... And he says, "I was in your service myself as an adjutant to Munnich. Have you heard about Manstein? I am Manstein and I am now general adjutant for King Frederick. You must know me. You," he says, "served in the royal guards and you dethroned Ivan Antonovich and put him under arrest. And now you," he says, "call yourself a merchant and lie." And he says, "tell us the truth. You were in the royal guards. Cause if you don't we will torture you such as you've never seen torture in Russia." I told him to torture me if he liked, but I am Ivan Zubarev, an artisan of Tobolsk.

**Voice.** Yes, you keep saying that.

**Zubarev.** That is because I am, Your Excellency! (*Zubarev falls to his knees.*) I truly am! What do I need to do for you to believe me? The Prussians believed me.

**Voice.** Well, if Manstein is as foolish as you're describing, perhaps he believed you. But we're not Prussians here. Keep going.

**Zubarev.** They took me to Berlin. On the way I was introduced to Prince Ferdinand, the uncle of the imprisoned emperor Ivan. That Ferdinand is a general in the Prussian army now. He convinced me that, since I am so brave and skilled that I could run away from the Russian prison in Siberia and make it all the way across the border and into Europe, I could do the holy mission.

**Voice.** Holy?

**Zubarev.** (*His eyes flare up.*) Yes, that will redeem us all, the traitors of god and country! You too, Excellency.

**Voice.** Redeem me. Very interesting. Semion!

*Semion enters.*

**Semion.** Yes, Aleksandr Ivanych.

**Voice.** Brief and hearty .

**Semion.** Sure.

*Semion comes up to Zubarev and delivers a precise and crushing blow on the face. Zubarev flies back from the bench.*

**Voice.** Thank you, Semion. You may go.

*Semion exists. Zubarev coughs and spits.*

**Voice.** So how were you supposed to redeem me and then redeem all of us?

**Zubarev.** I was to sneak to Kholmogory in the north, near Arkhangelsk and tell Anton Ulrich, who is imprisoned there with his family, that in the spring of this year navy ships would sail into Arkhangelsk under the guise of merchants and will try to kidnap the emperor Ivan and his father. He introduced me to the captain of the secret expedition so I knew his face. Manstein told me that when we kidnap Ivan, we would incite the Schismatics to rise against the empress and make revolution because Ivan is the defender of the old faith. He said I must make contact with the schismatics in the north. And so we will purge the usurpers from the holy Russian land.

**Voice.** Who are “we”?

**Zubarev.** Ah... eh... Manstein with that captain.... and the Prussians... and I.

**Voice.** Who are the usurpers?

**Zubarev.** Empress Elizabeth and her loyal dogs the Shuvalovs, the Razumovskies, the Vorontsovs...

**Voice.** You're calling the daughter of Peter the Great himself a usurper?

**Zubarev.** She dethroned the righteous emperor Ivan Antonovich and threw him in prison. Ivan was made emperor by the will of Empress Anna Ioanovna. So he is by the law set by Peter the Great himself.

**Voice.** Not bad. What happened next?

**Zubarev.** Then they took me to the palace called San Soussi to see King Frederick. The King made me colonel and gave me money. Then Manstein gave me gold and special medals that only Ivan's father could recognize and so trust me. Then they sent me back through the Polish border. In Warsaw I visited the Prussian ambassador, who helped me to cross back into Russia. But there I was caught. I stopped at Vetka, a schismatic settlement in Poland across the border from Russia. There I bragged a lot about my secret mission and somebody denounced me.

**Voice.** So the schismatics that were supposed to help you, denounced you to us?

**Zubarev.** Yes.

**Voice.** How were you planning to put Ivan back on the throne?



**Zubarev.** Just like the empress sat on it - unceremoniously.

**Voice.** Good...

*Inquisitor appears. It has been his voice all along.*

Good... Not bad, Ivan. But you did reveal yourself a few times as too educated for a simple artisan.

**Zubarev.** The Prussians never doubted. They did not know our tongue well.

**Inquisitor.** Hmm... Tell us did you see other people around Manstein, people from other countries? Any Englishers for instance?

**Zubarev.** No, Your Excellency. There were only Germans who spoke to me. But there are all sorts of people in their army. They laugh! King Frederick says that he wins thrice when he recruits a foreigner: first his army gets a soldier, second a German peasant stays on the land and works and third, if the soldier is killed, it is a foreign widow that cries, while the Germans remain calm and merry. Ha. Funny guy that Frederick.

*Zubarev spits blood.*

**Inquisitor.** *(Sits next to Zubarev on the bench.)* Tell me, did they really trust you? Are you sure they did not take you for a ride with this plot.

**Zubarev.** They were very mistrusting at first but I convinced them. Otherwise why would they take me to their king?

**Inquisitor.** *(Thoughtfully.)* Yes. Indeed, why? *(To Zubarev.)* You've done a good job and you will be rewarded. You'll get your nobility.

**Zubarev.** I would like to return to the service in my regiment.

**Inquisitor.** No, Ivan. You will remain here for now so that no soul ever knows who you were or what you've done. Understood?

**Zubarev.** What was that torment for? You said yourself that I did a good job. Why the torture? Why can't I go free?

**Inquisitor.** That is part of the job. Ivan Zubarev of Tobolsk, a Prussian spy, must be caught and tortured, sentenced and punished. The plot must be uncovered. And he must disappear in the endless abyss of Siberia. And *you* must feel what will happen

to you if you tell anyone about what you've done or who you are. Now you may go, Ivan. Semion!

*Semion enters.*

Semion, take care of Ivan.

**Semion.** Come with me, dear. Your trouble is over.

**Inquisitor.** And don't forget my kindness.

**Zubarev.** (*Turns around at the door.*) So strike me god if I ever do, kind sir.

*Zubarev leaves. Shuvalov appears.*

**Shuvalov.** Manstein, the uncle... All the rats gather in packs.

**Inquisitor.** Yeah, see how they all run to him. What is the lure? Money? Yes.

Glory? Hmmm. For some maybe. And to the uncle of the Braunschweig cub – the Russian throne.

**Shuvalov.** Do you think they might try?

**Inquisitor.** It's possible. Kholmogory is a busy place. Busy markets. Lots of people. Ships navigate up the river from Arkhangelsk. But they'd be crazy. They would have to pass the Fortress on their way twice. The entire Swedish fleet could not do it.

**Shuvalov.** If this is true, it's war. Does Frederick want to fight us?

**Inquisitor.** He wants us out of his way. He wouldn't mind adding Courland to his realms. That is why he'd love to put Ivan the Braunschweig back on the throne.

**Shuvalov.** But Ivan has been in prison since he was one. You told me yourself that he doesn't know how to read or write, or what his name is. That he can barely speak. You told me so yourself that he's basically a vegetable. Why wouldn't they bet on the Grand Duke Peter? He's pro-Prussian enough. He adores the Prussian king beyond any decency. Why bother with a deranged prisoner when the heir to the throne is a natural ally?

**Inquisitor.** Ha! There is a difference between an idiot and a vegetable. An idiot will want to rule himself and make a mess. The Prussian king is too smart to want this kind of love. But a vegetable on the Russian throne, now that would be ideal. Ivan wouldn't be able to rule, someone else would have to do it for him, someone who put him on the throne. Manstein or the Braunschweig uncle, for example. You see? Our

Empress wished to hide Ivan so no one could ever find him but it appears it's impossible to hide an emperor, even in the most remote place. And even though I don't believe they would dare, the prisoner is exposed.

**Shuvalov.** I still don't see why we keep a child in prison?

**Inquisitor.** What do you mean why?

**Shuvalov.** He never did anyone ill. He never had a chance.

**Inquisitor.** That's prevention for you, my dear nephew.

**Shuvalov.** You're a misanthrope, uncle.

**Inquisitor.** I'm what?

**Shuvalov.** You hate humanity.

**Inquisitor.** I see it every day, that humanity, here in this dungeon: thieves, murderers, traitors, who'd sell their own mother for a pittance. They all were children once. I do what I do in service of our Matushka the Empress. I protect her. Your lover. If what you've seen and heard here is not enough for you, go and ask your lover why she put a little child in prison and threw away the key.

**Shuvalov.** Had I courage to ask her I wouldn't have asked you, uncle.

**Inquisitor.** He didn't have time to do anyone ill. But ill was done in his name. By others. By politicians. If it were my will, every politician would be here in this dungeon.

**Shuvalov.** But he was only one. Hardly a politician.

**Inquisitor.** He was an emperor, incapacitated, a toy for any politician. I am sorry that he was born that way and it is either someone destroys in his name or someone builds against it.

**Shuvalov.** Why not send him to live somewhere far away? Siberia? As far as it gets and let him go.

**Inquisitor.** You've a bright mind, nephew, in some cases but sometimes you surprise me with your silliness. You've just heard how Zubarev made it from Tobolsk all the way to Prussia on his own, didn't you? Tobolsk is in Siberia, you know.

**Shuvalov.** But that was just a story, it was untrue, right?

*Silence.*

**Shuvalov.** So this was Ivan an artisan from Tobolsk?

*Silence.*

**Shuvalov.** Was he a soldier of the Royal Guard?

*Silence.*

**Shuvalov.** Was he?

**Inquisitor.** There is no more artisan Ivan or Ivan the soldier of the Royal Guard.

That's all you need to know.

**Shuvalov.** But emperor Ivan is a vegetable, right?

**Inquisitor.** He's growing up...

**Shuvalov.** But...

**Inquisitor.** ...and needs to be isolated completely.

**Shuvalov.** Uncle, tell me, is Ivan a vegetable?

**Inquisitor.** Vanya, that is... my trade secret. I don't know what he is going to grow into. But I know that we need to bring this "Certain Prisoner" closer, very close, in fact. So he remains under our constant watchful eye. We'll bring him to Shlisselburg Fortress. Secretly, at night. So that nobody knows. And to make sure, we will leave the guards in Kholmogory and make them report on the prisoner just like before.

**Shuvalov.** For how long?

**Inquisitor.** Forever.

**Shuvalov.** They will guard an empty cell?

**Inquisitor.** (*His eyes flare up.*) Yes. And in Shlisselburg we must make it so that no one sees him at all, even those who clean up the cell must not see him. No windows. No names. He must be behind a cover when anyone enters the cell. So that nobody knows who they guard. No one will be able to enter or leave the fortress, neither workers, nor guards, nobody, ever.

**Shuvalov.** Will this be enough?

**Inquisitor.** For some time. But you can't hide an emperor! Something will have to be done?

**Shuvalov.** (*Fearsome.*) What?

*Silence. One side of Inquisitor's face shakes in a tick.*

**Inquisitor.** Whatever is required to protect our empress... And also to protect you and our Shuvalov clan. Take my advice, Vasily, think of yourself.

**Shuvalov.** What do you mean?

**Inquisitor.** You know what I mean. We all are very grateful for your favour with the Empress and we have secured our futures. But you seem to be wasting your time.

**Shuvalov.** What are you talking about?

**Inquisitor.** I'm talking about money, wealth, securing your future.

**Shuvalov.** Thank you. I'm fine.

**Inquisitor.** But our empress is not. I spoke to the Royal doctor Condoidi. It's old age, Ivan. We are all mortal, only you don't feel it yet.

**Shuvalov.** Doctor Condoidi is lost. He only tells her what she wants to hear. He is afraid of her wrath.

**Inquisitor.** What does she tell you?

**Shuvalov.** She just kisses me and says everything is fine.

**Inquisitor.** Listen to me. Use your situation. While you can. Ask her for money.

**Shuvalov.** I just did. Three days since I begged her for ten thousand for the University building.

**Inquisitor.** I just can't get it, Vasily. What do you want to build this university for?

**Shuvalov.** For wealth and glory of the fatherland, uncle.

**Inquisitor.** Wealth? I doubt it. It seems to cost mounds and give no money back to you. You'd better do like my brother, your uncle Piotr. He consolidated the monopoly for the salt trade and rakes in gold by the bag. Now that's wealth. Everyone needs salt but who needs the university? As for glory...

**Shuvalov.** No, truly it's you who don't understand it, uncle. The University holds the treasure of what is known and what will be discovered. It teachers masters in of the trade. Peter the Great had sent a whole generation abroad to study. He had to commission foreigners to build the navy. How much did that cost? But with a university we will be growing our own engineers, architects, builders, scientists, like Lomonosov. And as for the people, I don't think they will forgive uncle Piotr for that salt monopoly and his huge prices. You'll see.

**Inquisitor.** Maybe you're right. Only remember the university will strip you bare and the fatherland will not come to you and bow to the ground in gratitude: "Thank you, Ivan Shuvalov, for my wealth and glory". While you are sleeping with the empress, everything seems fine and rosy. But when our Matushka, Yelizavet

Petrovny, blessed be her days, is gone, only money will save you. Because the Grand Duke Peter, when he's the emperor, will not forgive you for your love of everything French and hatred of everything Prussian. He will throw you away. What will you do?

**Shuvalov.** That's why I hurry.

**Inquisitor.** You'd better hurry to get some money for the rest of your life.

**Shuvalov.** (*Angrily.*) Upon my word uncle...

**Inquisitor.** Don't get so tense, Ivan. I say this out of care for you.

**Shuvalov.** Thank you, uncle for your care. Better look after yourself.

**Inquisitor.** I'll be fine. Every regime needs spies and protection. I'll just do my job.

**Shuvalov.** (*Coldly.*) Then do your job, uncle. Guard emperor Ivan!

**Inquisitor.** (*Officially.*) What emperor? I know no emperor. We have an empress, our Matushka Yelizaveta.

**Shuvalov.** Be well, uncle.

**Inquisitor.** Be prepared.

*Shuvalov exits.*

I will be too.



**ACT ONE "1756. THE DIPLOMATIC REVOLUTION"****SCENE ONE "The Empress Awakens".**

*Silence. The clock is ticking quietly. Elizabeth wakes up. Barefoot, in a night gown, her long hair undone, she goes to the door. Opens it.*

**Elizabeth.** Hey, people, what's the time now? Where's Count Karl? Sivers! Not drunk I hope. Tell him to make my coffee.

*She returns to her bed and slumps heavily back on the massive pillows. Suddenly she starts and begins crossing herself fervently.*

Oh, Mother of Heavens, forgive us...

*Enters Count Karl Sivers, the Ober Hof-Marshal of the Empire. He is slick, clean-shaven, well-fed and sober. He is carrying a tray with a cup of coffee.*

**Sivers.** (*Merrily.*) Well, Matushka, you shouldn't have thrown that ace last night. The six would have done it. I would have cut the hand for you... Here, drink while it's hot!

**Elizabeth.** Eighteen roubles... Pah! You can't build a house on it; you'll only get into trouble. Call out across the river, would you? Is anyone of the Stroganovs awake already? Tell them I am inviting them to breakfast...

**Sivers.** Better call it dinner. It's five o'clock.

**Elizabeth.** I've awakened just now. So it's breakfast! I wish you were drunk, Karl. You make no sense at all when you're sober.

**Sivers.** The Grand Chancellor has been waiting in the hallway since morning, Your Majesty. He knows no meaning of sobriety.

**Elizabeth.** What does he want, that restless geezer? Tell him to wait. I'm not dressed.

*Sivers bows and exits. Enters Shkurin, the royal stoker, carrying a bunch of fire logs.*

*He speaks/sings folk verses and dances from the door to the fireplace.*

**Shkurin.** (*Dancing.*) In the markets in the stalls

In the palace and the halls

In the streets when they go looting

In the woods where owls-a-hooting

They talk of one and only beauty.

The charm like hers you never met,

Our dear girl, Yelizavet.

*He drops the firewood on the floor before the fireplace.*

**Elizabeth.** (*Smiling and sipping her coffee.*) Why are you barefoot? I see you put the livery on but the heels are dirty... Tell me, my friend, why don't you stick to the etiquette?

**Shkurin.** (*Opening his arms.*) My boots walked out on me. I snoozed under the stairs for a minute... And woke up barefoot - someone nicked them off me!

*Elizabeth finishes the coffee and pouts.*

**Elizabeth.** You have no mercy for me, Vasily... What's that! You closed all the dampers again last night. My poor ribs clattered all night... I thought I'd die!

*Shkurin bows to her low and suddenly pecks her on a heel.*

**Shkurin.** Ah you, prettiness!

*His hands on his hips, he struts like a turkey-cock in front of her - showing off, and dances out of the room.*

Beyond the seven seas and mountains high

There is a beauty bird that I...

*Thus he gets to the door. The door opens and the Inquisitor appears in the doorway.*



*They stand face to face. Shkurin falls silent and begin retreating as Inquisitor advances.*

**Elizabeth.** *(Laughing.)* You're not of the timid kind, are you?

**Shkurin.** *(Forcing a smile.)* You're the sovereign. You know better, Matushka.

*So they stop. Inquisitor puts his hand on Shkurin's shoulder. Shkurin goes down on his knees with Inquisitor standing behind him.*

**Elizabeth.** Do you know who this man is?

**Shkurin.** How can I not? This is the Chief of the Secret Chancellery Count Aleksandr Ivanovich Shuvalov.

**Elizabeth.** Good. Stand up, my dear.

*Shkurin gets up from his knees cautiously, glancing back at Inquisitor.*

**Elizabeth.** I want to reward you for your service. **Shkurin.**

Matushka, I serve for honour, not for rewards. **Elizabeth.** I

know, I know. I wonder how you feed your family? **Inquisitor.**

Yes, you refuse pay. Very strange.

**Shkurin.** As I said, I serve our Matushka Tsaritsa for honour.

**Inquisitor.** What about your wife and the little boy, Sergei? The girls... what are they called? Masha and Natasha?

**Shkurin.** While I am by her Majesty's side, they are fed and thank you, Lord, and Matushka-Tsaritsa for her generosity.

**Inquisitor.** You steal?

**Shkurin.** It is a merry life here. If you don't steal, someone will steal from you. Only what could we, small people, steal? A chicken leg? Or a pair of boots of someone's feet? Now the noblemen, they have possibilities...

**Inquisitor.** Watch what you say, twerp. *(To Elizabeth.)* Crystal clean. *(Develops a tick. Comes very close to Shkurin.)* Too clean. *(Shkurin shrinks.)* Except for his feet. What about your conscience? Do you pray to god?

**Shkurin.** I am Vasily Shkurin, a free man. I live an honest life...

**Inquisitor.** I have a priest in my office at the fortress. He is the master of anointing

with red-hot pincers. He will take your confession.

**Elizabeth.** (*Sternly.*) Stop it, Aleksandr Ivanych. (*To Shkurin.*) It is your honesty that I want to reward, Vasily. I have a new job for you. You will replace Timofei Yevreyinov as the valet to the Grand Duke Peter and Grand Duchess Catherine. Timofei did not do his work well enough and had to go.

**Inquisitor.** Very far away.

**Shkurin.** What was his fault, Your Majesty?

**Elizabeth.** As the valet to the Grand Duke and Grand Duchess, he forgot who he worked for. You need to be a better valet than a stoker, Vasily. You will report about everything that happens in the House of the Duke and the Duchess -- who visits them, what they say. Particularly the Grand Duchess. To me, personally. You will be working for me. Do you understand? (*Pause.*) And your children will be well cared for.

**Shkurin.** As you wish, Matushka.

**Elizabeth.** Great. You will need new boots and a livery. (*To Inquisitor.*) Aleksandr Ivanych, please arrange everything.

**Inquisitor.** By all means, Your Majesty.

**Elizabeth.** (*To Shkurin.*) Thank you, my dear. You may go now.

**Shkurin.** Your Majesty. (*To Inquisitor.*) Shall I wait outside for you, sir.

**Inquisitor.** I will find you.

*Shkurin winces.*

**Elizabeth.** And call for Yegorovna...

*Shkurin bows and exits. The door opens slightly and the head of Chancellor Bestuzhev-Ryumin appears. Inquisitor is not seen by Bestuzhev but he makes a step back from his field of vision to remain unnoticed.*

**Bestuzhev.** (*Whispers passionately.*) Matushka-Tsaritsa, I must see you. Urgent affairs are at hand in Europe.

**Elizabeth.** Hold on, Chancellor, affairs aren't wolves, they won't run away to the forest. Europe can wait. I am not combed yet! Ask there, is Yegorovna coming already? Am I supposed to suffer here alone?

*Bestuzhev's head disappears.*

**Elizabeth.** Aleksandr Ivanych, you should go too. Can't you see I am not dressed yet? (*Yells.*) Yegorovna! Is she drunk, or something?

**Inquisitor.** Two minutes, Matushka. A despatch from my man in Riga. A certain Douglas Mackenzie, a Scot on his way from Paris, crossed the border and stopped at an inn in Riga. Apparently he was on his way to St Petersburg "to benefit from the healing powers of the northern climate". He's healthy though. This is "Le secret du Roi". He is definitely a spy of Versailles.

**Elizabeth.** A French spy? What does King Louis want?

**Inquisitor.** That I don't know yet. But I know that this Douglas has arrived in the city and visited the Vice-Chancellor Vorontsov. Secretly, at night. I could take that Scot into my office in the Peter and Paul Fortress and find everything out in detail. Perhaps I should invite Vorontsov too?

**Elizabeth.** No. I'll talk to the Vice-Chancellor myself. Let's keep the king's secret secret. For now.

**Inquisitor.** There's one more thing. It seems this Scott from Paris is trying to collect information about "The Known Prisoner" and the Braunsweig family.

**Elizabeth.** (*Gravely.*) What? Again?

**Inquisitor.** Yes, Matushka. Many are interested. Particularly King Frederick and now King Louis. Every enemy will be interested in a dethroned emperor while he is alive.

**Elizabeth.** What am I to do with him? No one is supposed to know that he even exists. We even decided to give him another name. Where is he now?

**Inquisitor.** Your orders have been executed. He's in Kholmogory in the bishop's house in solitary confinement, guarded by 25 soldiers and an officer of the Royal Guard. He's not allowed to leave the room and all his windows are painted over. The guards report that he's in good health but his mind is weak. He never sees anyone but his jailer and was never taught to read or write. Since he has been in prison since his infancy he doesn't know who he is. Nobody can address him by his real name and only the name of Prisoner Grigory is used in his presence and in any written correspondence about him. It is hard to converse with him as he does not know how to speak words and stutters heavily. He is more like an animal, Your Majesty.

**Elizabeth.** How old is he now?

**Inquisitor.** He is fifteen years of age.

**Elizabeth.** Fifteen years? Has it been so long? Fifteen years... am I getting old...? Say, Aleksandr Ivanych, I am still young and pretty, am I not?

**Inquisitor.** ... You are such a smart woman, Matushka. There's no one could be smarter than you... I... Everyone...

**Elizabeth.** I am a woman. We know each other well, Aleksandr Ivanych. You can't flatter like my Stoker Shkurin. I am very grateful for everything you have done for me throughout these years. I know I can trust you. (*Inquisitor bows.*) Keep a sharp eye on your prisoner.

**Inquisitor.** Of course. Moreover we need to triple our vigilance.

**Elizabeth.** What do you mean?

**Inquisitor.** My agent has returned from Prussia. He brought with him hard evidence of a new plot hatched by Ivan's Brounsweig uncle and the traitor Manstein to organise an expedition and free Ivan and incite an uprising in his name against Your Majesty. This spring they are planning to navigate up the river from Arkhangelsk to Kholmogory disguised as merchants and overpower the small garrison of the prison. The plot is being overseen by King Frederick himself. My agent saw him in person.

**Elizabeth.** That damned Herod! How dares he!

**Inquisitor.** Indeed, Your Majesty. However, we have foiled his plot. The leader of the future uprising has been caught, confessed and is awaiting punishment.

**Elizabeth.** Who is that miserable worm?

**Inquisitor.** My agent, a former soldier of Your Majesty's Royal Guard, one Ivan Zubarev.

**Elizabeth.** Your agent? Wait, Aleksandr Ivanych, I'm lost here. Does this mean the plot is false?

**Inquisitor.** Oh, no. The plot is very real. Zubarev deceived the Prussians. They believed him and sent him back to incite and lead the revolt. But now he will be officially condemned and sent as a convict to Siberia.

**Elizabeth.** From what you say I should rather reward than punish him.

**Inquisitor.** True, Your Majesty. Ivan Zubarev has done great service to you.

**Elizabeth.** What does he want for his service?

**Inquisitor.** He wishes for nobility for himself and his descendants.

**Elizabeth.** So what is it going to be: Siberia or nobility?

**Inquisitor.** Both Your Majesty. He needs to disappear for a while. The “criminal” must be punished. And you could sign his nobility patent with a date... five years from now.

**Elizabeth.** You weave cunning schemes, Inquisitor.

*Inquisitor bows.*

Tell Ivan Zubarev he will get his patent and a lot more.

**Inquisitor.** Your Majesty, what about the emperor?

**Elizabeth.** What about him? The plot is foiled. You said so.

**Inquisitor.** True. But as long as he’s out there, there will be always someone who will want to use him against you.

**Elizabeth.** And...?

**Inquisitor.** As you can see, Your Majesty, it is impossible to conceal a living emperor... it is hard...

**Elizabeth.** Are you proposing to kill him? To kill my own family? Have you lost your mind?! How dare you?!

**Inquisitor.** Forgive your loyal slave, Matushka. I am here to guard your safety.

**Elizabeth.** Then guard it!

**Inquisitor.** I will, Matushka.

**Elizabeth.** No one dies of my hand. No one! Do you hear? Go.

*Inquisitor leaves. Elizabeth once again looks up to the icons and crosses herself. Then she looks at the mirror. She stops for a moment. Then utters a deep sigh.*

Yegorovna!!! You fat cow!

**Voice of Yegorovna.** I’m here, Your Majesty, in the dressing room.

**Elizabeth.** You just wait, I’ll get there!

*Enters Ivan Shuvalov (through a different door). He is wearing a dressing gown.*

**Shuvalov.** Good day, Matushka.

**Elizabeth.** (*Reproachfully, but tenderly with care, like his mother.*) Where did you distinguish yourself last night?

**Shuvalov.** (*The prodigal son.*) We supped at the Apraksins. I remember the castrati sang so delectably. Then Razumovsky caned the field marshal and the Naryshkins, as usual pulled, them apart.

**Elizabeth.** Suck on some cranberries. Your head must be splitting.

**Shuvalov.** (*Filling his eyes with tears and looking at his fingernails.*) I'm not worth your care, Matushka. (*He sighs.*) I'll end up in a monastery.

**Elizabeth.** Once I'm gone, you can pray at your wish. But for now, don't sulk... Come to me, my dear angel.

*She kisses him passionately.*

Next time tell Razumovsky that I forbid him hurting Apraksin. The field marshal must be ready for his duties in one piece.

**Shuvalov.** He's got a leather back, Matushka. And fat this thick. Like those elephants that Nadir Shah gave to you. Cane won't hurt him much.

**Elizabeth.** Has the Chancellor dragged his carcass away already?

**Shuvalov.** You wish. He's sitting downstairs, watching the clock since I don't know when.

**Elizabeth.** What a pestering tick... I wish I knew what it is he wants.

**Shuvalov.** (*Biting on an apple.*) The new British ambassador Williams is coming to replace the old one, so your *visir* is worried we should push away the English money they want to pay us for protecting their property from the French and the Prussians.

**Elizabeth.** Had I not kept the army, (*she yawns*) there'd be no one in Europe who'd consider us. Only soldiers hold us up...

**Shuvalov.** Your tower is the highest, Matushka, you see the furthest. The English king wants our soldiers to protect his Duchy of Hannover. Only watch out because we, the Russians, might end up knitting someone else's dough for nothing! Then marshal Apraksin will be hurting indeed, in the battlefield.

**Elizabeth.** (*Slipping into rage.*) I have been scraping for three years and what have I got? And where is that Hannover anyway - I've no idea! I have my own troubles: the palace isn't finished. Where to get the money for it - no one knows. Everyone around only says: give, give, give! And no one has as yet said: "This is for you, Yelizavet Petrovna!.." Maybe you will give, darling?

**Shuvalov.** I only live off your generosity, Matushka. If you need, take everything I

have. I'll survive on the name of Christ alone. But your Chancellor Bestuzhev has quite a profit from the foreign courts. The Brits give him in hope that you give them. I bet that's what he is waiting downstairs for – to make you sign the British subsidy treaty. Ask him to pay!

*Elizabeth quickly ties up her hair as she speaks.*

**Elizabeth.** (*Calmly.*) He takes money, I know. But no one else is as good for foreign affairs as him. Besides he's loyal and thinks like me. Who could I put in his place? Vorontsov? At least Bestuzhev keeps up the appearances. He doesn't take from enemies. Vorontsov would rake in even more... and take it from anyone, without discrimination. Yes, we are in debt but what can be done? I don't even have my own roof over my head in town. The Summer palace is a ruin, the Winter palace... Nobody knows when it will be finished. Will I have to sleep in someone else's place till the day I die?

**Shuvalov.** Frederick, the Prussian king...

**Elizabeth.** Don't you mention the antichrist's name here!

**Shuvalov.** ...has gone poor too. He has even taxed beer and would love to get the English advances. I'm sure they will oblige. And this is how you and me, Matushka, will go alongside the Prussians to fight for Hannover against the France that you love so much... My uncle has been here today, hasn't he? He spoke to you about the Prisoner...

*Elizabeth stops him with a gesture. She gets out of bed and comes up to him with an angry expression but then turns away and falls to her knees in front of the icons.*

**Elizabeth.** (*Crosses herself repeatedly.*) Lord! Why am I tortured so? What on earth is this Hannover? Does it exist at all? Maybe they invented it on purpose, to bring me grief... (*Crosses herself.*) I am a great sinner, have mercy on me, oh Lord!

*Shuvalov throws her gown over her shoulders and rings the bell.*

**Shuvalov.** (*Calls out loudly.*) Get the Chancellor here! With papers...

**Elizabeth.** (*Getting off her knees.*) I have seen nothing from the French court but

humiliation and plots against me. And now...

**Shuvalov.** Yes, but time has passed. We haven't had relations with Versailles for eight years now. Nothing is forever.

**Elizabeth.** If they want our friendship, let them ask for it. I will not be the first to talk to King Louis... You know, darling, he was once my fiancée...

*Shuvalov makes a painful expression. Enter Bestuzhev already slightly tipsy. His dress is rich and foppish, a wig, lots of diamonds on his fingers. He sparkles with jewellery. He notices Shuvalov. Silently, without bows or ceremony, he slaps the papers of the Foreign Chancellery on the table.*

**Bestuzhev.** (*His back to Shuvalov.*) Thanks to god, I don't go hungry and don't pinch tobacco from others. I'm not troubling for myself but for the greater glory of the Fatherland. The root of my politics is ancient; moreover, it is the system of Peter the Great!

**Shuvalov.** (*Haughtily.*) Stop bragging, Petrovich. Politics, just like gallantry with ladies, cannot have a strict system. Sometimes you need to make her jealous to keep the darling. But according to your "system" Russia goes a-begging around others' courtyards. Who do we not take from? We don't even shy away from the Dutch tallars... And this is a shame on the Russian people!

**Bestuzhev.** If I were you, my dear sir, I'd be ashamed of mentioning the word shame. Just shut it.

**Shuvalov.** (*Flares up.*) Matushka, did you hear?

*Bestuzhev pulls his wig down and covers his eyes with it.*

**Bestuzhev.** (*Fake weeping.*) God is my witness, they slander me. They are plotting against me. All around. My life, my whole being is dedicated to serving Your Majesty and the Fatherland...

**Elizabeth.** (*To Shuvalov.*) Ivan Ivanych – my darling – leave us now. Come back later, with joy...

*Shuvalov exits and slams the door behind.*



And you, stop crying! Chancellor Osterman, that one could cry. His tears were like grapes... This big! You just keep rubbing your eyes but they are dry. Shame, nothing else!

*Bestuzhev pulls his wig back on his head and turns cold.*

**Bestuzhev.** (*Pointing at the papers.*) Have a read, great sovereign. My argument for you. Now, in our negotiations with England, we will send a corps of not thirty thousand, as we promised before, but all of fifty thousand soldiers to protect Hannover! And for that England will pay us 350 thousand pounds...

**Elizabeth.** They have no fear of god, those bandits!

**Bestuzhev.** (*Profoundly and soulfully.*) Sign it. And I will guard your interest. We won't take less than *five hundred* thousand.

*Bestuzhev takes a quill and offers it to Elizabeth.*

**Elizabeth.** (*Taking the quill cautiously, looking closely at the paper.*) The letters are so small. Can't you write larger? What if I sign it tomorrow?

**Bestuzhev.** (*Pleading.*) Matushka! How many years has it been always tomorrow and tomorrow. In London they've pecked the living soul out of your ambassador at their court!

**Elizabeth.** (*Rages.*) So what? I suffer all sorts of unpleasantness from politics, don't I? He's an Orthodox! So let him carry his cross. (*Tosses the paper on the table.*) Yet another debt won't be an adornment to Russia!

*Bestuzhev shakes the sand bottle, ready to pour it over her signature.*

**Bestuzhev.** There's no need to strain, Matushka. Truly, your honour won't suffer at all from another debt, but the work will get done. Just a little scribble. It's so easy: phew and you are rich!

**Elizabeth.** (*Throws down the quill.*) Have a little more patience, Chancellor. This isn't a joke! They want an entire corps... We're talking Christian souls here! They'll drag me into this and I'll be beaten. For what gain? Your English debt? Frederick, my personal enemy, is reaching for my throat. He's got armies in Eastern Prussia,

right on our doorstep. Pitt is cunning, but I have not been born so simple either. That is why, you should go now and rest for a while, Chancellor, and don't you worry about anything...

**Bestuzhev.** What will I tell the new British ambassador now?

**Elizabeth.** I am sure you will think of something.

*Elizabeth suddenly makes an uneven step and grabs the back of a chair or leans on the table in order not to fall. Her head droops. Bestuzhev rushes to her aid and supports her.*

**Bestuzhev.** Doctor!

**Elizabeth.** *(Regaining her composure and pushing them away.)* No need for a doctor. I need some fresh air. Get my sleigh ready. I'm going for a ride in the city.

*Elizabeth exits. Bestuzhev watches them as they leave. He produces a flask and takes a deep swig out of it.*

**Bestuzhev.** Shit...! Smart-asses all around... They read books. Correspond with Voltaire. Philosophize with Lomonosov about lightening and glass. Home-grown thinkers! They think they can teach me, Bestuzhev only because they sleep in bed with the Empress!

*Bestuzhev takes another swig out of his flask. And exits disappointed.*

## **INTERLUDE "26 January, 1756"**

*A room in the archbishop's house in Kholmogory. Darkness. Window are covered so no light gets in. It is a cell. A stool, a table. It is night. A man sleeps on a plank bed. This is ex emperor Ivan VI. Heavy locks are unlocked from the outside. The door opens. Enter officers of the guard Chekin and Vlasyev.*

**Chekin.** Hey, freak, get up.

**Ivan.** I'm no freak. I'm Emperor Ivan.

**Vlasyev.** Oh, silly boy. What are we to do with you?

**Chekin.** Your name's Grigory, stupid.

**Ivan.** I'm Ivan, emperor of this land.

*Vlasyev and Chekin laugh.*

**Chekin.** Emperor... Look at yourself, freak. You can't even talk. Better throw this nonsense out of your head.

**Ivan.** You're a freak! I Emperor will be emperor again and I will have your heads cut off.

**Vlasyev.** You don't say. *(To Chekin.)* He'll be emperor. Got that? *(To Ivan.)* We already have empress Yelizaveta, and the Grand Duke Peter with his wife Catherine. We don't need more. And on the orders from Her Majesty you, measly nothing, must now get up. You're being moved.

**Ivan.** *(No movement.)* Where?

**Chekin.** Another four walls and a locked door. What do you care?

**Ivan.** I'm not going anywhere. I like it here.

**Vlasyev.** Who's asking you?

**Ivan.** I don't wanna.

**Chekin.** Get up, sonny. Don't make god angry.

*They grab him, blindfold him and take him away.*

## SCENE TWO "The Diplomatic Reception"

*Enter Ambassadors of Austria and Saxony. They remain stage right by the wings throughout their conversation.*

**Saxony ambassador.** Ah, Sir Ambassador!

**Austrian ambassador.** My respects! How are things in Dresden? Do you still throw your golden plates into the Elbe after each meal?

**Saxony ambassador.** Alas, the porcelain factories cannot make the china fast

enough and our king has to eat off the same plate twice. And how is the weather in Vienna?

**Austrian ambassador.** Our great Empress Maria-Theresa is in good health, thanked be the Lord, yet she is plunged deeply in grief and prays for the return of her dear Silesian lands which were so brutally and treacherously taken from her by that low thief, your neighbour, Frederick of Prussia.

**Saxony ambassador.** Our king shares your grief and prays for the same and hopes that what you and I do here will help both our causes. (*Confidentially.*) Chancellor Bestuzhev asked me to relate this to you. He has had serious expenses lately and had to take 20000 ducats from the treasury. If an audit suddenly happens he might have serious unpleasantness.

**Austrian ambassador.** (*Outraged.*) What? (*Also confidentially.*) Tell him to go to hell. I gave him 62 000 recently.

**Saxony ambassador.** The Chancellor made it clear that the requirement is urgent.

**Austrian ambassador.** Where will I find 20000? My queen Maria-Theresa counts every gulden. Why don't you, my friend, dive into the Elbe under the windows of the palace of your king and collect the discarded treasures there? I'm sure there will be more than enough to cover the appetites of that troglodyte, Bestuzhev.

**Saxony ambassador.** I regret but I cannot swim and it is not my little Saxony who lost Silesia whose value your queen appreciates so much. Besides Bestuzhev said specifically that the money should come from you.

**Austrian ambassador.** Scheiße!

**Saxony ambassador.** (*Full of understanding and compassion.*) Ja, ja, I know.

*Enters Mardefeld. He sees the other two, makes a ceremonial bow with the sweetest grimace on his face. The other two make a bow with wry smiles on theirs.*

**Austrian ambassador.** I can't stand that Prussian swine!

**Saxony ambassador.** Let's move to the buffet.

*They turn away. The Prussian ambassador, however, does not seek to avoid the meeting and walks up right behind them.*

**Mardefeld.** (*Big smile.*) Greetings, gentlemen, on this splendid day! Oh, please do

not run away from me.

**Austrian ambassador.** Why would you think so?

**Saxony ambassador.** The very notion!

**Mardefeld.** Ah, you were hurrying to the buffet. Of course. How is the health of our precious Queen Maria-Theresa, and the illustrious Elector Frederick Augustus II?

**Saxony ambassador.** The Elector and the *King of Poland* – thank you very much – His Majesty Frederick Augustus is fine – thank you very much.

**Austrian ambassador.** She's the Empress of the Holy Roman Empire to you! She is fine and strong. And soon she will unleash all her pious and righteous fury onto your godless, criminal king and bring him to justice for his aggression against our country!

**Mardefeld.** (*Smile.*) I will pass these words onto my King Frederick. I believe he will be very excited at the thought of your *Empress'* 'fury unleashed'. My regards, gentlemen.

*Mardefeld walks away.*

**Austrian ambassador.** God protect us from the Prussian scum!

**Saxony ambassador.** Indeed.

*Williams and Poniatowski enter in a different part of the stage and remain on the side until introduced.*

**Saxony ambassador.** (*Noticing Williams.*) Oh, at least our purses might have just been saved. I wonder how much will this one give.

**Austrian ambassador.** (*To Saxony ambassador.*) Oh, England is rich, very rich. But the Brits are pragmatic business people. And for pragmatists loyalty *IS* a currency... It is directed by the winds on the high seas, just like their mighty fleet... So I would be cautious of talking of salvation as yet...

*The ambassadors continue their conversation and observations silently.*

**Poniatowski.** (*To Williams.*) Sir Charles, this place is amazing! Just look at these mirrors, all this gold and light! Golden light. Even Versailles did not make such an

impression. I have never seen anything like this anywhere. I am beginning to believe it is a fairy tale country. I wonder if Elizabeth is as beautiful as they say. Did you see her portrait?

**Williams.** (*To Poniatowski.*) My dear young attaché, you saw her naked portrait as a child!

**Poniatowski.** She was beautiful as a child and, they say, only got prettier with age. How old is she?

**Williams.** Forty seven.

**Poniatowski.** I also saw a copy of her portrait in her 20s... It must be this country. I feel like anything is possible here.

**Williams.** I heard that Russia might have a detrimental effect on developing minds. So curb your excitement, Stanislaw. Keep cool. We have serious business to do. It requires all of your concentration. Forget about gold, mirrors and fairy tales for now. And the Empress, for that matter, if you don't want her favourite Shuvalov to tear out your nostrils. That's what they do to thieves here. They also burn the word 'thief' on their forehead. And then send them to Siberia. Never forget that this country has Siberia!

*Mardefeld crosses towards them. He comes up from behind.*

**Mardefeld.** Apparently people live in Siberia too. Sir Charles, how happy I am to see you! So you've decided to abandon our cosy little Prussia and come to these frozen expanses.

**Williams.** Axel, my friend! It is not me, it was the will of my king to send me here. And you know how kings are.

**Mardefeld.** Oh we both do. Yours must be a very important mission since your king chose the best diplomat in Great Britain to carry it out.

**Williams.** You and I have been sent here because the most important missions are now here in Russia. We are all here to keep the peace.

**Mardefeld.** Of course we are.

**Williams.** Please meet my attaché. A bright aristocrat from Poland, Stanislaw Poniatowski. This young man has already been a member elect of the Treasury Tribunal in Poland and a member of the parliament there. I foresee a great future for this my pupil.

*Poniatowski makes a ceremonial flare in the Versailles style. Mardefeld reciprocates but in a more moderate manner.*

**Mardefeld.** I am very pleased. Bright young talents are in demand. I hope to see you in Berlin some time. I will be glad to arrange an audience for you with King Frederick.

**Poniatowski.** You are too kind, sir. Thank you. However I have already been to Berlin and met with the king. In fact it was in Berlin where I also met Sir Charles.

**Mardefeld.** Have you? I see, Sir Charles, that you have arrived with able troops. I hope you brought good news for us all from your court. Shall we meet after the ceremony and talk about our old times in Berlin?

**Williams.** I will be delighted, but not today. The first days here will be very frantic.

**Mardefeld.** Some other time perhaps.

**Williams.** That will be great...

**The voice of the Master of Ceremony.** The Empress of all the Russias Yelizaveta Petrovna! Kammer-Junker of the Court Ivan Ivanovich Shuvalov. The Grand Chancellor of the Empire Count Aleksei Petrovich Bestuzhev-Riumin. Vice-Chancellor of the Empire Count Mikhailo Illarionovich Vorontsov.

*Enter Elizabeth by the arm with Shuvalov followed by Bestuzhev and Vorontsov. Everyone inclines their heads. She stands in front of the throne, bows to the right, to the left and to the centre. She sits on the throne. The court raises their heads. Shuvalov stands by her right side, Bestuzhev and Vorontsov somewhere downstage but not far from the throne.*

**Elizabeth.** What is it we are having?

**Bestuzhev.** Matushka, the new British ambassador will present his credentials.

**Elizabeth.** Ah, very well. It's stuffy in here. *(She opens her fan.)*

**Shuvalov.** Shall I tell someone to open windows?

**Elizabeth.** Have you gone mad? It's freezing outside.

**Shuvalov.** Water, Matushka?

**Elizabeth.** Don't be silly. Wine. Well, be so kind and invite him.

*Shuvalov makes a gesture.*

**The voice of the Master of Ceremony.** Ambassador extraordinary from London, plenipotentiary of the Court of St. James's of the King of Great Britain the Second Kurfürst of Hannover... Sir Charles Hanbury Williams and the embassy secretary Stanislaw August Poniatowski.

*Williams skates along the mirror parquetry towards the throne, followed by his secretary Stanislaw Poniatowski. They go down on one knee with servility. In this position Williams offers his credentials in an outstretched hand. Elizabeth takes them and passes the papers to Bestuzhev standing to her left. She offers her hand for a kiss. Williams does that with exceptional servility. After which both guests can rise.*

**Williams.** Your Imperial Majesty, the King of England and Kurfürst of Hannover Georg II sends his warmest assurance of his affection for his sister and the deep respect for her nation and expresses his hope for a stronger than ever friendship between our great peoples. Russia is our ancient and natural ally. The providence itself is calling upon Your Majesty to facilitate peace and quietude in Europe. Use your uncountable forces for the sake of the well being of your friends. The Court of Saint James is calling upon your nation to avoid remaining a mere Asian country (*Elizabeth moves, Shuvalov loses his smile and Bestuzhev makes a grimace.*) by staying inactive and allowing the Enemies of peace to carry out their ambitious and dangerous plans...

*Williams continues silently.*

**Vorontsov.** (*Quietly to Bestuzhev.*) Asians are we? How much do you get from them, Petrovich?

**Bestuzhev.** (*Quietly.*) Mishen'ka dear, the size of my pension is my private interest.

**Vorontsov.** I can see that it's private. The interest of the Empire, now that is something altogether different...

**Bestuzhev.** Something for your consideration, Vice-Chancellor, for me the interest of the Empire is my own.

**Vorontsov.** (*Sarcastically.*) What a lucky coincidence!



**Bestuzhev.** What?

**Vorontsov.** Mine too.

**Bestuzhev.** You don't say! And I thought you like a dandelion, fly whichever way the wind of funding blows. Where is it coming from now? France? Then it'll blow from Prussia... As long as it keeps coming.

**Vorontsov.** A pliable tree looks weak but it will stand the storm that will break a strong unbendable oak.

**Bestuzhev.** Why do you suddenly speak in epithets? Poetry doesn't seem your field. It belongs to Ivan Shuvalov, our favourite. It's him that loves sculptures of all sorts and poets. You're a block of wood, aren't you? No, hang on, not that. You're a twig in the wind.

**Vorontsov.** Whatever I am I'm titled Count of the Holy Roman Empire.

**Bestuzhev.** How much did you pay for that? Being a count is not enough for foreign politics, Misha. It also requires intelligence and knowledge. And a lot of it. Do you understand? But all you can do is stand on the sleigh footboard, and yet you're aiming to take my place. I have this to say to you, Misha dear. Had you not married our empress' sister, you'd have been hanging on the rack a long time already for your loyal friendship with the Prussians.

**Vorontsov.** Were I you, I would not have mentioned the rack. The Secret Chancellery is just across the river and you have already learned the way there.

**Bestuzhev.** Precisely, I have learnt it. I dropped in and out. While all of that is still ahead of you.

**Vorontsov.** You really don't know me well, Petrovich.

**Bestuzhev.** No, I know you well. You are scum, Misha.

**Vorontsov.** One must run with the wolves... As for you, don't stumble, Petrovich.

**Bestuzhev.** You're just asking for trouble. Hasn't past experience taught you anything?

**Vorontsov.** Who knows, maybe it did...

*Bestuzhev walks away.*

Maybe it did...

**Williams.** ...And in conclusion I would like to express my true happiness at the

prospect of serving as a conduit of respect, friendship and mutual benefit between our enlightened monarchies and great peoples.

*Williams bows to Elizabeth, Poniatowski follows.*

**Elizabeth.** I can't understand why my brother, the King of England, is not so kind as to respect the flag of the Russian Navy. Why do his privateers do as they please in the Russian seas?

*Bestuzhev takes his snuffbox out and taps on it with his finger, loudly. Elizabeth does not notice and goes on with increasing fervour.*

Also your paper editors write god knows what about my subjects! As if we catch flies here with our nostrils or eat with our shoes and dogs lick off our plates... Why does my brother like to chastise me - a poor orphan? Here in Russia, we summon such scribblers to a proper place and give them a good thrashing...

*Bestuzhev makes a painful grimace.*

**Bestuzhev.** *(Coughs.)* Ahem!

**Elizabeth.** *(Angrily.)* Chancellor, what are you wincing about?

**Bestuzhev.** It's a sudden toothache, Matushka...

**Elizabeth.** Get it pulled out and next time come to me merry!

*Elizabeth thrusts forward her hand for a kiss. Williams kisses her hand. Elizabeth bows to the left, to the right and to the Ambassador and exits majestically. Shuvalov follows.*

*Mardefeld approaches Bestuzhev.*

**Mardefeld.** I cannot help but notice that your empress is not happy with the English. Perhaps they have had troubles with payments... Or is your ship steering towards the rocks...? My King Frederick appreciates your talents and the greatness of Russia and would be willing to help turn the Russian ship away from uncertain credits by

offering you, let's say, a hundred thousand tallars...

**Bestuzhev.** Oh, has the king found an inheritance? Or are the spoils from the invasion of Silesia so great? Ambassador, I already gave you my answer when you offered fifty thousand. I will not accept your money in exchange for changing our policy.

**Mardefeld.** Does it have to be a hundred and fifty thousand?

**Bestuzhev.** You really don't understand, do you?

**Mardefeld.** Why. My king will be willing to part even with two hundred thousand for a great cause.

**Bestuzhev.** All of two hundred?

**Mardefeld.** What? Is that not enough? Would 250 do?

**Bestuzhev.** Sir, ambassador!

**Mardefeld.** This by far exceeds everything that the others can offer you. Name your price then! My king is ready to accept your terms. Any.

**Bestuzhev.** You are not at a market stall. The Russian foreign policy is not for sale.

**Mardefeld.** And yet the English buy it.

**Bestuzhev.** I feel I ought to write to your King Frederick and ask to send a new, more astute diplomat in your place. But only out of respect for you, Sir Axel, I will explain this one time. No one, I repeat, no one buys the Russian foreign policy. They can only appreciate it by way of token donations. No matter how much you will be proposing to change the course, you will trouble yourself in vain. And trust me that the Russian ship is on the right and steady course and no rocks are a threat. Not while I am steering it.

**Mardefeld.** I see now. It is a great pity, sir, because I have a lot of respect for you too. I would rather deal with you than...

*Bestuzhev has already disengaged.*

Another helmsman.

*Mardefeld crosses the stage towards Williams with his hand outstretched for a shake.*

**Mardefeld.** Sir, Charles! What a brilliant speech! Who were you referring to when

speaking about "the enemies of peace"? Was it France? I agree, inciting Indians to fight alongside them against your colonists in North America is truly indecent. But to call on Russia to bring them to order...

**Williams.** Ah, my dear Axel, how can we comment on the orders of our sovereigns..?

**Poniatowski.** I heard that the Indians began learning German.

**Mardefeld.** (*Coldly.*) It would be no surprise. German is the language of the kings of the world.

**Williams.** Please pass my respects to His Majesty Frederick.

**Mardefeld.** I certainly will. I am sure my King would wish me to pass his expression of friendship and respect to Kurfürst Georg.

**Williams.** You can be assured that I will relate your kind words to my king. I must excuse myself, sir. We have only just arrived in St Petersburg and we have a million things to attend to.

**Mardefeld.** But of course. I will see you soon.

**Williams.** I am sure you will.

*Williams disengages and is faced with Vorontsov.*

**Vorontsov.** (*To Williams?*) Sir Ambassador.

**Williams.** Sir...

**Vorontsov.** Count of the Holy Roman Empire Mikhail Illarionovich Vorontsov.

**Williams.** Oh, yes. Nice to meet you, count.

**Vorontsov.** Welcome to Russia. I hope you will find your time here both fruitful and pleasant.

**Williams.** Well, I truly hope so.

**Vorontsov.** Sir Charles, I am the Vice Chancellor of the Russian Empire and I would appreciate it if you addressed me appropriately.

**Williams.** But of course, Vice Chancellor... Count...

**Vorontsov.** Sir Charles, let's talk about your mission. The subsidy treaty is on the table.

**Williams.** I would be delighted to develop the subject with you, however I am required to discuss the treaty only with Chancellor Bestuzhev and Her Majesty in person.

**Vorontsov.** Sir Charles, I remind you that I am the Vice Chancellor. I began building my house on English money but haven't been able to finish it for six years because it must be finished on English money. You understand, Sir Charles?

**Williams.** Why don't you ask for a loan from a British bank? I am sure your credit would be strong.

**Vorontsov.** For a diplomat, you don't show much flexibility, Sir Charles. I repeat, if you don't give the money, others will...

*Bestuzhev approaches them.*

**Bestuzhev.** Sir Charles, what a pleasure to see you! Mikhaila Illarionych, sir ambassador and I have things we need to discuss. Make yourself scarce, will you?

**Vorontsov.** Chancellor. Sir Charles.

*Vorontsov moves away.*

**Bestuzhev.** I am delighted, Sir Charles, to see a representative of the enlightened nation of Great Britain here in Russia. A little souvenir.

*Bestuzhev gives him a gold snuffbox. Williams takes the gift without looking at it.*

**Williams.** Thank you... I did not quite understand your Empress. If Russia does not ratify a new subsidy treaty with us now, England will do it with Frederick of Prussia, who (I won't conceal this from you) will not refuse such a treaty.

**Bestuzhev.** (*Coldly.*) I don't know, Sir Charles, perhaps calling the Great Russian Empire an Asian country in the face of Her Imperial Majesty was neither prudent nor correct.

**Williams.** I was only calling on Her Majesty's patriotic feelings...

**Bestuzhev.** You actually insulted her patriotic feelings.

**Williams.** That was not my intention..

**Bestuzhev.** And next you added to the insult by suggesting that England would turn to Prussia. I will refrain from passing that remark on to Her Majesty. Sir Charles, do not forget that Her Majesty only represents Russian politics, but it's me who steers it! And I'm a loyal servant of England from way back and used to serve the father of

your king when he occupied the throne of the Kurfürstom of Hannover...

*(Warmly.)* My dear friend, the subsidy treaty is of high mutual importance for us and we will do everything to progress it. Consider it already done. Her Majesty has a kind heart and a frank disposition. She feels strongly about the freedom of navigation in the Russian seas and she always speaks her mind. But she's a woman. You simply forgot to mention in your speech how beautiful she is. A little flattery can get you quite far. So I think an increase in the initial payment may be of a great benefit. Her Majesty is concerned with finishing the building of three new palaces. So a sum of, let's say, fifteen thousand pounds forwarded for Her Majesty's personal disposal would finally bring her to our cause entirely.

**Williams.** You're suggesting buying off your Empress?

**Bestuzhev.** I'm suggesting neutralizing the influence of the French party on her. *(He points towards Shuvalov and Vorontsov.)* Let us talk over the details in my summer house on my river island across from here. We can talk freely and openly there. Let's leave the court.

**Williams.** I am delighted to accept your invitation. But first I would like to express my respects to the Grand Duke Peter and the Grand Duchess Catherine, if you don't mind.

**Bestuzhev.** *(Drawing him by the arm towards the exit.)* What a splendid idea! Please be my guest and take my carriage. And I will see you later tonight...

*Bestuzhev and Williams exit. Poniatowski follows in their steps. Mardefeld approaches Vorontsov.*

**Vorontsov.** Bestuzhev is strong. You know he invented these magical drops. That is why he can drink like a horse and still run around as he does. Look at him. He is 63! He sits tight. And I cannot do much. Not yet at least. Not just yet...

**Mardefeld.** Vice Chancellor, I heard you are building a new house. I have studied architecture, you know.

**Vorontsov.** You did? How exciting! I have questions I would love to ask you.

**Mardefeld.** Shall we discuss them over a glass of wine?

*They exit.*

**Saxony ambassador.** What do you make of it all?

**Austrian ambassador.** The Englishman has no sense. He could not have done worse. To start his mission with an insult! "Asian country"...

**Saxony ambassador.** Well, the money should fix the faux pas.

**Austrian ambassador.** (*Looks at his interlocutor.*) We are in Russia. It is a void. Money disappears here without a trace, no matter how big a sum...and solves nothing. Let's return to the buffet.

**Saxony ambassador.** I concur.

*Saxony ambassador sighs and both leave.*

### **SCENE THREE "The Young Court"**

*Enter Shkurin followed by Williams and Poniatowski.*

**Shkurin.** Sir, ambassador, please wait here. I shall announce your arrival presently.

*Shkurin bows and exits.*

*Shkurin returns.*

**Shkurin.** His Imperial Highness, Piotr Fyodorovich.

*Enters Peter. Williams and Poniatowski bow. Peter is merry, flamboyant and slightly drunk.*

**Peter.** Guten tag, meine herren.

**Williams.** Your Imperial Highness, as the ambassador of the great King of England, I am honoured to greet the heir to the throne of the great Russian Empire!

**Peter.** Sir...?

**Williams.** Charles Hanbury Williams, at your service, Your Highness!

**Peter.** Brilliant! I'm glad. Only I wouldn't exaggerate the greatness of this Empire. It

is filled with thieves and bastards. Look at that one! (*Points at Shkurin. To Shkurin.*)  
Get out of here! (*Shkurin bows and exits.*) And when you're not looking, they steal  
your wine, if you forget to hide it. It's a horrible nation! Believe me, sir.... (*He clicks  
his fingers.*)

**Poniatowski.** Charles.

**Peter.** Yes. I must tell you in secret. I hate all this etiquette and pompous ceremony  
and formal audiences. So I'll just ask you straight: would you like some wine?  
Shkurin! Where is that idler?

*Shkurin enters.*

Where the hell are you? Wine! For me and guests.

*Shkurin bows and exits.*

Terrible. I tell you. And who do we have here?

**Williams.** Allow me to introduce to you my secretary and the ambassadorial aid,  
Stanislaw Poniatowski, from the house of the Czartoryskis, the staunch supporters of  
the Russian party in Poland.

**Peter.** Poland? Russian what?

**Poniatowski.** Yes, Your Highness.

**Peter.** Yes what?

**Poniatowski.** My mother, Countess Chartoryska, was delighted at the opportunity to  
send me to the country she wished to learn about herself for so long. After all we  
travel in order to see in other countries something that we cannot see in our own.

**Peter.** I'm an orphan, Monsieur. Apparently my mother was Russian but she died  
after giving birth and I don't recall her suggesting I'd travel to Russia. I never  
wished to do such a nonsensical thing.

**Poniatowski.** Your Highness, my travel is not mere leisure. I'm here to learn.

**Peter.** Learn what?

**Poniatowski.** Before coming here I went to Vienna, Versailles, Copenhagen and  
London. After all only by seeing other places you get to fully appreciate your own  
Motherland.

**Peter.** (*Pointing with his finger into Poniatowski's face.*) That's it. I like this guy.



Monsieur...eh...

**Poniatowski.** Poniatowski, Your Highness.

**Williams.** An extraordinary young gentleman. Excellent education! I have been entrusted with his upbringing. He has been to the greatest courts in Europe.

**Peter.** Upbringing... Education... What is it about? You know, Sir...

**Williams.** Cha...

**Peter.** ...Charles, the greatest court there is is the court of the Great Frederick of Prussia! Don't get offended but even your successful country could learn something from Prussia. Well, it is learning. I think King Georg is German! Even though he's from Hannover. They are petty burgers over there but Germans none the less.

**Williams.** Your Highness, he's the son of the late king George I who was German, but he was born and grew up on British soil and that makes him a true Brit.

**Peter.** Well, it's worse for him then, isn't it? Haha! No, Sir Charles, even my delightful Holstein cannot compare with Frederick's Court at San Soussi. Frederick is a warrior! And I am too, as is every true German! I proved it on the battlefield many times. One time I remember....

*Shkurin comes in.*

**Shkurin.** Her Highness, the Grand Duchess of the Russian Empire Yekaterina Alekseyevna!

**Peter.** (*Annoyed.*) Oh, my dear wife.

*Catherine enters brisk, energetic, delightful. Poniatowski notices her and cannot take his eyes off her from now on.*

**Poniatowski.** (*To himself.*) Matko boska!

**Peter.** Ah, finally. Late as usual.

**Catherine.** Sir Charles, I am delighted!

**Williams.** (*Kissing her hand.*) I am honoured and absolutely charmed. Your Highness, this is my aide de champ, Count Stanislaw Poniatowski form the House of the Czartoryskis.

**Catherine.** (*Offers her hand for a kiss. Smiles.*) It is nice to meet you, Count Stanislaw.

*Pause. Poniatowski stares at Catherine.*

How are you today?

*Williams elbows him. Poniatowski finally kisses Catherine's outstretched hand. He is blushing and is moved to tears. Catherine smiles.*

**Poniatowski.** Your Highness,...

**Peter.** Your secretary is dumb. *(He bursts into laughter.)* Didn't you say he's been to the greatest courts? Don't worry, my young friend, *(Pats Poniatowski on the shoulder.)* I have the cure for this. Sir Williams let's have wine. *(To Shkurin.)* Wine! *(He puts his hand around Williams' shoulder.)* You wouldn't believe it, but these barbarians here drink the thing they call vodka. It's a vile liquid. No taste at all!

*From this moment on Peter keeps drinking one glass after another as Shkurin pours them for him. The rest of the company barely touches the wine.*

**Catherine.** I hope you had a pleasant journey to Oranienbaum.

**Williams.** Oh, yes, Your Highness. Thank you! We observed the beautiful surroundings of your capital and were treated to an incredible experience of seeing a beautiful rider, who fearlessly rushed past our fast moving carriage. The intrepid rider was of extraordinary beauty and she rode like a man, astride! Please tell me do you know her or was it just a vision that we both had, induced by the fresh Russian air?

**Peter.** It was more likely induced by vodka. Hahaha!

**Catherine.** Unfortunately I don't think I know anyone suited to your description.

**Peter.** The Empress has forbidden my wife to ride that way because it prevents her from giving birth to the heir, but she is so stupid, you know.

**Williams.** I believe that heir has been born healthy, so there is no need to worry. Her Majesty cares of course.

**Peter.** A bloody miracle! *(To Catherine.)* Dear, I'm having a rendezvous with Teplova. I really like her. I have prepared my room for the occasion. Twenty rifles

along the wall, grenadier helmets everywhere and swords and pistols. What's your opinion? Will she like it?

*Pause.*

**Catherine.** An entire arsenal! I'm sure this is more than any peasant woman needs for a romantic evening.

**Peter.** You're vile.

**Williams.** Your Highness, you were telling a war story...

**Peter.** Ah, yes! I once had to face an entire horde of enemies on a battlefield. I had only one regiment under my command. My father was the commander in chief. He was a little stingy. The enemy forces were ten times stronger than us in numbers. I ordered my cavalry to flank them on the left and lead my grenadiers to attack! It was a bloody battle. My horse suddenly stumbled and fell struck by an enemy bullet. I rolled forward and got up with my sword still in my hand. Bullets swished passed all around. Then I saw this monster of a man rushing at me swinging a huge bludgeon but I dodged the blow and pierced him with a lightning blow of my sword. He tumbled down on the ground right into the puddle of his own guts! Only then I realized that I was surrounded and that there were none of my soldiers in sight. I had to fight on every side. Only after some time I saw my cavalry fighting their way towards me. I cut my way through towards them. The enemy fell in front of me like flies as I made my way through their crowd...

**Poniatowski.** (*Fascinated.*) Incredible!

**Peter.** Hehe, isn't it!

**Catherine.** My husband is a true soldier.

**Poniatowski.** Indeed! Which war was it, Your Highness?

**Peter.** Eh... I don't remember, there were so many... It was in Silesia, when King Frederick and I took Neisse.

**Catherine.** I am truly impressed, Your Highness. You showed such skill and composure already at the age of thirteen.

**Peter.** (*To Catherine.*) You are vile!

**Williams.** Your Highness, now you have great forces at your disposal in Russia. So much more than just one regiment!

**Peter.** Sir Charles, these are no army, they are hordes. They can't stretch their legs at

90 degrees on the march. They just shuffle like sheep...

**Williams.** Your Highness, but you will be their tsar...

**Peter.** My dear friend... Sir Charles... Just imagine what bad luck befell me! I could have entered the Prussian service and served as earnestly as I only could and by now I could hope to have become a regiment commander with a general-major rank or even become a general-lieutenant... But what happened..?! I was dragged here to be made a Grand Duke of this shitty country. Believe me I would rather be a colonel in the invincible army of the Great Frederick than the emperor of this barbaric mob! This is a country of dumb and thick slaves. (*To Shkurin.*) Hey, slave! More wine!

**Poniatowski.** You must have travelled through and through this country to make a judgement like this.

**Peter.** God forbid! I would never do such a thing.

**Catherine.** What His Highness means is that we are very abbreviated in our movements under the court custom and he has little chance to see the outside world.

**Peter.** If you mean the direct order to be incarcerated in this palace, then yes. But even here, Sir Charles, it is obvious by the slave like that one that these people are nothing but savages.

**Poniatowski.** They need education, Your Highness. You know, when I was in Paris I visited the Salon of Madam Geofrin and saw Voltaire. He praised the new publication of Encyclopedie. In his opinion the most brilliant notion of that remarkable book was the fact that the knowledge becomes available to the wider masses. (*To Williams.*) Just like your illustrious countryman Sir Isaac Newton showed that science could be available to everyone by way of repeatable experiment, so the authors of the Encyclopaedia propagate knowledge for everyone. Voltaire repeated many times their slogan: "Liberté, égalité", stressing that knowledge will eliminate slavery.

**Catherine.** You've met Voltaire?

**Poniatowski.** Yes, Madam. An incredibly passionate man. Just repeating those words from the Encyclopedie lead him into a sort of ecstasy and moved me to tears!

**Peter.** Is that the Voltaire that is a friend of Frederick?

**Poniatowski.** The very same, Your Highness. Have you read his Letters Concerning the English Nation?

**Peter.** Eh...

**Catherine.** (*Bright.*) "The English are the only people upon earth who have been

able to prescribe limits to the power of Kings by resisting them...”

**Poniatowski.** (*Excited.*) They “...at last establish’d that wise Government, where the Prince is all powerful to do good, and at the same time is restrain’d from committing evil..”

**Peter.** Voltaire? He’s French right. They think they are the smartest of all. Diese sind Frankreih ferfluchter. I wish he’d come here. We would have lots of laughs watching him flogged in the square outside.

**Williams.** Voltaire is a great friend of King Frederick of Prussia. You wouldn’t give such affront to your favourite king, would you, Your Highness?

**Peter.** What?

**Williams.** I have never been to Paris. I met Voltaire at San Soussi in Potsdam with King Frederick. He was working for the king at the time.

**Peter.** Perhaps he was useful to the king...

**Williams.** But only for a time. They fell out and the King threw Voltaire out of his court.

**Peter.** Aha!!! You can’t have dealings with the French, they are generally swine.

**Poniatowski.** Your Highness, although I believe that to be somewhat excessive...

**Peter.** (*Laughing.*) Somewhat excessive?

**Poniatowski.** (*Laughing.*) Only a little, tiny bit, Your Highness.

*Williams makes worried signs to Poniatowski.*

**Williams.** (*To Peter. Smiling.* ) Minute. (*Shows with his fingers how small the “ tiny bit” is.*)

**Poniatowski.** Indeed, Your Highness. Because I agree with you.

**Peter.** Aah...!

**Poniatowski.** Absolutely. They are depraved to the core.

**Peter.** Interesting.

**Poniatowski.** This happened to me in Paris. Almost every time I was in Versailles I dined at Madame de Brancas, the epitome of what was left of the court of Luis XIV. She was the grand lady of the court of the wife of the Dauphin. A most exquisite old lady. Once she pointed me out in the presence of twenty other people and asked if I knew who the Duc of Aquitaine was obliged to with his birth. I was really caught by surprise. Just imagine the predicament I found myself in...

**Peter.** I'm trying.

**Catherine.** We all are.

**Poniatowski.** It was my second time in that house. I knew no one in the crowd. Which is better than in this house because it is my first time here... (*Williams makes a sign to Poniatowski,*) Right. The Duc of Aquitaine died in his infancy but was the older brother of the King of France Luis XVI. Yet, Madame de Brancas insisted that I answered her question...

**Peter.** What question?

**Poniatowski.** Who was responsible for the birth of the Duc of Aquitaine?

**Peter.** I don't know.

**Poniatowski.** Neither did I. Red with embarrassment, I forced an answer out of myself: I think it could be no other than the Dauphin.

**Williams.** Since he is the father.

**Peter.** Who's father.

**Catherine.** Of the Duc of Aquitaine. And the King of France.

**Peter.** Ah.

**Poniatowski.** "It was precisely not him," she said. "Take a better guess!" I begged her: "Madame how can I guess? Be so kind do not insist!" "Remember then," she said, "that was St. Francois-Xavier. The Queen of Poland advised her daughter, the wife of the Dauphin, to marry that saint. She heeded and so was born the Duc of Aquitaine."

*Pause.*

**Peter.** A saint? As a father? Have they lost their minds?

**Williams.** This parabola tells perhaps how removed are the heroes of the story from the reality.

**Catherine.** Or simply that the Dauphin is not the father of the Duc of Aquitaine or the King of France...

**Peter.** A cuckold! Ahahaa.

*Peter is thrown around by the fit of laughter. He makes the circle and comes back.*

Brilliant, Poniatowski! Shkurin, wine!

**Poniatowski.** After two months in France I fully realized what was happening. I was

completely subjugated by the consequences of observing the rules of the so-called good form, such as, for instance, the fear of being judged for making a mistake in some "exclusively selected" society, or worry about avoiding associations that that society would disapprove, or the duty of playing cards literally everywhere, except in the Salon of Madame Geoffrin, where, thank god, cards were not allowed.

**Peter.** (*Keeps laughing.*) I know. Cards are everywhere.

**Poniatowski.** And when they don't play cards they have excruciating conversations where instead of answering a question another question is asked, then another and another and they never return to any of them. (*Peter's laughter is growing into a fit.*) I constantly wondered: how do those people, who don't seem to ever listen to one another nor be able to reason consequentially, or fathom thoroughly a single occurrence, how can they entertain each other? (*Peter's laughing fit is a slight worry to Catherine.*) They get excited to extremes at a smallest word and then never remember it the next day. I remember in one place the wife of the host learned that I was Polish, looked at me and exclaimed: "it can't be! IT is dressed in a suit of fine velour. But I saw twenty Germans dressed in black drapery as if they were in mourning!...

*Peter is in tatters.*

**Peter.** Hic! "It can't be..." Hic! Would you exc...hic... I... hic... Lackey! Hic! Excuse, hic, me...

*Shkurin jumps up to Peter and holds him by his armpits.*

Hic...

*Thus they leave.*

**Poniatowski.** Oh, I hope my story did not do harm to His Highness.

**Catherine.** On the contrary. It was most amusing, Monsignor Poniatowski. I apologise for His Highness. He was tired.

**Williams.** His Highness is certainly attached to the King of Prussia. Does it not go against the current politics of the Russian government?

**Catherine.** Frederick is a primordial and the most dangerous enemy of Russia. He is the worst person in the world.

**Williams.** Your Highness, I was an ambassador to Berlin before I was sent here and I can assure you that he is an enlightened and highly educated person, who calls Voltaire a friend.

**Catherine.** I knew the king personally. He and I go back a long time. He turned my mother into a fugitive and almost destroyed me for his political purposes. I assure you that there is no worse person in the whole world. Voltaire, as you rightly pointed out earlier, left Frederick. I am sure he saw through that double-faced person.

**Williams.** I hope you won't think that of us. For we have arrived here as your friend.

**Catherine.** Of course, Sir Charles. Will you do me the honour and be our guests at the Peter and Paul Day celebration?

**Williams.** Oh, I will be delighted!

**Catherine.** And you, Monsignor Poniatowski, please do come. It will be a delight to have you.

*Catherine thrusts her hand forward for a kiss. Williams kisses.*

**Poniatowski.** I will be... delighted!

*Kisses her hand while looking up at her. She looks at him.*

**Catherine.** I will see you soon, gentlemen.

*She leaves.*

**Williams.** I won't bet a penny on the Grand Duke. He is a complete and utter fool. I won't be mistaken if I say that he will never reign... But look at you? You impressed me today, my young friend. And not just me! My dear, you can help your unfortunate fatherland... The situation in Europe is serious. My parliament is not spending its money so that your unsurpassable beauty weathered in useless chastity.

**Poniatowski.** (*Flares up.*) What else would sir require of me?

**Williams.** A trifle. When the Grand Duchess entices you into the shadow of the alcove, don't call upon witnesses, as you did with me. Love, like politics, doesn't like



bright light... Love moves courts, courts move politics, politics move armies and armies make fortunes of the world!

**Poniatowski.** You must be joking?

**Williams.** Believe me, a great future awaits you... jokingly! But seriously, listen carefully. It is very unlikely that the current dispute between England and France over the colonies in North America can be settled. That means that an all-European war is unavoidable... And I believe and so does my government in London that the success in this war can be assured only by keeping Russia on our side. On your side. Our treaty with Russia is about to expire and it is of paramount importance that we sign a new one expediently. This is our mission! I want you to understand clearly your part in it. (*Poniatowski nods eagerly.*) Elizabeth is aging. In fact, I have information that her health is deteriorating rather quickly. When she is gone, we will have to deal with that. (*Points towards the door through which Peter left.*) That means your country in the first place, as the immediate neighbour of Russia. Think of having Prussia on one side and its minion in Russia on the other. The Grand Duchess will have to deal with that and you will have to deal with the Grand Duchess. This is how you will be able to help your unfortunate Poland. Do you understand now?

*Pause.*

**Poniatowski.** You are right about one thing, sir: When I look at her, I'm not even afraid of Siberia...

**Williams.** Excellent!

**Poniatowski.** But is it possible? Who am I? And... who she is...

**Williams.** You're a man and she's a woman. There are instances when prudence must give way to passions. Better still when passions are in alliance with your duty. So may the sense of duty towards your unfortunate motherland relieve your conscience.

*They exit.*

## SCENE FOUR "The System"

*Late night/early morning. (A white night in St. Petersburg.) Magical light. Bestuzhev and Williams are at the table in a marquee on the bank of a canal. Both are already well soaked.*

**Williams.** Your Dutch garden is absolutely amazing. What are those birds?

**Bestuzhev.** Lyres.

**Williams.** Lyres... This garden, these seals frolicking in the canal, swans that come to your feet... A living fragment of the ancient worlds. Times of gods and legendary heroes, times of Homer... The Argonauts must have seen something like this on their journey... I'm half expecting the Sirens to start singing.

*Bestuzhev makes a sign. Divine female voices begin to sing.*

**Williams.** Oh! (*Broodingly.*) "Everything is more beautiful because we're doomed..."  
(The Iliad)

**Bestuzhev.** Why so dark, Sir Charles?

**Williams.** Oh, it's not me, it's Homer.

**Bestuzhev.** That's from the Iliad, is that right? I see. "A man who has been through bitter experiences and travelled far enjoys even his sufferings after a while."

**Williams.** The Odyssey...

**Bestuzhev.** Everything is for our enjoyment. Life is wondrous. Please believe a man who once looked at the rack in the dungeons of the Secret Chancellery. Every minute of life is a pure joy. And Homer knew it more than anybody else. After all it was the Ancient Greeks who had a god of drinking and merriment. And triply right was Peter the Great who brought Bacchus to Russia. A toast to Bacchus! And to the Great Peter, the father of our great Empress!

*They drink.*

But, alas, I have no Golden Fleece. Her Majesty, God bless her days, Yelizaveta Petrovna was so kind as to present me with the Palace left after Chancellor

Osterman. But it's an absolute ruin. It urgently needs restoration. Dresden cries about its poverty, while eating and drinking off gold and throwing the dishes into the Spree out of the palace window. Maria-Theresia in Austria suffers from absolutely abominable misery. She sent me such a little sum that was an offense to my rank and my country. I sent it right back...

**Williams.** London is informed of your financial woes, Chancellor. But our King already subsidized you with 10000 pounds. Besides, have you not used the treasury money from two of your ministries for all of this? (*Gesturing at the garden.*)

**Bestuzhev.** How do you know?

**Williams.** My predecessor Lieutenant – Colonel Dickens filled me in.

**Bestuzhev.** I see. Well, that may be so but do you know how much all of this costs? The Empress pays me only seven thousand a year. Can one survive on that? It's barely enough to feed the animals in the menagerie... Those seals, you know, they want twenty buckets of fish a day! And not any fish, but heavy with caviar from Astrakhan 2000 versts away... I am in need.

**Williams.** My predecessor already paid thirty thousand florins to you just recently... Did he not?

**Bestuzhev.** (*Waves his hand.*) It didn't even cover my debts. So I hope that you, Sir Charles, have brought me more than good wishes from London...

**Williams.** The King pays for loyalty and for the work done.

**Bestuzhev.** You question my loyalty? Had I not known you as a friend I'd have thought you were trying to insult me, Sir Charles. I began my service to the father of your present king, while he was still the Kurfürst of Hannover, and then I served as the British ambassador to Russia! And now, as the Grand Chancellor of the Empire, I hold the interests of England as I do my own. Frederick, such a monstrous miser, tries to bribe me all the time, and every time he offers a larger sum – a lot more than I get from you. But I am an honest servant. Christ says in the Bible: no man can serve two masters, both God and Mammon!

**Williams.** Which master do you serve, Chancellor?

**Bestuzhev.** Sir Charles, we live in the Age of Enlightenment, the age of reason. When the mind has finally realized that everything around is a material substance that can be useful – useful for bettering existence. The better you use these substances the greater is the measure of your success, your well-being, your wealth. Your motherland is the first example of it. The countries that will appear from now

on will be built on that principle: use everything you can for your own gain. This will make them incredibly rich.

**Williams.** I see. And what about god?

**Bestuzhev.** God? My dear friend, god that imprisoned Diderot and burnt on the stake Giordano Bruno is dead. Really. Though it's not dead in public. It will be evoked and used and raped ad nauseam. But the only true god left today is Mammon. And these new countries will serve only that. This is the new dream. It will be bloody and exciting!

**Williams.** As an honest servant to Mammon, why do you refuse the money from King Frederick?

**Bestuzhev.** (*Smiles.*) I like wealth. But I also love my country. I'm Russian. And I don't take money from her enemies. Or enemies of her friends.

**Williams.** Aha! I've caught you. You're not such a selfless follower of Mammon after all.

**Bestuzhev.** Well, I'm first of all the servant to Russia and Her Imperial Majesty. That is why I cannot accept pension from two opposite sides. A friend to France, Frederick is the enemy of England – is he not? – and, thus, an enemy to us! I have a system that I follow, and I speak about it openly so they know it in Europe and don't expect Russia to sway. You are an experienced diplomat, Sir Charles, and you should know better than threatening me with turning to Frederick, as you did in the Palace. You would be mistaking believing that you could rely on him to protect Hannover. Today he pretends to be your friend, tomorrow he will stab you in the back. He will sell France, England, his own mother, the Devil himself if this could progress his conquest. He has grown too aggressive. You know he explains his invasions? "I invade because I have an army!" The limits of Prussia are too small for him. He wants to conquer all his neighbours and become the king of all Germany. That can only happen at the cost of the destruction of the Great Roman Empire: Saxony, Austria, Poland – all of them our allies. He's keen on Courland. And that is already our front gate. Taking money from that man would mean helping my own destruction. Under him Prussia is bound for war! To stop it we must hold an equilibrium between the powers of Europe. A strong alliance that would dissuade the aggressor.

**Williams.** Is that your system?

**Bestuzhev.** Yes. Sir Charles. And it's enough to look at the map to understand it. (*A*

*map of Europe appears probably carried by half naked naiads, singing sirens or Ancient Greek styled living statues.)* Russia is great in itself, it stretches from sea to sea and from sea to sea. She has everything. But to be rich she requires trade. Our most important trade is with the European countries. And this trade is free when done by sea, without extra levies. England rules the seas and trade with her is most important and most profitable so alliance with her is the most important for our mutual enrichment. This alliance is the oldest for Russia and it brings profits to our merchants and so we must hold on to it with both our hands. *(He raises the glass and so does Williams.)*

**Williams.** Cheers to that!

*They drink.*

British Navy and Russian iron – a solid ground for your system.

**Bestuzhev.** Of course we need an alliance with Saxony because the Kurfürst of Saxony is also the King of Poland. And Poland is our Western border. And there's always a potential for such a mess over there that – God help us all! – that place must remain in peace.

**Williams.** Indeed. I witnessed a Sejm, their parliament gathering. Chaos.

**Bestuzhev.** I'm glad you understand. That attaché you brought. Isn't he a Pole?

**Williams.** Yes. From the Chartoryskis clan. I'm sure he can be of use.

**Bestuzhev.** Good. Look here, Sir Charles. Austria. They are in constant feud with the Turkish Ottomans over the lands in the Balkans. We have no enemy worse than the Turk. They've raided us and incited the Tatars to raid us for centuries. They kill, they burn, they pillage, they take our people into slavery. They feed off our blood. Again the Black Sea and free passage through the Bosphorus are important for our free trade. So Austria is the cornerstone of our alliance. A blow to Austria would ricochet. We would feel it. Austria is a sworn enemy of France, who is the sworn enemy of England and thus a friend to you. And finally Frederick of Prussia has taken Silesia from Austria and keeps an army in Eastern Prussia hoping to bite into our Courland. A great friend of France and the most immediate threat to us.

**Williams.** This is all brilliant. But our treaty has been waiting for six weeks now for ratification.

**Bestuzhev.** You did not help to expedite it with your "mere Asian country". Sir, you should not begin a diplomatic mission in a country by insulting our Empress.

**Williams.** That was not my intention. I simply wished to urge Her Majesty to get involved in European politics.

**Bestuzhev.** Wrong choice of words...?

**Williams.** I'm the ambassador of the Great British Empire, I use the words that I find appropriate.

**Bestuzhev.** A problem with translation...?

**Williams.** Perhaps.

**Bestuzhev.** Her Majesty is considering the offer. She likes to take her time in important matters and this one is important. After all it's our army that will go to fight for England.

**Williams.** That's right and England will pay generously for that.

**Bestuzhev.** That's it! The future tense in that statement is somewhat discouraging, Sir Charles.

**Williams.** Just as is the lack of Your Empress' signature on the treaty.

**Bestuzhev.** Sir Charles, this is driving our negotiations into a dead end.

**Williams.** You have to understand, Chancellor...

**Bestuzhev.** Sir Charles, call me by my name: Aleksei Petrovich. After all we are friends.

**Williams.** Aleksei Petrovich, I have to follow my instructions.

**Bestuzhev.** No doubt. But I hope your instructions are to sign this treaty.

**Williams.** Of course, but also to spare the treasury expenditure.

**Bestuzhev.** This is haggling over human lives.

**Williams.** I thought you are used to it. After all it's customary here to own humans as slaves and buy and sell them.

**Bestuzhev.** (*Smiles.*) Is it so much different than selling wives on the London Bridge.

**Williams.** Alright. I will write to London and ask for additional funds.

**Bestuzhev.** Thank you, Sir Charles. It's a lengthy process, however. Your post must be taken on a frigate. The frigate must cross the Baltic Sea and then the straits. Next they have to make the decision in London and send the reply on a frigate that must cross the straits and the Baltic Sea. And then there are storms...

**Williams.** I'll arrange the advance payment.

**Bestuzhev.** Wonderful! Sir Charles, let us drink to the treaty and our eternal friendship!

*They drink.*

In order to appease Her Majesty's worries and expedite the process, please tell me what assistance can we expect from England if Frederick attacks us in Courland?

**Williams.** Your empress hasn't ratified the treaty yet.

**Bestuzhev.** You may consider it signed.

**Williams.** We will return to the conversation about my King's assistance when I have the signed copy of the treaty.

**Bestuzhev.** Good bargain.

**Williams.** Indeed.

*Blackout.*

## **SCENE FIVE "Peter and Paul Day"**

*Oranienbaum. In adjacent room. Celebration. Music. Dancing. Toasts. The windows are open into the garden and we hear a remote drum roll. The roll continues throughout the scene, coming and going. Enter Catherine and Williams. They hold Peter by the arms. He is drunk. Peter's enormous sword is an annoying abstraction.*

**Peter.** *(In German.)* Glückliche Engel Tag für mich!... Did you see that dame on the far side of the table. She's so ugly! Ich liebe sie! *(Roars with laughter.)*

*They stop.*

**Williams.** Where to?

**Catherine.** Over there, to the billiards room.

*They continue.*

**Peter.** *(In German.)* Sie sind ein guter Soldat! Aufmerksamkeit! Zu bewachen! You

can serve in my army! The army of Great Frederick!... Hedvig! Where is my Hedvig?... I want to dance.

**Catherine.** Your highness, over here please.

**Peter.** I don't want to dance with you... Hedvig!

*That take him into the billiards room, lock it and return.*

**Catherine.** Sir Charles, I am very grateful for your assistance and I would like to apologize...

**Williams.** You can be absolutely sure of my discretion, Your Highness.

**Catherine.** Thank you.

**Williams.** This can happen to anyone.

**Catherine.** Sobriety can happen to some as well. I have been married for 11 years, Sir Charles, I know my husband. Meekness is not one of my virtues.

**Williams.** Meekness is a virtue of victims. Petty cunning and concealed rage are not worth your talents. People are weak in their mass and only resolute characters take lead over them... Characters like yours!

*Door opens. Enters Hedviga, hunchbacked and dragging one leg.*

**Hedviga.** *(Hisses.)* Vsssss!

**Catherine.** What are you looking for, Hedviga Ivanovna? Is it the key to the billiards room. Take it.

**Hedviga.** *(Grabbing the key.)* Vsssss!

*She grabs a candle, limps to the door, unlocks it and closes it behind.*

**Williams.** Who was that?

**Catherine.** That was Hedvig, the daughter of the infamous Duke Biron.

**Williams.** The favourite of Tsaritsa Anna Ivanovna?

**Catherine.** The very one.

**Williams.** Ah, so that was that Hedvig...

**Catherine.** Yes. She fled her father in banishment and bought her freedom by converting to the Orthodox faith. Now she's appointed to guard my morals.



**Williams.** Really?

**Catherine.** Really. She's not very busy, however. For now this creature is preoccupied with corrupting the last remaining virtues of my husband.

**Williams.** I see.

*Door opens. Teplova enters.*

**Teplova.** Oh, I...

**Catherine.** Looking for His Highness?

**Teplova.** No... Ah... I seem to have lost my purse... I'm sorry.

*She leaves.*

**Williams.** Who is that?

**Catherine.** That's Matryona Teplova, the wife of secretary Teplov.

**Williams.** Aha.

*Door opens. Enters Liza.*

**Liza.** Excuse me, Your Highness. I thought His Highness was here...

**Catherine.** He was.

**Liza.** Ah... Where did he go?.

**Catherine.** Try through this door.

**Liza.** I will.

**Catherine.** Be so kind.

*Liza exits into the billiards room.*

**Williams.** And that?

**Catherine.** That is Yelizaveta Vorontsova, the niece to the Vice Chancellor Mikhaila Illarionych Vorontsov.

**Williams.** Really? They both...?

**Catherine.** Yes, all three of them...

*There is a commotion behind the door into the billiards room.*

**Voice of Hedviga.** ...you bitch! How dare you come in here! Get out you Moscow slut! Aaah!

**Voice of Liza.** Aaah! Not my hair!

**Voice of Hedviga.** I'll show you..! No! Put away that cue!

*More commotion. Finally the door opens. Liza enters. She is dishevelled and is quickly pats down her hair and skirts. She walks past Catherine and Williams and curtsies on her way. Catherine acknowledges. Liza exits.*

**Catherine.** As you can see, Sir Charles, I am far from jealousy....

**Williams.** You are... an extraordinary woman. And you deserve an extraordinary man.

**Catherine.** Thank you for the compliment. My husband is the heir to the throne of the Great Russian Empire. I could not wish for more.

**Williams.** On a number of occasions and publically His Highness expressed his wish to serve as an officer in the Prussian army rather than being an Emperor of this country.

**Catherine.** Oh, believe me, he can't wait to sit on the throne.

**Williams.** (*Cautiously.*) I do not think he will remain on it for long.

*Door opens. Music breaks in from the adjacent room, where the revels are taking place. Enters Shkurin carrying a tray.*

**Shkurin.** Refreshments, Your Highness.

**Catherine.** Thank you, Vasily. Put them down on the table.

**Shkurin.** (*With a glance at the door to the billiards room.*) Does His Highness require any assistance?

**Catherine.** No. I believe he has all the assistance he needs. You may leave now.

*Shkurin bows and exits.*

**Catherine.** Sir, Charles, you are certainly honest in your assessment but you should

be more careful. These walls have ears.

**Williams.** (*Raises his voice.*) Of course, Your Highness. Please accept my apologies.

**Catherine.** Apologies accepted.

**Williams.** Your Highness, I represent my King and naturally my aim is to progress the policies of my country, and these demand an expedient ratification and assurance of the subsidy treaty and the Russian guarantee of protection of Hannover for years to come. (*Lowers his voice.*) I'll be completely honest with you. In carrying out my mission I have to consider the possibility of Her Majesty's untimely demise and the change of government in Russia. The Grand Duke may, perhaps, not be relied upon for the continuation of this great alliance due to his...strong Prussian affiliation. If I may put it this way.

**Catherine.** You may, but what is it exactly that you want?

**Williams.** Your Highness, I'm a diplomat but I have a heart. And my heart urges me to be your loyal friend... My happiness will be complete if my official mission coincides with my personal sympathies. I believe that only you are able to become the true leader of this nation. You should be the future Empress of Russia.

**Catherine.** (*Lowers her voice.*) Sir Charles, I'm flattered. But I have to remind you I am the wife of the future Emperor.

**Williams.** I do not think he would remain such. The only hope is that you...

**Catherine.** Sir Charles...

**Williams.** (*Lowering his voice.*) I am convinced that the future of this land and the future of our friendship will depend upon you and you only. Duke Peter displays his incapability to reign constantly and publically. If I have noticed this after only a few weeks in St Petersburg, imagine what the rest of the court must be thinking. The future is yours, Your Highness, and I will be glad to be your friend and to help you in any way I can. If you have any needs... If you require funds... my King will be happy to oblige. Privately...

**Catherine.** Thank you, Ambassador.

**William.** Please, call me by my name.

**Catherine.** Of course, Sir Charles. But I need to warn you. Everyone who becomes my friend is promptly removed from me. Some are taken to the Secret Chancellery. Most disappear without a trace.

**Williams.** Nothing and no one is forever in this world...

**Catherine.** I understand, Sir Charles... The venture you are talking about requires considerable funds.

**Williams.** I'm sure I will be able to satisfy your demands.

**Catherine.** 10000 pounds should cover the initial costs.

**Williams.** Ten thousand pa...

**Catherine.** Yes, Sir Charles. When the decisive moment arrives, the most important thing will be information. And even more so the speed with which you get it. Information costs. I will have to pay a lot of people for their discretion.

**Williams.** The decisive moment is her majesty' passing?

**Catherine.** That will be too late. It has to be before. When she falls ill and is incapacitated and we know for sure she is going to die. She has regular faints now and retains a lot of fluids in her lower body. Nobody knows how long she will survive.

**Williams.** What is your source? She appears to be in perfect health. You should have seen how she danced at the ball last Friday.

**Catherine.** This is reliable information. But it reaches me with delay. In order to be able to act I have to know what is happening quickly. This means buying off a lot of servants and couriers. When the Empress passes, the most crucial act will be to secure my son who is with Her Majesty. She took him away from me at birth. I believe that the Shuvalovs and the Vorontsovs will want to make him, a toddler, the new emperor and rule in his name. Under them Russia will side with Versailles, Sir Ambassador. This is what we cannot allow. We need to be able move faster than them.

**Williams.** But you're talking of a coup...

**Catherine.** And you, Sir Charles, what are you talking about? You have just said that my husband is cannot reign. You proposed help to me in order to progress your cause in the future. Do have a different idea? On my part I promise that once I'm on the throne, the friendship between Russia and England will be stronger than ever. Is this not what you want?

**Williams.** A...bsolutely. But the danger...

**Catherine.** For myself, I have already decided that I will either reign or perish. I have no other choice. You offered your friendship, haven't you, Sir Charles?

*He goes to say something.*

And your courage?

**Williams.** Oh, Your Highness... I did not expect... I am very pleased at your resolution... I admire... but I think...

**Catherine.** What?

**Williams.** Eehh... I think that an open credit with our embassy's consul Wolf should be conducive to your... projects.

**Catherine.** *(Smiles.)* Thank you.

*Violins play out, the door opens and a castrati begins singing a sweet aria about excitements of love. His voice is divine. Catherine picks a cherry from a tray. With eyes half closed he walks into the room and circles them. He goes back to the door, turns around and almost whispers the last passionate notes of the aria in the doorway. The doors close on him. Catherine fingers the cherry. A short pause.*

**Williams.** What do you think of my attaché? Doesn't he remind you of an antique vase thrown into a pile of garbage?

**Catherine.** Sir Charles, in our times antique vases don't lie around in garbage.

**Williams.** Well said! Stanislaw is a very bright young man. I was entrusted with his upbringing by his parents. He is from a very ancient and powerful family. His mother is of the Czartoryskis family in Poland, you know.

**Catherine.** Yes, and his father did a great deal of harm to Tsar Peter I and Russia. Didn't he help the Ottomans and the Swedes against our country?

**Williams.** That is true. But now he and his wife and her family are the strongest Russian party in Poland. They have sent their son to Russia and entrusted his upbringing to me to foster the same feelings in him. He's well read for his young age. I'm amazed how much he can read.

**Catherine.** Reading is the food for the mind and a salvation to anyone in times of loneliness.

**Williams.** How true! You are a true philosopher, Your Highness. But philosophical trends grow in people who are wise, experienced but, alas, lonely.

**Catherine.** You speak like such a one.

**Williams.** Indeed, loneliness is the philosopher's unwanted friend. That makes me worried about Stanislaw. He travelled all over Europe, was introduced to many

courts and gained impeccable manners, which I attribute in part to my humble person. A very strict upbringing! He is like a son to me. Smart, handsome, intelligent and a philosopher. Admit it, Your Highness, this youth stands out in the midst of all the *jeunesse dorée* surrounding your young court.

**Catherine.** I believe, Sir Charles, that Russia is a touchstone for foreigners. It tests their virtues. Who succeeds in Russia can be assured of success all over Europe... for nowhere are there such masters of pointing out the shortcomings of a foreigner as there are in Russia. One can be certain that nothing will be forgiven because naturally every Russian deep in his heart dislikes every foreigner.

**Williams.** Is it a tip from a fellow foreigner in Russia or is it a warning from the Russian princess? I rely on your opinion absolutely. After all you are a foreigner as well.

**Catherine.** This is an observation from a Russian who once was a foreigner. (*Stands up resolutely.*) Thank you for your story, Ambassador. If you will forgive me, I need to leave you now. You are always a welcome guest in my house. Let's meet very soon and continue our consultations. Please enjoy the celebration. And look after your attaché. He is a fine young man. I hope to see you soon. Goodbye.

*She leaves. Williams watches through the window. He goes to the door and calls for Poniatowski. Poniatowski enters eating an ice cream.*

**Williams.** I see you are indulging in childish pleasures...

**Poniatowski.** (*Eating.*) This is splendid. You ought to try it.

**Williams.** (*Lowering his voice.*) The Grand Duchess has gone to the garden... This is a perfect opportunity.

**Poniatowski.** But how could I...!

**Williams.** (*Looking out of the window.*) She is already there behind the hedge. She's waiting... Go!

**Poniatowski.** Ah...

**Williams.** Haven't you fallen in love with her?

**Poniatowski.** Yes, but...

**Williams.** Don't you have any courage at all?! Give me this. (*He takes the ice cream from Poniatowski.*) Go! This is your life chance. Go to her!

*Williams pushes Poniatowski out. He returns to the window and looks out. Then he turns around thinking intently. He notices the ice cream in his hand and goes to try it.*

Mmmmm!

*He looks out of the window again. Door opens. Enters Bestuzhev.*

**Bestuzhev.** (*Shining.*) I've been looking for you.

*Williams drops the ice-cream.*

**Williams.** You've startled me, Chancellor!

**Bestuzhev.** Ah, that is because you were scheming something in here. (*Laughs.*)

Admit it. You were scheming. What is it?

**Williams.** How can I be scheming, sir Chancellor. I am no match for your deviant abilities. I didn't even know you were at this ball.

**Bestuzhev.** I wasn't. But I've come here looking for you.

**Williams.** I'm honoured but my liver begs for reprieve.

**Bestuzhev.** Sir Charles, your liver will fall silent right now.

*Bestuzhev opens a folder and takes out a piece of paper. Williams takes it and reads.*

**Williams.** Her Majesty's own hand!

**Bestuzhev.** And the imperial seal. Our subsidy treaty has been ratified and is in force.

**Williams.** This will be dispatched first thing in the morning. My King will be pleased.

**Bestuzhev.** It is a great achievement for you, Sir Charles.

**Williams.** Oh, you are too kind, Chancellor. Where would I, and indeed, England be, without your friendship and good will?

**Bestuzhev.** That's true. I always keep my word. So forget about your liver and let's celebrate this our mutual achievement!

**Williams.** I cannot object. But first I must dispatch this to His Majesty.

**Bestuzhev.** Of course but before that shall we discuss the payment schedule?

**Williams.** With utmost pleasure, Sir Chancellor, and I'm convinced I will be able to return with a bank promissory note that I will find in my secretaire in the embassy immediately after the courier's departure to London.

**Bestuzhev.** Please do take my carriage.

**Williams.** I am ever so grateful, Chancellor. I have my own handy.

**Bestuzhev.** We are friends, aren't we? Call me simply: Count Aleksei Petrovich.

**Williams.** We are. Call me: Sir Charles...

*This way Williams has backed his way to the exit where he is stopped by Vorontsov, entering suddenly from behind. William almost jumps away.*

**Vorontsov.** Oh, what a splendid company – the fox and the rabbit.

**Bestuzhev.** Mikhailo Illarionych, what are you doing here?

**Vorontsov.** Just looking for my niece. But instead I am chuffed to see you two. Care for a game of whist?

**Williams.** Thank you...ah...Count. I was leaving. Work, you know. It never stops for a diplomat.

**Vorontsov.** But of course, have a good evening, Sir Charles. Although it is a pity to lose your company at such a great celebration.

**Williams.** Charmed. (*Sleeping past Vorontsov and out of the door.*) Have a great night. You know, Her Highness has splendid ice-cream...

*Williams exits.*

**Bestuzhev.** I've been wandering, Mikhailo Illarionych...

**Vorontsov.** I'm listening.

**Bestuzhev.** Why are you such a pest. You just can't help but shit here and there.

**Vorontsov.** Aleksei Petrovich, one day you might regret what you've just said to me.

**Bestuzhev.** Trying to scare me? You think you can topple me? You've put your niece under the Grand Duke and think you've made it? Do you think it will help you?

**Vorontsov.** I don't know about that. What's going to help you?



**Bestuzhev.** I'm fine.

**Vorontsov.** Really.

**Bestuzhev.** ...And sometimes I wonder if you have all your wits about you. Good evening.

*Bestuzhev exists.*

**Vorontsov.** That we'll see tomorrow at the Empress' council.

*Exits.*

## **SCENE SIX "Peter and Paul Day" Part Two**

*Somewhere in the garden. Light is low. It's night. Catherine walks/sits on a bench, engrossed in thought. There is a rustling in the bushes.*

**Catherine.** Who's there?

**Poniatowski.** Me.

**Catherine.** Me?

*More rustling.*

**Poniatowski.** Matko Boska, dopomóz mi!

**Catherine.** Is that you, Monsignor Stanislas?

**Poniatowski.** Yes, Your Highness. Please forgive me. I got lost in the park and got stuck in this bush. God damn, let me go!

*He tumbles out of the bush in front of Catherine. He is dishevelled, his wig is askew and his clothes are torn.*

**Catherine.** *(Laughing.)* People usually follow the alleyways. Look at you, you are a mess.

**Poniatowski.** Your Highness, I ran around the park looking for you.

**Catherine.** For me? Well, you've found me. What was so urgent that you decided to battle the hedge? Come catch your breath, sit on the bench.

**Poniatowski.** Thank you but... But I'd like...to remain standing...

**Catherine.** Alright. You may remain standing. What is it?

**Poniatowski.** Your Highness...I... when Sir Charles and I drove to Oranienbaum for the first time to meet you, I remember a beautiful Amazon overtaking our carriage. A female rider of such agility, courage and beauty rushed past us at breakneck speed. I was enthralled. I had been in a dreamlike state from the moment I arrived in St Petersburg and every event was more magical than the one before. But that Venus firmly commanding her impetuous steed and the expression of such a great joy on her face, pierced my whole being. I fell in love right there, deeply and finally. The unknown rider disappeared into the distance and I thought I'd have to spend the rest of my life trying to find her. Then when you entered the room in Oranienbaum – hurried, fresh, flushed – I realised that my life long search was over... And my life-long suffering had begun...

**Catherine.** (Laughs loudly.) What nonsense, Monsignor Stanislaw! Have you been drinking?

**Poniatowski.** I don't indulge in drink, Your Highness. I never do. I've never gambled or chased after women. I only studied and worked hard preparing and saving myself, because I knew that one day I would meet the one and only soul that I will give all of myself to.

**Catherine.** Really?

**Poniatowski.** Yes, Your Highness. And now it has happened. I've met you - the most beautiful, ...

**Catherine.** Stop. Please don't.

**Poniatowski.** But why? I'm telling the truth. I love you, Your Highness. I loved you from the moment I saw you.

**Catherine.** Love...

**Poniatowski.** Yes!

**Catherine.** How do you know it's love?

**Poniatowski.** I don't know it. I only feel...

**Catherine.** You are forgetting that I have a husband.

**Poniatowski.** Your husband has not a drop of love for you. I see that. Everybody can see that. He spends time with his numerous lovers... I understand you must have

uncountable admirers here. I saw how Prince Chernyshov looked at you. I'm sure that everyone, from Count Shuvalov to the stoker, must be in love with you! They all should! And I am just a visiting foreigner, who saw you and was struck down, forever! And who cannot understand why fate was so unjust towards you, having given you such a husband. How is it that he does not understand what he is rejecting?! Your eyes shine with wisdom and beauty. Your lips are made by the gods of love for kisses. Your voice rings divine music in my ears. I know that I am nothing and I do not deserve you. But I cannot remain silent. I am torn by this feeling for you. And it doesn't matter what price I must pay for this! I love you!

*Blackout.*

### **SCENE SEVEN "Messonier de Valcroissant"**

*A room in the house of Ivan Shuvalov. A table is set for one. Door opens and Valcroissant appears. He is frightened and his movements are uncertain. The door shuts behind him. He is in the room alone and remains standing on the spot for a while. He sees the food and first cautiously approaches it, then begins eating and drinking quickly. He is hungry. After a while Inquisitor enters the room from a different door. This has a shattering effect on Valcroissant. (When Inquisitor gets excited, one side of his face develops a tick.)*

**Inquisitor.** Messonier Valcroissant... This is your true name, isn't it?

*Valcroissant shrinks as Inquisitor approaches him and comes very close, puts his hand on his head and strokes him like his own son.*

My dear sir, please! Could I ever hurt you? Come, come, stop crying. You've put everything down on paper. You made the right decision and you will be rewarded. You see? There's no need to be afraid. It's not becoming of you - after all the French are brave people, aren't you? Caviar? And now you will talk to a very important person...

*Enters Ivan Shuvalov. He sits down in front of the prisoner. Inquisitor assumes*

*duties of a waiter for Valcroissant. He pour more wine for him. Shuvalov plays with a gold snuffbox. Pause.*

**Shuvalov.** Do you remember a French gentlemen you met in an inn in Riga where you stopped for the night?

**Valcroissant.** (*Trapped.*) Ah...ah... That actor..? What was his name...

**Shuvalov.** You don't remember his name?

**Valcroissant.** No... I must admit I've forgotten. We only spoke briefly. It was just a chance encounter on the road.

**Shuvalov.** And yet you gave him your secret correspondence to Paris? (*He produces papers. Valcroissant is stunned. Pause.*) Your papers were in my hands before you even arrived in St Petersburg. Some of them are very interesting. Like you, I have questions.

**Valcroissant.** I...don't know...what's in it. I'm just a courier.

**Shuvalov.** Just a courier? I see. This is a letter from the Chancellor of Austrian Empire von Kaunitz to Prince Conti, the cousin of your king. You must be very bad at geography, Monsieur Valcroissant, if you tried to deliver a letter from Vienna to Paris via Riga. How did you get lost?

*Silence.*

**Inquisitor.** Answer, dear. Silence is very bad right now. Do yourself and me a favour. I've spent three days interrogating. I want to go home today. **Shuvalov.** Why did you give the correspondence to the first stranger you met.

**Valcroissant.** I gave it to the first *Frenchman* I met. It had to be delivered and I could not do it.

**Shuvalov.** Why so?

**Valcroissant.** Because I received a new order to travel to St Petersburg.

**Shuvalov.** Why didn't you send the correspondence with the messenger who brought new orders to you?

**Valcroissant.** Because the new orders came from Censor Tarcier but the letter needed to be delivered to Prince Conti so that Tercier didn't know about it.

**Shuvalov.** Who exactly do you work for?

**Valcroissant.** My king.

**Shuvalov.** So the order to travel to St Petersburg came from your King of France?

**Valcroissant.** Yes.

**Shuvalov.** Via Tercier?

**Valcroissant.** Yes.

**Shuvalov.** So Tercier works for the King of France?

**Valcroissant.** Yes.

**Shuvalov.** So the order to deliver the letter came from.. Conti?

**Valcroissant.** Yes.

**Inquisitor.** So you work for Conti? **Valcroissant.**

Yes. No. I work for my king. **Shuvalov.** (*To*

*Inquisitor.*) He works for the King? **Inquisitor.**

Which king?

**Valcroissant.** My king.

**Shuvalov.** So who does Conti work for?

**Inquisitor.** The King.

**Valcroissant.** (*Happy to finally see understanding.*) Yes!

*Pause. Shuvalov and Inquisitor look at each other. Valcroissant looks at them.*

**Shuvalov.** Right. So Tercier works for the King and Conti works for the King and you work for both of them but they don't know it.

**Valcroissant.** Yes! No! I work for the King. They work for the King. But the King works his mysterious ways.

**Shuvalov.** So there are two kings' hands but one shouldn't know what's done by the other?

**Valcroissant.** (*Big smile.*) Yes. You see, Prince Conti curates His Majesty's secret diplomacy, and Tercier looks after the super secret diplomacy. It's complicated...

**Shuvalov.** (*Stops him with a gesture.*) And your orders from King via Tercier were...?

**Valcroissant.** By way of asking questions to find out what the Russian Empress thinks about returning to relations with France.

**Shuvalov.** You were expecting to reach the Russian Empress?

**Valcroissant.** Yes.

**Shuvalov.** (*To inquisitor.*) Without a rank? (*Inquisitor shrinks his shoulders.*)

*Shuvalov and Inquisitor begin laughing heartily.*

A nobody without a rank... Who does your king think we are? (*They laugh, then seriously.*) I can give you an answer. Yes! My sovereign is upset because of the sour relationship with Versailles. She is particularly upset by the unfavourable tone which newspapers in Paris use in reaction to everything that happens in Russia... You shouldn't think that since we, the Russians, live on the outskirts of Europe, we don't care what they say about us! We follow the foreign press very keenly. So tell this to those who sent you: first you must change the tone of your press and then seek our friendship!

**Valcroissant.** You will earn immortality, if you bring your empress closer to an alliance with my king!

**Shuvalov.** We have enough allies. Russia has enough power and has no need to search for anyone. An alliance depends on France herself... You may tell this to those who sent you. And also that Versailles has no business in Poland! And even more so, you should stop inciting the Turkish Sultan to begin a war with us...

**Valcroissant.** (*His hand on his heart. Fervently.*) I swear! On that beauty, whom I dare not to name, and who is languishing awaiting my return in Warsaw and whose name is Jadwiga Poderewska... I swear! I will rush to Paris right away, in order to bring such important messages to my King.

**Shuvalov.** (*Takes some snuff.*) Right away you will be returned to the fortress, where you will remain until we exchange you as a spy...

**Valcroissant.** Exchange? As a spy? For who?

**Shuvalov.** For that actor, whose name you've forgotten. But I can remind you. The name of the you gave your urgent secret correspondence to is Chudie and he is a friend of mine. And now he is in Bastilles. I will exchange you for him. Just that should tell you, Monsieur Valcroissant, how high I value you. And take my advice, don't play spy again. You don't do it too well. You may go.

*Valcroissant gets up. Inquisitor opens the door for him.*

Is it true that the Chancellor of Austrian Empire has signed a secret treaty of friendship with Versailles? Or is this a forgery that you meant to plant in Russia?

**Valcroissant.** (*Turning at the doorway.*) I don't know. I am a messenger. I swear I didn't know that actor.

*Shuvalov waves his hand in resignation. We see hands grab him in the door frame.*

**Inquisitor.** Funny fop, that one. When we took him to the interrogation, Semion fanned up the fire and didn't even have to show him red-hot pincers. He screamed at once. Told everything. He was to find out about our army movements, supplies, armament and to find out who was the closest to our Empress. Here's his confession.

**Shuvalov.** I'm not interested in that petty spying. But this, on the other hand..! (He holds up the letter.) A treaty between France and our Austria? That could be the end of our friend the Chancellor. I'll talk to Vorontsov. Together we will see what we shall do.

**Inquisitor.** I wouldn't trust that man, Ivan.

**Shuvalov.** Vorontsov is on our side against Bestuzhev. (Brandishing the letter.) Just wait till Matushka hears about this!

*Blackout.*

## SCENE EIGHT "Thunder and Gadzooks!"

*Bestuzhev sleeps drunk.*

**Female Voice.** "Get up! Get up even if you are dead! The Empress wants to see you."

*Bestuzhev wakes up, dishevelled, stunned and hung over. Servants run in. They bring a bowl of ice. Bestuzhev puts ice on his face and dips his face in the bowl. Servants dress him, put the wig on him, powder him and give him his papers very quickly.*

I knew it. You only keep drinking with those bottle buddies of yours. Those disgusting imbeciles. Not a single friend in the house! Only your drunkards. My god,

why did I let you take me away from Germany?

**Bestuzhev.** (*Holds his head. Through his teeth.*) Could you please stop talking in German...

*Servants exit. Bestuzhev steps forward. He pats his coat around searching for something. Then he finds the flask. Opens it and takes a swig. Elizabeth appears from the shadows. Bestuzhev quickly hides the flask and makes a bow.*

**Elizabeth.** (*Fuming.*) You're finally here! (*The clock strikes three times.*) Well, that's great!.. You've slept through everything, drunk everything away! Strangers, from the outside, tell me that Austria and Paris want to lie together, even though they've been at each other's throat for I don't know how long, and you, in the meantime... Did you know about it?

**Bestuzhev.** (*A bit.*) Ah...I've been...noticing for quite a while now.

**Elizabeth.** So why didn't you say anything, you old bastard?

**Bestuzhev.** (*Bows low.*) Forgive me, Matushka, but...eh...the Austrian ambassador Count Esterházy claims that's not true... The gossip is false! Reason for yourself: could it be that King Louis, the friend of Frederick, would suddenly come together with the Austrian empress... You said it yourself: the Habsburgs and the Bourbons have been in feud forever. I've been silent because I don't believe this! (*Twists a grimace.*) Oh, I see. I knew it!

**Elizabeth.** What?

**Bestuzhev.** This must be a plot against me. Again my enemies are trying to destroy me... How long do I, an old and weak man, have to suffer this?

**Elizabeth.** What are you talking about, Petrovich?

**Bestuzhev.** It's obvious, Matushka!

*He walks to the dark corner of the room. Checks if someone is there.*

**Elizabeth.** What are you looking for?

**Bestuzhev.** Enemies.

**Elizabeth.** Have you completely lost your mind? This is my room. And I'm here. Are you so drunk that you see ghosts now?

**Bestuzhev.** Maybe. Or maybe it's the enemies.



**Elizabeth.** (*Roars.*) Petrovich, sober up!

**Bestuzhev.** Your Majesty, our friends are enemies of our enemies. Because they are enemies, that's why they are friends. The English king pays us money to protect his possessions from the one who threatens us, who dared to plot against you.

**Elizabeth.** Delirium...

**Bestuzhev.** The Brits are fearful of Frederick and are at war with France. Frederick is aligned with France. Austria lost its Silesia to Frederick. It is so simple...

*Enters Vorontsov.*

**Vorontsov.** Is it? (*Bows.*) Your Majesty.

**Bestuzhev.** (*Low.*) Ah, there's one. (*To Vorontsov.*) Coming to Her Majesty without announcement now?

**Elizabeth.** What is it, Mikhaila Illarionych? I'm tired already.

**Vorontsov.** Please forgive me, Your Majesty. It's urgent. This has arrived with a courier from Berlin just now.

*Elizabeth takes the paper and reads it. Vorontsov looks at Bestuzhev.*

**Bestuzhev.** Just now?

**Vorontsov.** Just now.

*Bestuzhev smirks. Vorontsov smirks back and winks.*

**Elizabeth.** Murderer!!! You damn monster! I have noticed how rare you go to communion. How much did you sell me for, antichrist? I signed this damned treaty for one reason only – to keep Frederick away from Courland! And now what? You've made me his friend?

*Bestuzhev is dumbfounded. He was not expecting this development. She gets up and walks across the room there and back.*

**Bestuzhev.** What happened?

**Vorontsov.** Your English friends have signed a subsidy treaty with the King of

Prussia, Frederick. Exactly the same as the one you gave to your friend Williams. Prussia is to be the guarantor of safety of Hannover. This makes Prussia our ally in that guarantee. So that's that, Aleksei Petrovich.

**Bestuzhev.** They couldn't have.

*Enters Shuvalov.*

Ambassador Williams said nothing about it.

**Shuvalov.** Williams is a liar! He represents a government of liars! This treaty is a spit in the face of Her Majesty and Russia. This is a betrayal!

**Bestuzhev.** Don't throw such words so casually, Ivan Ivanych. I am sure the English never meant evil in their considerations. They want to protect Hannover and they needed our help. But we lingered for six years! And the cunning fox Frederick outran us.

**Shuvalov.** *(To Elizabeth.)* I warned you, Matushka, about this treaty. Now our soldiers will go alongside the Prussian army to fight for the British Hannover. But that's not all, Your Majesty. France has allied itself with Austria, which makes us allies of France and thus enemies of England. *(To Bestuzhev.)* And you, Chancellor, brought us to this!

**Bestuzhev.** This is nonsense. France is at war with England and is allied with Prussia who is at war with Austria who is allied with us...

**Elizabeth.** *(Stops pacing.)* Everything is on its head.

**Shuvalov.** Europe has collectively lost its mind.

**Elizabeth.** What shall we do? *(She sits down.)*

**Bestuzhev.** The treaty is ratified and the money has been paid. We cannot pull out of it...

**Shuvalov.** According to that treaty our army will fight with Prussia against France.

**Elizabeth.** Over my dead body! And even then I would come as a ghost to haunt you!

**Shuvalov.** Matushka, I say we throw away this treaty.

**Bestuzhev.** Your Majesty, we received the down payments on the subsidies. It will have to be paid back.

**Shuvalov.** Screw their money! They are getting fat at our expense. Their entire navy is built with our timber that they get at a pittance. And then that same navy does

whatever they want in our own seas.

**Bestuzhev.** Well, I don't sell our forests to the English, but your uncles do, Ivan Ivanych. They have the monopoly.

**Shuvalov.** That's right, you don't sell timber, you sell our soldiers to them!

**Bestuzhev.** Pulling out of the treaty will damage Her Majesty's reputation and plunder the treasury.

**Shuvalov.** No, Chancellor, something else plunders the treasury. Or rather someone...

**Bestuzhev.** Matushka tsaritsa, again they try to slander me in your eyes...

**Shuvalov.** You were supposed to know everything about England. You all-knowing wizard of politics, how did you not foresee this treachery. Or were you in on it together with you ale-pal Williams?

**Bestuzhev.** You'd better take those words back, Ivan Ivanych. You're a milksop next to me...

**Elizabeth.** Shut it!!!

*Pause.*

What shall we do?

**Bestuzhev.** Your Majesty, I'm sure the Brits don't look at this matter as "betrayal". Naturally they look after their own interests. They're people of commerce and that's how they run. Obviously King Frederick simply offered a better deal to them and they took it.

**Elizabeth.** So what you're saying is that we submitted to godless money mongers, who hold nothing sacred but profit?

**Bestuzhev.** They call it business.

**Vorontsov.** Precisely Your Majesty, that's why we should deal with them the same way.

**Bestuzhev.** *(To Vorontsov.)* Don't rush ahead of people who know better.

**Vorontsov.** *(To Bestuzhev.)* It's not your day, Petrovich. *(To Elizabeth.)* Your Majesty, since pulling out would indeed look rather bad on our part, allow me to present for your consideration this additional clause to our treaty with England. *(Gives Elizabeth a paper.)* It's just a short sentence, which we will propose to them to keep secret.

*Elizabeth reads it.*

**Bestuzhev.** We?

**Shuvalov.** We, the cabinet.

**Bestuzhev.** Ah, you're in the cabinet now?

**Elizabeth.** Alright. Give me the quill.

*Vorontsov gives her a quill. She signs it. Vorontsov takes it and gives it to Bestuzhev.*

**Bestuzhev.** What is it?

*He reads.*

**Vorontsov.** This is "The Secret Declaration of Her Imperial Majesty Elizabeth I of All the Russias", an additional clause to our treaty with England.

**Bestuzhev.** (*Howls.*) Matushka!

**Elizabeth.** What?

**Bestuzhev.** This is a self-excluding condition. If Frederick has signed a treaty with them...

**Elizabeth.** *Them* signing a treaty with *Frederick* is a self excluding condition.

**Bestuzhev.** You cut me down without a knife!

**Elizabeth.** No, my dear. It's not I, who cuts you, it's your friends in London.

**Bestuzhev.** How will I give this to Williams? How will I look him in the eyes?

**Elizabeth.** Your eyes are perfect to look into his. Take it to him! (She gets up.) From now on our reasoning is this. Beat Frederick we will! Despite all the treaties with England. As for cavils coming from London, the British King will not get a chewed up fig from me. I will not give him soldiers and that's it! The Russian soldier is required for the Russian needs... And I will not take their godless money either!

*She exits followed by Shuvalov.*

**Vorontsov.** How's your System now, Chancellor?

**Bestuzhev.** How's the French money? Good?

**Vorontsov.** Money is money. I thought you knew that dealing with “business” people.

*Vorontsov exits. Bestuzhev cries. He pulls out his flask and takes a deep swig out of it.*

**Bestuzhev.** Sir, Charles... *(He takes another swig. Grins.)* Oooh, Sir Charles...

*Blackout.*

## **SCENE NINE "Thunder and Gadzooks!" Part Two**

*Bestuzhev and Williams.*

**Bestuzhev.** *(Still grinning. Nicely drunk.)* Our sovereign, meek at heart, Yelizaveta Petrovna, in her thoughtful wisdom, is so kind as to give Her magisterial order to convey to you, Ambassador, for the further information of King George II of England and Kurfürst of Hannover... This... A secret declaration....

*He gives the document to Williams. The other begins reading it.*

**Williams.** *(Reads)* "...The British Ministry cannot fail to remember that our negotiations had nothing else in view but to restrain the Prussian King from any sudden undertaking and to do damage to him..."

**Bestuzhev.** Yes. Russia will only give troops to England if Frederick of Prussia attacks Hannover.

*Williams looks up at Bestuzhev, then his feet become uncertain. With one hand he searches for support. He finds the back of a chair with his fingers and slumps into it.*

*(Cool.)* Sir Charles... Water?

**Williams.** *(To himself.)* I'm finished...

**Bestuzhev.** Vodka it is.

**Williams.** No! I do not accept this amendment! The treaty has been drafted and ratified. No additions! What will my King say? Our convention was supposed to be directed against France in the first place. Sir Chancellor, you assured me of your unmitigated loyalty. I thought after all the favours we have rendered to you, you could have cared better for the interests of England and Russia!

**Bestuzhev.** It's nobody's fault that it's not me but Ivan Shuvalov who sleeps with the Empress, and that Shuvalov loves France so much as if it was his aunt or something.

**Williams.** Then break that Shuvalov's neck!

**Bestuzhev.** I'd love to. But there are many other necks that need to be broken before I could get to his... And it's not my fault that your cabinet signed a treaty with our (*bangs his fist on the table*) enemy!

**Williams.** (*In desperation.*) Ah, Lord is my witness, it is not my fault that Earl of Hoderness and the Duke of Newcastle are cretins!

**Bestuzhev.** Why don't you break the Earl's neck, Sir Williams?

**Williams.** Touché. I can't send this document to London. It destroys all of our previous agreements. It will destroy me! They will make a laughing stock of me in the parliament.

**Bestuzhev.** Our treaty is hanging by a thread. I'm surprised we still have it. If you persist, we risk enraging our Empress even more and risk the relationship between Russia and London all together...

**Williams.** (*Cries.*) I am ruined.

*Bestuzhev looks how he cries and pours two deep drinks and brings one to Williams. Williams takes the glass.*

**Bestuzhev.** Sir Charles, you're an Englishman! Courage should be your trait.

**Williams.** (*Cries.*) I'm Welsh.

*A short pause. Bestuzhev looks at Williams. Williams is a mess. Bestuzhev sighs and downs the glass himself. Pick an apple from the table and bites on it.*

**Bestuzhev.** (*Pouring another for himself. Chewing.*) Anyway, I have survived three tsars, two empresses and one bastard regent. Every one of them could have had my

head. Yet I am here and I am the Chancellor. Should I be concerned now with that parvenu Vorontsov? He thinks he can outsmart me. Ha! He has no guts for it!

*He drinks a shot and bites on the apple. Williams looks at it and has his in desperation. This sends a shock through Williams. His body freezes with the glass in his hand. His eyes are twice their normal size and he is gasping for air like a fish out of the water, in silence. Bestuzhev does not notice. He is engrossed in his own thought.*

*(Lowers his voice.)* The whole Shuvalovs clan is against me. Piotr, Ivan, Aleksandr. One sleeps with the Empress, the other is married to her closest girlfriend, the third cuts out tongues for her. They sit all over the throne like flies on a rotting carcass. Well, they want to get rich before Her Majesty kicks the bucket. They don't see beyond that. Ivan loves France. I can see that. But Vorontsov... That wants my place when Peter becomes the tsar. That's why he slipped his niece into his bed. I need to lure them all out in the open. Then I'll break them one after another. Her Majesty's health has been declining lately. No wonder, if she stays up at night and drinks so much... But there's still time... Courage, Sir Charles!

**Williams.** *(Course voice. With difficulty.)* The Grand Duke is a complete and utter fool. But the Grand Duchess...

**Bestuzhev.** Now you're beginning to think clearer!

**Williams.** You know he would rather be a Prussian minion than the Emperor of Russia.

**Bestuzhev.** *(Annoyed.)* Hasn't your king just made Frederick his friend?

**Williams.** But Peter would like to be Frederick's subject. And he is going to be the Emperor. He will make all of you subjects of Frederick. Chancellor, I would rather be a monkey on the Island of Borneo than a subject of the Prussian king! I was an ambassador in Berlin for four years. I know...

**Bestuzhev.** Wait. You're right. Peter is our blessed sovereign's sorry mistake but his wife... I know for sure that even my enemies shiver at the prospect of Peter's succession. Catherine, on the other hand, as a regent for her son Pavel perhaps... now that's altogether something different...

**Williams.** I don't believe she favours you personally. She is convinced that you are the principal contributor to her miseries.

**Bestuzhev.** What because I caught her mother spying for the Prussian king and involved in a plot with the French Ambassador against our Empress? Her mother was extremely lucky that our Empress gave a solemn promise to never sign a death warrant. Had it been the previous reign, she would have been broken on the wheel and quartered. There was every reason to be weary of them. Do you know what our Grand Duchess did first thing upon her arrival in St Petersburg? She asked to lead the very way that our Empress had travelled from her home to the palace on the night of her coup! She wasn't even fifteen years of age then! I made a note of that. I notice every detail. She had to be watched. As well as her mother. They were Prussian through and through. They could not be trusted. That is why I watch her every step.

**Williams.** As I said, she has no reason to feel affection for you. Is she in need of money?

**Bestuzhev.** Sir Charles, you are definitely beginning to think better. Another vodka? (*Bestuzhev pours. Williams changes expression indicating that that might not be a bad idea at all. They drink.*) Catherine is a card player. She plays with everyone in her circle. But she's not very good. She regularly loses large sums. The Empress doesn't trust her and the Grand Duke, particularly her, and surrounds them with spies. But Catherine wins everyone over. How? They all turn to her side.

**Williams.** Maybe that's why she loses large sums.

**Bestuzhev.** (*Astonished.*) Sir Charles, how has it never dawned on me?

**Williams.** (*Chuckles.*) It is you who observe her every move.

**Bestuzhev.** Precisely. No one has more determination and strength. Since she came here she has done everything to make herself loved. She learned the language perfectly, something the Grand Duke never did. She is strong, beautiful, kind, understanding, wise... She doesn't even remember she was ever German. She is popular. Her husband is hated. She is the mother of the heir to the throne. Her husband is not. She is the mother of the Fatherland! Perfect. If only I could convince her that we are on her side. I am afraid she will not forgive me what I have helped to impose on her.

**Williams.** Where persuasion doesn't work, love might.

**Bestuzhev.** What?

**Williams.** As you told me yourself... the Grand Duchess' life has not been easy. There can be no talk of love between her and the Grand Duke. Her only lover, that Count...



**Bestuzhev.** Saltykov.

**Williams.** That's right. He apparently abandoned her almost two years ago...

**Bestuzhev.** Mmmmm... He was sent away... Saltykov fulfilled his duty. That was his requirement. Then he went on to other duties.

**Williams.** What was that duty? Let me guess: the heir to the throne?

**Bestuzhev.** I said nothing.

**Williams.** I heard nothing. But still, Catherine is a blossoming woman. She's young. Her heart is craving affection. And not just her heart...

**Bestuzhev.** Indeed. So... That's it! We need to find a lover. Someone from the outside. Someone who would work only for us...

**Williams.** Chancellor, perhaps you no longer notice every detail...

*It dawns on Bestuzhev.*

**Bestuzhev.** (*Surprised.*) Your Polish attaché?

**Williams.** (*Smiling. Confirms meaningfully.*) Mm-mm! You didn't know... You are getting old, Chancellor. But that's alright. Nobody knows.

**Bestuzhev.** (*Excitedly.*) Oh, you cunning English... uh, Welsh fox! I have underestimated you.

**Williams.** No, you have underestimated Catherine.

**Bestuzhev.** (*Smiles.*) Have I? Well, since she's been losing so much, perhaps it's the time she won something back...

**Williams.** (*Smiling.*) Something like ten thousand pounds, perhaps... from our Consul Wolf, perhaps.

**Bestuzhev.** (*Smiling.*) Indeed. Sir Charles! Our prospects are not that desperate anymore! Here's to the future!

*They drink again. Williams chokes. Bestuzhev pats him on the back. Lights down.*



**ACT TWO "1756-1761. THE WAR"****SCENE TEN "Queen Beats Jack".**

*Lights come on Bestuzhev and Catherine sitting at a cards table.*

**Bestuzhev.** (*Shuffling a deck of cards.*) It's such a rare occasion that we meet these days.

**Catherine.** God is my witness, it's not my fault, Chancellor. I'm deprived of the pleasure of seeing you, because I'm forbidden to leave my home (*she cuts the cards for Bestuzhev's deal*) and you don't come to visit.

**Bestuzhev.** (*Dealing.*) Alas, Your Highness, the affairs of the state require my attention around the clock and keep me away from your hospitality.

*Enters Shkurin with wine.*

**Catherine.** (*Picking up cards.*) So what happened that you suddenly interrupted your busy schedule and illuminated my idle and otherwise dull existence with your presence? To play cards?

*Shkurin pours wine for Bestuzhev. Pause. Bestuzhev waits. Shkurin exits.*

**Bestuzhev.** You are being unjust to yourself, Your Highness. Your existence is not all that dull. You organised an incredible celebration on Peter and Paul Day. A splendid ball. Such exuberance! Yet you kindly did not invite me.

**Catherine.** (*Putting a card on the table.*) Clubs. I thought you didn't like my company and wouldn't have fun.

*They play.*

**Bestuzhev.** On the contrary, Your Highness, I've been waiting for an invitation for a long time.

**Catherine.** So I have been unjust towards you, Chancellor. I am sorry.

**Bestuzhev.** Oh no, I've been convinced that you had all the company you needed and did not seek your attention. I hear Monsieur Poniatowski frequents your abode...

*Bestuzhev collects the hand.*

**Catherine.** *(Raises eyes from the cards.)* Chancellor, why are you here? After all you've done to me, to my mother..., deprived me of my family, my freedom, now you want to win my money?

**Bestuzhev.** Your Highness, you receive a regular salary from the treasury and the latest gifts from the Empress were rather generous...

**Catherine.** Since you know about my pastime, I'm sure you're aware of my expenses too.

**Bestuzhev.** Yes, your expenses are much higher than your income. That celebration alone was... – Queen of Spades –. You are a serial gambler. And one might think not a good one. You lose a lot. King of Spades.

**Catherine.** You're worried about my losses? Or are you here to increase them?

**Bestuzhev.** What if I'm not a good player myself?

**Catherine.** You? A bad player? *(Laughs.)* I would never believe that.

**Bestuzhev.** I'm flattered, Your Highness. *(Takes the hand again.)* Nevertheless your gambling habits do not so much worry me as they are the source of great concern for our Matushka the Empress, concern and annoyance. And you know how Her Majesty is when she's annoyed.

**Catherine.** Aha, Her Majesty sent you? I hope that Her Majesty in her infinite kindness will find it possible not to deprive me of cards – the only entertainment left to me in this life.

**Bestuzhev.** *(Bestuzhev wipes his neck with a handkerchief.)* Yes...

**Catherine.** Chancellor, I want you to know that I'm past the point of fear. Threats could have worked on me before, when I was a girl. Now I'm the mother of the heir to the Russian throne and I would like you to speak openly. What is it exactly you've come here for?

*Bestuzhev takes the wine glass and takes a deep swig. Clears his throat.*

**Bestuzhev.** Your Highness. I assure you that my visit has nothing to do with Her

Majesty's annoyance. I've come on my own accord. I've come to seek friendship.

**Catherine.** Friendship?

**Bestuzhev.** I wish us to leave our disagreements and grievances in the past.

*They keep playing, throwing the cards on the table.*

**Catherine.** You surrounded me with spies, you took away everyone who became my friend and I don't know what happened to them, where they are... You deprived me of my mother, my only family. You banished her and I don't know if she is alive at all. You've done so for 10 years and now you've come to me to seek friendship?

**Bestuzhev.** You have a good hand, Your Highness. ...Believe me all that was done in the name and for the sake of the higher good of the Empire and was always sanctioned by Her Majesty.

**Catherine.** And designed and carried out by you.

**Bestuzhev.** Yes. But I've come to make amends... This card is yours too.

**Catherine.** Why, Chancellor?

**Bestuzhev.** (*Clears his throat.*) It's precisely because you are the mother of the heir and the only hope for the future of Russia.

*Pause. Enters Shkurin.*

**Shkurin.** Sweets, Your Highness.

**Catherine.** Thank you. Put them on the table over there.

*Shkurin does so.*

**Shkurin.** (*Doing so.*) Will there be anything else, Your Highness?

**Catherine.** No, Vasily. You may go.

*Shkurin exits.*

**Catherine.** I became the mother of the heir two years ago. What happened that you've suddenly discovered I'm the only hope for Russia?

**Bestuzhev.** You wish me to speak openly...

**Catherine.** (*Putting down the cards.*) Yes. I think we've played this game long enough. And you said it yourself – I'm a bad gambler. So I wish to cut my losses, Chancellor.

**Bestuzhev.** I know you play with everyone and you lose a lot... How much did you lose to Shkurin?

**Catherine.** That's my own business.

**Bestuzhev.** But you did play with him...

**Catherine.** He doesn't seem to like cards.

**Bestuzhev.** Alright. (*Lowers his voice.*) That lackey, Vasily Shkurin is a spy.

**Catherine.** (*Also lowers her voice.*) I wonder how you know.

**Bestuzhev.** He's not mine. I have no control over his reports. Every spy I put near you I lost. You won them over. But this jack is from a different deck – he works for Vorontsov and the Shuvalovs'. Beware of him. Now the Shuvalovs feel that the end is near and they have allied with Vorontsov. Their previous spy, Yevreyinov...

**Catherine.** Became my friend...

**Bestuzhev.** Yes. He stopped working for them.

**Catherine.** ...and disappeared. What happened to him?

**Bestuzhev.** I don't know, really. Most probably he was sent away somewhere. Or he might still be in the dungeons of the Secret Chancellery. Now they've planted a new one, that Shkurin, to keep an eye on you. Vorontsov put his niece into your husband's bed to win him over. They are planning to finally destroy your marriage and after Her Majesty's death to use Liza Vorontsova to exclude you and your son from inheritance and make her Grand Duke Peter's wife.

**Catherine.** They can't do that. Tsaritsa Elizabeth has named my son Pavel the heir.

**Bestuzhev.** Yes. But you know our hereditary law. The sovereign appoints the heir and Peter, when he becomes the tsar, can change that, especially after Liza Vorontsova's nightly "persuasive" exercises...

**Catherine.** You're a dirty man, Chancellor.

**Bestuzhev.** (*Naturally.*) I'm a politician. But there's more. Sometimes His Highness recognises Pavel as his son, sometimes he openly calls him a bastard. Peter is unpredictable and might denounce your son as illegitimate.

**Catherine.** Chancellor!

**Bestuzhev.** Please forgive me, Your Highness, but this is the situation. And if Liza Vorontsova brings him a child... What I mean to say is that, as the Chancellor of the

Empire and a subject of the Russian crown, I'm worried about the future of the country. Everybody knows about His Highness' love for Prussia. In case of his accession to the throne, the turn of policy will be severe. It will shake the very core of our Fatherland. It will weaken us. It will create unrest...

**Catherine.** It will destroy you...

**Bestuzhev.** ...And you.

*Short pause.*

I'm talking not to the Grand Duchess right now but to the mother of the future emperor, maybe herself the future empress. Yes, Your Highness. I want you to know that I'm your ally and will do everything possible for that to happen. If you don't believe me, ask Sir Charles, or better still Monsieur Poniatowski. Sir Charles Henbury Williams is my friend, the Pole Stanislaw Poniatowski is his. I believe they are your friends as well. Your friends are my friends.

**Catherine.** I'm deeply moved by your honesty, Aleksei Petrovich. If anything I regret this conversation did not happen earlier. But I still do not understand what is it that you want to do.

**Bestuzhev.** Better late than never. But let me explain, Your Highness. The time for action might be upon us any moment.

**Catherine.** Why do you think so?

**Bestuzhev.** Her Majesty's health is in serious decline, more serious than most people think. I know for sure that she has been fainting frequently and is growing weaker and weaker. That's why she's beginning to think about what is going to happen to the throne after she's gone. She has just visited Prisoner Grigory in the Shlisselburg Fortress.

**Catherine.** Who is Prisoner Grigory?

**Bestuzhev.** The former Emperor Ivan VI.

**Catherine.** Aha. (*Almost to herself.*) "The Brounschweig bastard"...

**Bestuzhev.** She told you about him?

**Catherine.** She mentioned him once in a moment of rage. But why did she call him a bastard? Wasn't he a legitimate son of Anna and Karl?

**Bestuzhev.** I don't know. Her Majesty likes colourful epithets.

**Catherine.** Oh yes, Her Majesty, bless her days, uses a lot of quirky and strange

words when she's angry.

**Bestuzhev.** (*Smirks.*) Yes, she can swing a tirade.

**Catherine.** So he is alive?

**Bestuzhev.** You see, Ivan... "Prisoner Grigory" is apparently a retard. He was never allowed to leave his cell, to learn to read or write, see anyone but his jailer or know his own name. Since he was four.

**Catherine.** He grew up in a cell in a fortress?

**Bestuzhev.** Pretty much. Recently I heard Her Majesty saying in relation to your husband: "I'm worried about one thing! My freak nephew will plunder everything and put everything to shame. And he will hate everything that I loved and he will love everything that I hate... He cannot be allowed close to the throne!" And next, for the first time ever, the Empress decides to visit "Prisoner Grigory" whom she locked up and threw away the key 16 years ago. Because queen beats jack, unless jack becomes a trump card.

**Catherine.** But you said that he's a retard. How could he be a danger?

**Bestuzhev.** He's a legitimate contender for the throne of the Russian Empire. What I'm afraid of is that in the hour of Her Majesty's possible incapacitation, the Shuvalovs and the Vorontsovs might force her to change the will. That would spell a sorry end for His Highness the Grand Duke and, along with him...

**Catherine.** My son, myself...

**Bestuzhev.** And myself.

**Catherine.** But there is another possibility. Her Majesty might make my son the tsar instead of my husband.

**Bestuzhev.** Perhaps that would be an ideal. An infant tsar would require a regent and it would have to be you. But Vorontsov and the Shuvalovs will never agree to that. Please remember what happened to Ivan VI when he became an Emperor at the age of one. A strong resolution from one woman and the support of the Royal Guard and he's still in the fortress today.

**Catherine.** In order to win with Vorontsov and the Shuvalovs, I need to be quicker than them. I need immediate and reliable information about Her Majesty's state of health. So that when the hour is upon us I can be the first to secure my son and her will. I need to buy off a lot of servants in the palace.

**Bestuzhev.** I asked you whether you played cards with Shkurin for a reason. He might cost more than others.

**Catherine.** Why are you so sure that he is a spy. After all you didn't appoint him.

**Bestuzhev.** Your Highness, did you buy a measure of brocade as a gift for Her Majesty's upcoming Angel Day?

*Catherine is astonished.*

Were you planning to improve your relationship with her? It would have been a nice surprise and I am sure it would have pleased Her Majesty. But she already knows about it and by the day she will lose interest. Your cost was in vain. You may believe me now or wait for the reception.

**Catherine.** I simply don't have enough money to pay everyone, to please everyone, to win everyone...

**Bestuzhev.** (*Showing his cards.*) Oh, Your Highness, but you've won this hand.

**Catherine.** What?

**Bestuzhev.** I don't even have the colour. This is yours.

*He pushes the money across the table to Catherine.*

And Sir Charles will deliver more.

**Catherine.** I thought I had a bad hand...

**Bestuzhev.** This money is courtesy of Sir Charles. May such luck accompany you always. I will not take much more of your time. I only wish to assure you of my absolute loyalty and hope that you accept my friendship.

**Catherine.** I am very grateful to you, Chancellor. Thank you.

*Bestuzhev bows. Catherine allows him to kiss her hand.*

**Bestuzhev.** I will not see you very often. It is better for our cause. But we can correspond through Monsieur Poniatowski.

*Bestuzhev exits. Shkurin enters.*

**Shkurin.** Shall I take the tea set away, Your Highness?

**Catherine.** Yes. Vasily.



**Shkurin.** Yes, Your Highness.

**Catherine.** You come into my rooms, you accompany me in my life. You look after me.

**Shkurin.** That's my job, Your Highness.

**Catherine.** You replaced a good friend of mine, who was banished for his loyal service. You are probably aware of it. It was a high price and I never expect you or anyone else to do the same... Have I done you anything wrong, Vasily?

**Shkurin.** No, Your Highness. You are incredibly kind to me. And I am grateful.

**Catherine.** Why do you harm me then?

**Shkurin.** Your Highness, I would never... ever...

**Catherine.** You would never...?

**Shkurin.** You are wrong about me. I am...

**Catherine.** A loyal servant. I know.

*Pause.*

Tell me then how did Her Majesty learn about the surprise gift of brocades I was preparing for her Angel Day?

*Pause.*

Am I wrong?

**Shkurin.** (*Falls on his knees.*) Matushka, Your Highness, please have mercy on me!

**Catherine.** Her Majesty doesn't trust me. Our relationship soured for many reasons. Do you realise how hard it is to win a mother-in-law over? Especially such as Her Majesty. I spent my last money on something that would surprise her and please her. I know why you're sent here and what you have to do and I don't hold it against you. But why this? Why did you have to deprive me of a chance to fix my relations with Her Majesty, at least a little? Why so low?

**Shkurin.** I swear it was a mistake. Your Highness, please hear me out.

**Catherine.** I'm listening.

**Shkurin.** Matushka the Empress and the Grand Inquisitor did tell me to spy on you. Your Highness, I have a family... The Shuvalovs keep telling her that you are Prussian through and through like your husband and you cannot be trusted. And I'm

supposed to bring proof. But since I've been in your service I saw they were wrong about you. Your husband, His Highness the Grand Duke, he talks to me obscenities in German and beats me with a stick and calls me a Slav swine. But you are different. You speak our language, you treat me like a person, like no one does. I never wish to do anything against you...

**Catherine.** So why have you?

**Shkurin.** If I did then, it was because of my stupidity. I never told them anything. I just kept reporting on your card partners, constitutionals, horse riding. So they became suspicious and warned me: "if you don't do your job, you'll be gone." I thought I could not tell them about the visits from the English ambassador or his secretary... Poniatowski... or that you receive money from them or anything that I thought would make them more suspicious. I thought that the brocade purchase was innocent enough... That's the only thing... I never thought it would be so important...

**Catherine.** Get up. (*Shkurin gets up from his knees.*) Remember there's nothing more important to me than Her Majesty's regard?

**Shkurin.** Your Highness, I will do anything to amend my mistake. Only say it. Your regard is the most important to me.

**Catherine.** Is that really the only thing you divulged about me?

**Shkurin.** I swear. (*He crosses himself.*) I never told about anything else, neither about the English ambassador, nor about your correspondence or about the banker. And they will never learn from me about your card game with the Chancellor, nothing. I swear on my family. Believe me or kill me.

**Catherine.** Thank you, Vasily.

*Catherine exits. Shkurin makes a big sigh of relief.*

**Shkurin.** Brocades, surprise gifts... My god! How is one to live here? How can one remain honest? To be loyal, you must be a traitor. To be a traitor, you have to be loyal. Lord, why is this cross upon me? Thank you, Your Majesty... thank you so much for your kindness and generosity...

**SCENE ELEVEN "It's War!"**

*Royal chamber. Williams enters. He is upset. He stops for a moment, closes his eyes, regains composure and goes to cross the stage. Enters Bestuzhev.*

**Bestuzhev.** Sir Charles! What happened?

**Williams.** You don't know? I'm ruined.

**Bestuzhev.** Why so gloomy?

**Williams.** So you don't know. I'm sorry, my friend I must leave now... There's so much packing to be done.

**Bestuzhev.** Packing? What are you talking about?

**Williams.** Oh, Chancellor, please believe me that I have been and will remain your and Her Highness' loyalest of friends. But this is out of my control... I must go. I'm so sorry! I swear I did not know about all of this. It happened behind my back.

**Bestuzhev.** It looks like all of this is happening behind my back too. What is it?

*Enters Vorontsov.*

**Vorontsov.** Sir, ambassador, are you still here?

**Williams.** *(To Bestuzhev.)* I'm sorry. Don't believe anything they tell you about me. Farewell.

*Williams exits hastily.*

**Bestuzhev.** What is this about?

**Vorontsov.** *(Smiling.)* You don't know. Everything in its due time.

**Bestuzhev.** How dare you speak to me like this! I am the Chancellor of the Empire. I demand you answer.

**Vorontsov.** Oh "demand"! Your demanding days are over, Petrovich. Gone. You've drunk them away with that Williams of yours. He's been thrown out, you have only one day before you'll have to drink alone.

**Bestuzhev.** What do you mean "he's been thrown out"? Who decided?

**Vorontsov.** So many questions that need answering...

**Bestuzhev.** What have you conjured up?

**Vorontsov.** Me? (*Laughs.*) I'm just a little man. What can I conjure up? I'm only a Vice Chancellor...

**Bestuzhev.** Stop playing the fool.

**Vorontsov.** Alright. Your system has crashed, Petrovich. You forgot that the road is never straight and didn't even notice the ravine ahead... The British have returned our secret Declaration, telling us to stick it you know where... The treaty, they said, is as is and no additions are accepted. It's an offense to Her Majesty.

**Bestuzhev.** That Declaration is of your making. As for the Brits sending it back, no matter. They'll pose a bit and the whole matter will dissipate.

**Vorontsov.** Do you think so?

**Bestuzhev.** I do think so. My system is solid as rock.

**Vorontsov.** Alright then. We shall see.

**Bestuzhev.** We shall. What's with Ambassador Williams.

**Vorontsov.** Ah, Williams? He must leave St Petersburg within 24 hours.

**Bestuzhev.** What nonsense!

**Vorontsov.** I'd be more careful if I were you. That is Her Majesty's order. An ambassador of an enemy must leave.

**Bestuzhev.** Enemy?

**Vorontsov.** Petrovich, I almost pity you... While you were smooching with your British drinking buddy, he slipped his attaché into the Grand Duchess's bed and sent regular reports on your secret dealings to Frederick in Prussia.

**Bestuzhev.** (*Stunned.*) Regular...?

**Vorontsov.** Clockwork.

**Bestuzhev.** Who says so?

**Vorontsov.** Count Shuvalov, the head of the Secret Chancellery. He presented Williams' entire secret correspondence with Frederick to Her Majesty today. I'm surprised she didn't send him to Peter and Paul Fortress right away. The Inquisitor would have had a field day with so many answers to so many interesting questions. Especially about you. All four of you...

*Enter Inquisitor, Peter and Elizabeth with Shuvalov. Shuvalov is supporting Elizabeth who is visibly unwell. Bestuzhev and Vorontsov bow to the Empress. They walk past Bestuzhev without noticing him. Vorontsov joins them. As a result*

*Bestuzhev is left alone, inclined. Elizabeth sits and so do others at her side.*

**Elizabeth.** *(To Bestuzhev.)* Ah, you here, shameless?

**Bestuzhev.** Matushka, I arrived at your command.

**Elizabeth.** Good. Sit down.

*Bestuzhev sits down.*

**Elizabeth.** Petrovich, where's that treaty with the King of England. *Bestuzhev opens*

*his folder and brings the treaty to Elizabeth with a bow.* **Bestuzhev.** Here it is, Your

Majesty. I met the British ambassador Sir Williams just now...

**Elizabeth.** Don't mention that treacherous name to me anymore. *(She points to him to sit.)*

*Bestuzhev returns to his sit.*

Sirs, High Conference. I want to hear what you say about this paper now.

**Shuvalov.** Your Majesty, this subsidy treaty that buys our army to defend Hannover for the King of England against France and its ally Prussia is a promissory note, signed by us in good faith and honesty and belief that we and England stand together against our common enemies. However, since the King of England signed the same treaty with Prussia, he allied himself with our enemy and put us in a shameful situation alongside the Prussian thief...

**Bestuzhev.** Since we take money from England, she, naturally, has the right to send our troops where she needs them. Otherwise, what are we, sirs High Conference, without her subsidies? I see no shame in it for Russia. On our demand the British cabinet gave explanations. They say that the King of England counted on the treaty with our sovereign in case Frederick did not fulfil his obligations.

**Shuvalov.** You see no shame in it for Russia? What kind of expression should we have when we take this money for the lives of our men?

**Bestuzhev.** We shall take the money with an indifferent expression, as if we don't

need it at all.

**Shuvalov.** The Anglo-Russian alliance has been crossed out by the agreement between Prussia and England and it is not becoming of the Chancellor of such a great country as Russia to abase himself for money. Your policies would be much better, had you not had a private interest in this!

**Bestuzhev.** Slander me thus and I will treat you with my stick. I get payments as a sign of respect for our great Empire, your Shuvalovs clan holds monopolies and sells everything to everyone!

**Shuvalov.** Come on, bring out your stick!

**Inquisitor.** (*Calmly.*) Chancellor. Leave our Shuvalov clan out of this. Get back to the problem at hand.

*Short pause.*

**Vorontsov.** People are the principal strength of the state and it should be spent with conscious moderation. Thanks to God, we are not some German kurfürsts who sell their peasants abroad and profit from their mutilation. This mean custom is not for us. Our soldiers must not die far away somewhere on the Rhein or devil knows where or for what...? For Austrian interests! Prussian...!

**Shuvalov.** Especially now.

**Vorontsov.** Yes, especially now.

**Inquisitor.** Yes.

**Peter.** That's right. They should die in a war with Denmark for my Duchy Holstein!

**Elizabeth.** (*To Peter.*) Not now.

**Bestuzhev.** Why now?

**Shuvalov.** What do you mean "why"? You don't know?

**Bestuzhev.** Don't know what?

**Shuvalov.** The Prussian king has invaded Saxony. The King of Poland fled with his army from Potsdam to the mountains.

*Bestuzhev is stunned for a moment.*

**Bestuzhev.** Invaded Saxony?

**Vorontsov.** Where have you been, Chancellor?

**Peter.** Ha ha! Look at him! Aunty, he's the lover of Bacchus more than I, but you keep accusing me of drunkenness.

**Elizabeth.** Peter dear, close your hole, would you? Well, Petrovich...? Now you know?

**Bestuzhev.** Yes, Your Majesty. Now I know. I can see clearly now. (*Looks around.*) I can see everyone. But that you (*to Vorontsov*), Vice-Chancellor, dared to keep me in the dark about such an important development... Your Majesty...!

**Elizabeth.** Petrovich, don't wear me out. You pushed me into the friendship with the English and they betrayed us. Now don't cry. You've become slack, Chancellor. We need your work now, not your tears. So be so kind and pull yourself together.

**Bestuzhev.** Of course. (*Clears his throat.*) By invading Saxony, King Frederick thus attacked our important neighbour Poland. The interest and safety of the Empire demand that such dangerous actions not be looked upon indifferently. If my neighbour's home is on fire, I must then, naturally, for my own safety, help him to put out that fire, even if he were my enemy, and I am doubly obliged if he is my friend.

**Peter.** Yes. Yes. A fire is very interesting. I saw one a few days ago. The house of some merchant's was burning. The flames went up right into the sky! People ran out like cockroaches. They tried and tried and tried to put it out but it burnt right down to the ground.

*Silence.*

**Bestuzhev.** Your Majesty, please consider my draft proposition. (*He pulls out a document from his folder.*) Allow me. (*Reads.*) "The goals of the future conflict as stated at the conference by Aleksei Petrovich Bestuzhev."

**Vorontsov.** You have a draft proposition? Already?

*Pause. Everyone looks at Bestuzhev. Bestuzhev looks at Elizabeth. She is enjoying the situation.*

**Bestuzhev.** (*To the conference.*) What are you all staring at me for? If we are to fight Frederick now, well, hasn't it been me who was always against Prussia? Of course I have one. Allow me, Your Majesty.

**Elizabeth.** Go on, Petrovich.

**Bestuzhev.** (*Reads.*) “We must, having weakened the Prussian king, make him non-fearful and non-troublesome to us; strengthen the Vienna court by returning Silesia to them and thus making our alliance against the Turks more important and desired for them; by delivering the Kingdom of Prussia to Poland, gain, in return, from her not only Courland but also such rounding-up of her borders, which would not only put an end to our ceaseless trouble over them but also gain a way of connecting the trade routes of the Baltic and the Black seas and hold them in our hands.”

**Peter.** We cannot go against the Greatest King of all. Our army isn’t worth one regiment of King Frederick’s grenadiers. He is a brilliant soldier himself and everyone should submit to him.

**Elizabeth.** Peter dear, wait a while.

**Vorontsov.** Does the state of our empire allow such an expenditure in money and men?

**Elizabeth.** Is that your answer, Vice-Chancellor?

**Vorontsov.** I simply think we should consider the cost of such a war.

**Elizabeth.** Inquisitor? What do you think?

**Inquisitor.** It would be superfluous to argue how detrimental to Her Imperial Majesty’s interests is the strengthening of the King of Prussia. Our allies suffer from his aggression and, having not enough strength to throw the invader from their lands, beg us for help. It is our sacred duty to help them in times of grief. Frederick sees his conquest as the only way his house can survive. And he sees Russia as the sole danger. In his letters and conversations the king allows himself to badmouth Your Majesty, using words that aren’t acceptable even at the market stalls and might only be heard in soldiers quarters...

**Peter.** I know them. For an example the word “c...”

**Elizabeth.** Peter!!

**Inquisitor.** Being fearful of Her Majesty’s wrath, Frederick still shows his outmost disrespect and allows those expressions to be published. (*Producing a piece of paper.*) This is what he wrote to his friend: (*reads*) “The stakes are the very survival of the Brandenburg House. Can I remain calm? I already have France and Austria on my hands. What will happen when I have to defend myself from Russia as well? Had Empress Elizabeth been so kind as to die or at least sit quietly, I wouldn’t be afraid of any other enemies.”



**Bestuzhev.** *(He pulls out the document from his folder.)* We still have this treaty with England, signed and sealed. What are we to do with it?

**Elizabeth.** Give it to me, Petrovich.

*Elizabeth tears the agreement into pieces and throws them to the floor.*

**Elizabeth.** Today, people! We must bring France into an alliance with ourselves and Austria, - a triple alliance, fearsome for the godless Frederick. I suspect the king hasn't been to church once! The Fritz in Berlin has created a new fashion: sees something nice next door and takes it by force. Force is only then good in politics when you are in the right. Russia is in the right: we shall not stay calm until we pour the Prussian wish wash into its old bellows, so it goes sour in there. *(Calmly.)* Fight Frederick we shall, despite of all treaties with England. As for London's pettifoggery about that Hannover of theirs... The King of England won't get a chewed-up fig from me. I will not give him soldiers and that's final! Russian soldiers are required for Russian needs... And I won't take their money for them either! The army is to gather in Riga and march on to Prussia. Sirs High Conference, I expect an appointment of a worthy commander for the army. Who is going to lead us to the victory?

**Vorontsov.** Munnich is old.

**Shuvalov.** And German.

**Peter.** But German...

**Elizabeth and Shuvalov.** Peter!/Your Highness!

**Bestuzhev.** Field Marshal Apraksin, Your Majesty.

**Elizabeth.** Where shall we beat this Herod?

**Inquisitor.** Your Majesty, we should seek permission from Poland for our troops to pass through their territory and direct our attack from Riga. And beat the enemy in his teeth at Konigsberg.

**Elizabeth.** It's settled then. It's war!

*She gets up but suddenly is too weak and falls back into the chair. Shuvalov rushes to her to help her up.*

Don't! I can do it myself.

*She gets up. Everyone bows. She walks off accompanied by Shuvalov. Bestuzhev exits hastily.*

**Vorontsov.** The old man is tricky. Look how he's run. I wish I knew where to...

**Inquisitor.** You'd like to take Bestuzhev's place, wouldn't you?

**Vorontsov.** For sure. What is it to you?

**Inquisitor.** Nothing. Good luck...

*Sounds of an army on the march, horses, carts, yells of soldiers, clanking of ammunition, then the battle begins, cannons fire, cavalry charges, swords clash against each other, rifle salvos, explosions, screams of pain and "hurrahs".*

## **SCENE TWELVE "On Poniatowski"**

*A pavilion in the Oranienbaum Park. Night. Enter two Holstein guards with sabres bare. They drug Poniatowski by the scruff of the neck. Poniatowski is dressed in dark cloths, a grey hat and a dark cape thrown over his shoulders. He looks like a night thief. Enter Peter.*

**Guard.** Your Highness. This one was caught sneaking in the park. He was peering into windows. We think he's a thief.

**Peter.** Oh, thief? Hey, thief, take off your hat. Let us see your face.

**Poniatowski.** I would but my hands are tied.

*Peter makes a sign and the guard take off Poniatowski's hat.*

**Peter.** Ah, I think I know this night thief. *(Smiles.)* Herr Poniatowski!

**Poniatowski.** I prefer Pan or Monsieur.

**Peter.** *(To the guards.)* He prefers. *(The guards laugh.)* So Monsieur...

**Poniatowski.** Poniatowski, the plenipotentiary consul of the King of Saxony and Poland in St Petersburg.

**Peter.** Oho. Chancellor Brule must have appreciated all the jokes you told about him here and gave you a rank. So what where you doing under my windows at night,

Monsieur plenipotentiary of the King of Saxony and Poland? Your King has fled. The Great Frederick of Prussia has driven him into a hole in the mountains and is now eating off his china in Potsdam. In the meantime his ambassador, or consul or what was it?, sneaks under my windows. What were you looking for? The window of my wife's bedroom perhaps? I knew you two were screwing behind my back. You have been caught. There's no point in denying. Have you slept with my wife?

**Poniatowski.** No.

**Peter.** You'd better tell me the truth. Do tell and the situation will still be solvable. But if you start denying, you will not have a good time here.

**Poniatowski.** I can't tell you that I did what I did not.

**Peter.** Alright. Since you don't want to talk, you will remain here until further instructions.

*Peter leaves. Poniatowski is left with a guard. They sit in silence. Long pause. Enter Inquisitor.*

**Inquisitor.** (*Surprised.*) Eh... Sir...ah...Poniatowski? (*Poniatowski rises.*) I was dispatched here to investigate... The Grand Duke came to Her Majesty... He said there was a thief... But I came in and saw you... Would you be so kind to explain... What has happened here?

**Poniatowski.** I hope, Count, that you understand that the honour of your court demands that this all be finished without excessive noise and that you release me from here as soon as possible.

**Inquisitor.** Eh...you...mmmm...eh...are right. I shall...eh... attend to it immediately.

*Inquisitor leaves. Pause. Enter Peter.*

**Peter.** (*To the guard.*) Leave us. (*Cheerful.*) Aren't you just mad! You only needed to admit it straight away and all of this nonsense wouldn't have happened...

**Poniatowski.** Well, of course. I hope Your Highness understands...

**Peter.** Oh yes, yes. But say it. You slept with my wife.

**Poniatowski.** Yes.

**Peter.** Oh you naughty boy.

**Poniatowski.** I must say that I was no match to your cunning and tactical foresight.

Your actions after you stopped my carriage were incredibly prudent. It is amazing how you knew it wasn't a tailor in that carriage.

**Peter.** Ah, yes. And Liza was very sharp too. I said to her: "A tailor? At this time of the night? Going to see my wife?"

*They laugh.*

**Poniatowski.** And you dispatched your guards to follow the "tailor".

**Peter.** I love a good hunt!

**Poniatowski.** Your jaegers were efficient and precise! I didn't even notice them following me. I just turned around the corner and suddenly they rose in front of me like some giants out of nowhere!

**Peter.** They are good aren't they?

**Poniatowski.** Are they your famous Holstein guards?

**Peter.** Yes, indeed. The cream of Holstein manhood! The true Germans.

**Poniatowski.** Trained by and under the command of the truest of them all!

**Peter.** Brilliant! You are a likable person after all, Monsieur Poniatowski. Brilliant. Although I can only contend for the second place in this ranking. The best German is the Great Frederic.

**Poniatowski.** Ah!

**Peter.** So now as we are such good friends, I believe there's someone missing here!.. Don't you think?

**Poniatowski.** Who? Please stop intriguing me.

**Peter.** (*Wagging his finger.*) Ah, you'll see.

*He leaves. Pause. Poniatowski looks around searches for an escape route but there is none. The door is locked and the windows are closed. Peter returns pushing Catherine before him. He pulled her from her bed. She has a gown thrown over her shoulders that covers her sleeping gown. She is barefoot.*

**Peter.** Well, here she is. I hope now they will be pleased with me... (*Spiteful.*) So now, my children, I suppose you do not need me anymore...

*Peter exits. Poniatowski rushes to Catherine. Embraces her, kisses her hands, her*

*face – insatiable.*

**Poniatowski.** (*Kissing Catherine.*) Oh, my love. How I've been missing you. Every moment without you is a torture.

**Catherine.** You should have had more sense. Why have you come here like this? Why have you allowed to be caught?

**Poniatowski.** Yes, when I saw Inquisitor Shuvalov at the door I thought it was the end.

**Catherine.** It is so foolish!

**Poniatowski.** Yes, my love. But I needed to see you one last time.

**Catherine.** What are you talking about?

**Poniatowski.** My king sent me an order to return home immediately.

**Catherine.** How dares he!

**Poniatowski.** I am sure it is the Shuvalov's plotting against me so they can hurt you. They told my court about certain expressions I used describing Brule and the king. The letter from my chancellor Brule was most unkind. I am accused of defamation of the King of Poland. That Saxonian fop should never be the king of my country. He cares not for Poland!

**Catherine.** Are you leaving?

**Poniatowski.** I must obey the order.

**Catherine.** You're leaving...

**Poniatowski.** Yes.

**Catherine.** You cannot go.

**Poniatowski.** I must depart right away if I'm to avoid arrest.

**Catherine.** No, you're not going.

**Poniatowski.** Oh, my heart. I'm so sorry!

**Catherine.** They cannot take you away from me! No one will dare to arrest you here.

I'm not letting you go!

**Poniatowski.** Vorontsov told me that my "actions" here are detrimental to the relations with Saxony. There was a badly veiled threat in his words. I must leave for a while.

**Catherine.** No!

**Poniatowski.** I love you. I will do everything... I will return...

**Catherine.** You can't go!

**Poniatowski.** When circumstances change...

**Catherine.** Don't go!

**Poniatowski.** I'll come back.

*He disappears.*

**Catherine.** Don't leave me alone! (*Cries.*) I'm carrying your child...

*Catherine cries. In another part of the stage Elizabeth and Shuvalov.*

### **SCENE THIRTEEN "The Plot"**

*Catherine and Williams.*

**Williams.** Your Highness, I've come to say goodbye. I cannot stay in St Petersburg anymore. My country has allied with your enemy and the Embassy has to close. This is possibly the last time we see each other, although I hope it would not be true.

**Catherine.** Sir Charles, I can't express enough how grieved I am at this unfortunate turn of circumstances.

**Williams.** I'm leaving with sadness and concern for your safety. Powerful forces are working against you, Your Highness. The Shuvalovs are making plans to leave you out of any succession options. They wish to rule themselves after Elizabeth's death as regents over your little son. One can only imagine what they have to do to you. Perhaps you should make contingencies in case you need to save yourself. I can ask my king for your protection.

**Catherine.** Ivan the Terrible wanted to flee to England once. I don't intend to ask the King of England for asylum. It will be my fault if they win. Be assured that I will not play the calm and weak role which Adolf-Frederick plays in Sweden. Deep inside my heart there has always been something that never allowed me to doubt that sooner or later I would manage to become the autocratic sovereign of Russia. I will never allow a limit to royal power. I will either reign or perish.

**Williams.** I am awed by your courage, Your Highness. I only see the need to caution you against an excessive reliance on the believe that the Empress, either because of her laziness or her sympathies for her nephews, would not change the order of succession. If she never sees the Grand Duke, if his words are not related to her truly, if she's not aware of His Highness' actions, if only his enemies have access to her ears and whisper to her against him and yourself, then her suspicion might overwhelm her most tender feelings for you.

**Catherine.** You are right, Sir Charles. But believe me, even if the Shuvalovs force the ill Empress to sign a manifesto about the change of the heir, she will not publish it. Only after her death the document will be read out over her body, which can always be stopped. When I receive the unmistakable news of her agony, I will go straight to my son's room. If I meet Aleksei Razumovsky, I will leave him by the little Paul's side, if not I will take the child into my room. I will not let happen to him what happened to the little Ivan. At the same time I will send a trusted person with a signal to five officers of the guard, who each will bring 50 soldiers who will listen only to mine or the Grand Duke's orders. Next I will go to the dying Empress' room and make the Captain of the guard to give an oath to me and leave him by my side. If I notice a smallest movement, I will arrest the Shuvalovs. I have arraigned it with the lieutenant-colonel of the Izmailovsky Regiment Kirilla Razumovsky. He swore to bring to our side Buturlin, Trubetskoi and even Vorontsov. I have bribed the empress' maids to inform me of a slightest movement around her and particularly if Ivan Shuvalov starts writing anything in front of the Empress. You can see, Sir Charles, where that money you gave me went. And, as uneasy as it makes me asking you about it, we will need a lot more before it's over.

**Williams.** I understand.

*He produces a bag.*

**Catherine.** Only, Sir Charles. I cannot have such sums in my possession. Every little corner of my apartments is checked daily. I need to be able to operate discretely.

**Williams.** (*Taking the bag away.*) In that case... Since Our friend Stanislaw is gone... Do you have a trusted person who could go to the city freely, without arousing suspicion?

**Catherine.** Yes.

**Williams.** Then my council, a Jew by the name of Wolf...

**Catherine.** I know. He runs a bank.

**Williams.** Your Highness is so well informed!

**Catherine.** Ambassador, I have a personal request. Would you please deliver my letter to Stanislaw?

**Williams.** I will be delighted, Your Highness.

**Catherine.** Only not via the diplomatic post.

**Williams.** Of course. It will be delivered by a trusted courier.

**Catherine.** I'm very grateful to you, Sir Charles. And know this. The fault will lie with me if we are overcome.

*Williams bows and leaves.*

**Catherine.** When will the old fat bitch finally die! What? Too harsh? Fifteen years of rudeness, abuse, interference in my private life... *(She smirks bitterly.)* What life? I have none. Only prison. And now that I finally found my love, it's taken away from me. Harsh? I want to live. I want to love. I want to be able to go where I want. Do what I want. I want to be free! I can see it now. The whole empire is a prison. Even kings are in prison here. Some are prisoners of court, others are in the Schlisselburg Fortress. This will change!

*"In London, trying to prove his mission to Russia was not a failure, Sir Charles Hanbury Williams produced a letter from Catherine, in which she promised to fix the relationship with England when on the throne. No one was interested. Sir Williams quickly succumbed to a mental condition and committed suicide. But first:"*  
*Paintings of battles of the Seven Years' War appear in collages. Inscription:*  
*"Gross-Egersdorf".*

## **SCENE FOURTEEN "Delivery"**

*Enter Shkurin, puffing, he has been running.*



**Shkurin.** I went to visit my brother-in-law. He serves in Her Majesty's palace. Her Majesty suddenly regained her consciousness after three days. First thing they told her that our army won the battle at Gross-Egersdorf, the Prussians took flight and the Burgermeister of Konigsberg brought the keys to the city out for Field-Marshal Apraksin, which made her rejoice and Her Majesty even got on her feet. But the Burgermeister never saw Field-Marshal or any of the Russian troops. Apraksin turned the army around and fled from the Eastern Prussia despite the victory! Apparently he quit everything: cannons, ammunition, horses. And the army retreated back to Riga. The word is that the Field-Marshal got scared when he heard that Her Majesty had had a stroke. That he thought that Her Majesty died and His Highness the Grand Duke was the new Emperor and he would execute him for a victory over the Prussians. When Her Majesty heard about the retreat, she cried: "Treason!", fainted but then rose again and ordered Apraksin to be arrested and she ordered to summon Chancellor Bestuzhev because they were friends and in correspondence. But the Chancellor said he was ill and that mightily angered Her Majesty. She put him under arrest.

**Catherine.** Bestuzhev?

*Shkurin nods frantically. Catherine holds her belly. She slumps down on a chair. She is in pain and cannot find a comfortable position but keeps composure.*

**Shkurin.** They've put him under the house arrest. My brother-in-law knows one officer guarding Chancellor's house. I gathered that it would be in the interest of Your Highness that I find out as much as I could. So I asked him if anything could be done for the guarding officer, like a nice piece of pastry that my wife could bake for him, perhaps a nice flask of vodka... My brother-in-law said he would find out and went to see that officer. He went and I stayed behind in the Winter Palace waiting. An hour later he returned and said nothing was required only a little money and that has a note to be delivered to Your Highness from Chancellor Bestuzhev. I thanked him and said that Your Highness was sure to find a way to reward their services. I took the note and rushed here as fast as I could so I could give you the note before anyone comes asking...

**Catherine.** (*Screams.*) So what is in it?!!

**Shkurin.** Do you wish me to read it?

*Catherine moans.*

Right. (*Reads.*) “Your Highness, please be assured that you are safe. I have burnt everything.”

*Catherine takes a deep breath. Obviously contractions seized.*

**Catherine.** (*Breathing heavily.*) Vasily, my friend, clean sheets...

**Shkurin.** Oh. Oh! Has it begun? Clean sheets... of course, and water... In a jiffy.

*He goes to exit.*

**Catherine.** Vasily!

**Shkurin.** Ah?

**Catherine.** Sent to tell Her Majesty.

**Shkurin.** Aha.

**Catherine.** Before you do... burn the note.

**Shkurin.** Oh, right.

*Shkurin burns the paper over the candle.*

*Peter enters dressed in a parade Holstein uniform. He is dressed in jackboots with spurs. A scarf around his waist. A huge sword is at his waist. He is drunk. Shkurin turns around to face him with a burning note in his hand.*

**Peter.** (*To Shkurin.*) Sie! Schwein!

**Shkurin.** Ja vol, Herr Your Highness.

**Peter.** (*Points at the paper on fire in Shkurin's hand.*) Was ist das?

**Shkurin.** (*Looks at the paper.*) Ah... This is the list of my chores for tomorrow.

**Peter.** It's on fire.

**Shkurin.** Really? Lucky I remember them by heart.

**Peter.** It's a nice blaze...

*The fire burns Shkurin fingers and drops it on the floor.*

You want to burn our house down?!

**Shkurin.** (*Stomping on the ashes to put it out.*) No, I swear! It was an accident.

**Peter.** Rause hier!

*Shkurin bows and shoots out into the wings.*

Your Highness, I'm here to protect you.

**Catherine.** What is the reason for such an elaborate dress?

**Peter.** It's only in trouble when you know who's your real friend. Wearing this dress, I am ready to act according to my duty. The duty of a Holstein officer is to defend his house from all enemies. Once I heard you were not well I hurried to your aid.

**Catherine.** I'm not unwell. I'm in labour.

**Peter.** Precisely. It's a very vulnerable position. And enemies are all around. I saw them surrounding the palace. They hide behind bushes in the park. Did you see that saboteur with the fire just then? You need protection.

**Catherine.** I am very grateful, Your Highness. But I what I need more is a doctor right now. And I'm sure the Royal Guards can protect us.

**Peter.** What if they ARE the enemy?

**Catherine.** Your Highness, I suggest you go to bed. Her Majesty is about to come here and we don't want to give her a double displeasure of seeing you here drunk, armed from head to toe and wearing the Holstein uniform which she hates so much.

**Peter.** I'm telling you, enemies are lurking in the corner...

**Catherine.** Your Highness, please...

**Peter.** No. I am at my post now! I shall guard my wife and the child. I'll stay by this door and will not let anyone in!

**Catherine.** Your Highness! Do you really want to bring the Empress' anger upon us? I can hear someone coming in the corridor.

**Peter.** No. (*Pacing.*) My wife is pregnant! There will be a child! Devil only knows where does she get those pregnancies... That's right. Where? I want to know. Yes. (*To Catherine. Menacing.*) Where? I want to know.

**Catherine.** Please, Your Highness, not now...

**Peter.** I demand an answer!

**Catherine.** Alright. Your Highness, swear right here and now that you have not slept with me!

**Peter.** Go to hell.

*Catherine crosses herself.*

**Peter.** Oh, what a disgusting thing to do. You and this barbarian religion of yours! With its stupid rituals, churches choking you with smoke and people on their knees. These priests with their beards long as horses' tails howling at their masses, (*grimaces*) and everyone trembles. This idiotic fasting. "Oh, you can't eat meat on Friday..." I eat meat whenever I bloody want! It is so fucking backward. Oh how I loathe it! You hate it too. Only you know how to lie. And you lie...

**Catherine.** Your Highness, Orthodox Christianity is the religion and custom of this country, of which you will be the tsar one day – Anointed Sovereign...

**Peter.** When I become the "Anointed Sovereign" of this country, I will break its neck. There'll be no more orthodoxy! No more clergy! No more of these Russian slaves all around. And I will break you...

*Enters Shkurin with water and sheets.*

**Peter.** (*Pointing his sword at him. Menacingly.*) You, slave...! What, do you want?

**Shkurin.** (*Bows.*) Your Highness, a baby is about to come to this world. It requires a little help. (*To Catherine.*) Her Majesty and the royal doctors are on their way.

**Peter.** (*To Shkurin.*) You wretched swine! You traitor! You betrayed our hideout!...

**Catherine.** (*Interrupting.*) Your Highness, Her Majesty is on her way...

**Peter.** (*Rushing to Catherine.*) Your Highness, I don't want to see her. She is frightening. She wants to eat me alive. Can I hide under your bed?

**Shkurin.** (*To Peter.*) Your Highness, let me show you another exit. I'll lead you into another corridor away from Her Majesty.

**Peter.** Oh, you're a real friend...eh...

**Shkurin.** (*Taking Peter by the arm and showing him a way out.*) Shkurin, Your Highness, Vasily Shkurin...

*They exit.*

**Catherine.** Oh...

*Blackout. Catherine screams. Then a child screams.*

## **SCENE FIFTEEN "13(24) April 1758. "Showdown at the Empress"**

*Catherine is in bed covered with sheets. Enters Liza.*

**Liza.** What, in bed already. Alone? Ah, your Pole is gone finally. *(With disgust.)* Why don't you open your windows? Oh this chair must not stand by the mirror. Its place is by the door. *(She moves a chair.)* Look at the upholstery. It fits the wall over there. And what on earth possessed you to put the pier-glass in the corner. Its place is between the windows where there's more light. *(She's by the dressing table.)* Ugh, this perfume is disgusting. When you're gone, I'll turn this room into a beautiful boudoir. You have no taste... You really need to open windows. It's hard to breathe in here. Ah! You've run out of servants? No one's left to empty the piss pot.

**Catherine.** You take it away.

**Liza.** *(Haughtily.)* What else! I've never even emptied mine.

**Catherine.** *(Leaps towards her. Fiercely.)* But you will empty mine... Take it, bitch.

*Liza cowers at the scream, takes the pot*

now go!

*Liza exits. Catherine sits down on her back, closes her eyes.*

Soft, Catherine, soft...

*Enters Shkurin. He carries a tray with breakfast/supper.*

**Shkurin.** Your Highness, your coffee. Very strong as you like it.

*He puts the tray on the table. Catherine sits down. He begins serving, pouring coffee, lifts the cover of the plate, etc.*

Stambke has been sent Back to Hostein.

**Catherine.** When? How? I spoke to him two days ago.

**Shkurin.** The Empress told His Highness, the Grand Duke to sent him away.

Because his correspondence with Bestuzhev had been discovered. They intercepted the messenger. He is in the Secret Chancellery now. The empress was outraged and said that Stambke ought to be arrested but because he's a minister for Holstein and out of respect for His Highness the Grand Duke, he can remain free as long as His Highness sent him away immediately. His Highness is very upset and scared. And you are not to deal with the affairs of Holstein anymore.

**Catherine.** Whose order is this?

**Shkurin.** Her Majesty's orders. The Grand Duke seems to be happy about that.

**Catherine.** Thank you, Vasily.

**Shkurin.** Poniatowski's letter to Bestuzhev was discovered. Her Majesty said she didn't want to see the 'partisan' ever again. Someone is spreading the rumour at the court that you will be sent away too.

*Pause.*

**Catherine.** Vasily, do me a favour, would you? Get all my papers, correspondence, writings, everything, and bring them here. Please do it now.

**Shkurin.** Of course, Matushka. I guess you want this one as well?

*He produces a piece of paper from his pocket and gives it to Catherine.*

Count Stanislas.

*Shkurin exits. Catherine reads then she gets up and paces across the room once or twice. Shkurin returns with a bail of papers.*

**Catherine.** Thank you, Vasily.

**Shkurin.** Will there be anything else, Your Highness.

**Catherine.** Wait a moment.

*She takes the papers and start throwing them into the fire. Once all of them are in:*

Look and be a witness that all my papers and bills have been burnt so that if you are asked where they are, you can swear that you have seen them burning.

**Shkurin.** There has been a rather strange change in the order of the prisoner guards. Since they discovered the correspondence with Stambke, Bestuzhev is to be guarded better and for that they moved my friend Kolyshkin from guarding Bernardi to Bestuzhev's room. He has loyal to him soldiers with him and is convinced that the Chancellor is innocent and his arrest is a result of an intrigue. All the guards are on our side now.

**Catherine.** Vasily. Is the Hof-Marshal here?

**Shkurin.** Yes, Your Highness, the Inquisitor is in His Highness's chambers.

**Catherine.** Please tell him that I need my carriage for myself and my maids of honour. I am going to the theatre.

*Shkurin bows and exits. Catherine throws the las papers into the fire. Long pause. Enters Inquisitor.*

**Inquisitor.** Your Highness, your intention to go to the Russian theatre does not please His Highness.

**Catherine.** Count, tell His Highness that I'm ill with boredom here and I am determined to go.

*Inquisitor looks at the burning papers in the fire and develops a tick in his eye and exits. Catherine remains seated. Pause. Enters Peter. Catherine remains calm throughout the next conversation.*

**Peter.** You must find pleasure in driving me mad. You know I hate Russian comedy and yet you decided to go to the theatre.

**Catherine.** You are making a mistake by not liking these performances. They are

often funny and instructive. But you don't need to go. I'll go alone.

**Peter.** As I said I don't like you going to those performances.

**Catherine.** Since I'm not part of Your Highness' company, I believe it should not matter whether I sit alone in my room or alone in the theatre box.

**Peter.** I will forbid giving you a carriage.

**Catherine.** Then I will walk. I really can't understand why you make me die of boredom here, alone in my room.

**Peter.** I don't like the comedy and that's it! You're my wife and you must do what I tell you.

**Catherine.** Ah, so because you want to spend time with my maid of honour Liza Vorontsova, you forbid me to go to the theatre. Is that it? Then I will go alone. I don't have to take my maids of honour with me. Enjoy your time with Mademoiselle Vorontsova!

**Peter.** You vile creature! Two bastards not enough for you, you want to go to another Poniatowski to make one more!

**Catherine.** Yes, because you can't make any!

**Peter.** You... You..! I will... I will...

*Runs out. Catherine sits down, picks a quill and writes. She rings the bell. Enters Shkurin.*

**Catherine.** Vasily, go and check if the carriage is ready, would you?

*Shkurin bows and exits. Catherine finishes writing. Enters Inquisitor.*

**Inquisitor.** Your Highness, His Highness has forbade preparing the carriage for you.

**Catherine.** In that case, I will walk. And if others will be forbidden to accompany me, I will walk alone. And I will complain to Her Majesty in writing about the Grand Duke and about you.

**Inquisitor.** What will you tell her?

**Catherine.** I will relate to her the way I'm treated and inform her that you, in order to give the Grand Duke rendezvous with my maids of honour, you encourage him to stop me from going to the performance where I could have the pleasure to see Her Imperial Majesty. Moreover I will ask her to send me back to my mother because the



role I'm playing here has gone beyond my strength. Alone, abandoned in my room, hated by the Grand Duke and disliked by the Empress, I only wish for repose and don't want to be a burden to anyone and make unfortunate those who are close to me, particularly my servants, so many of whom have been banished only because I wished and did good for them.

**Inquisitor.** Will you write all of that?

**Catherine.** I have already done it. And now, Count, I will see that you deliver it to Her Majesty.

*She gives the letter to Inquisitor. His tick is now very serious. He stares at the letter in his hands for a moment then leaves. Catherine sits down. Pause.*

*The clock strikes two. It's night now. Enters Inquisitor.*

**Inquisitor.** Your Highness, Her Majesty will see you now.

*Empress' room. A table in the middle by the window. On it there is a bowl with a few visible letters. Upstage right is a screen. Elizabeth is also stage right by the screen looking behind it for a moment, talking to someone. Doors open stage left. Enters Peter.*

**Elizabeth.** What are you doing here?

**Peter.** I know my wife is under suspicion. I want to see how she will lie.

**Elizabeth.** How do you know she's coming?

**Peter.** Everybody knows that.

**Elizabeth.** Do they? How?

**Peter.** *(Confused.)* Ah...

**Elizabeth.** Well...? Who is the rat?

**Peter.** Ah...she told me she would be talking to you. Yes. I know she will be lying about me. I have a right to see it.

*Enters Inquisitor.*

**Inquisitor.** Your Majesty, the Grand Duchess is here.

**Elizabeth.** Alright then. Stand back there and keep quiet.

*She points at a spot behind her. Inquisitor opens the door inviting Catherine in. She comes in and for a split second assesses the mezzanine. Inquisitor stands back. Catherine drops on her knees.*

**Catherine.** (*Cries.*) Your Majesty, I beseech you, show your merciful heart and don't let me perish. I'm so grateful to you for all the graces that you bestowed upon me ever since I arrived in Russia, but, to my misfortune, the events have proven that I am unworthy of them because I only drew hatred of the Grand Duke and your disfavour upon myself. You can see the misery I'm in, that I am withering away of boredom and solitude in my room, where I am deprived of most innocent pastime, so I beseech Your Majesty to end my misfortunes by sending me back to my relatives in Germany in any manner that Your Majesty deem appropriate.

**Elizabeth.** Get up, please.

**Catherine.** No, Your Majesty. On my knees I plead with you, send me away.

**Elizabeth.** How can you ask me to send you away? Don't forget you have children here?

**Catherine.** My children are in your hands and nothing could be better for them. Since I never see my children, even though I live in the same house with them, it becomes irrelevant to me whether I'm in the same place or hundreds of versts away. I know Your Majesty gives them care superior to what my humble abilities would have allowed me to give. I dare to ask Your Majesty to continue this care and, in this expectation, I shall spend my remaining days at my relatives', praying for you, for my children, the Grand Duke and for everyone who did good or evil to me. But my health has been driven to such ruin by my grief that I must do everything possible to at least save my life and that is why I'm begging Your Majesty to let me go to spa and from there to my relatives.

**Elizabeth.** How am I supposed to explain to the society the reason for such deportation?

**Catherine.** If you see the need for it, Your Majesty will tell of the reasons why I've drawn your disfavour and hatred of the Grand Duke.

**Elizabeth.** How are you going to provide for yourself living with your relatives?

**Catherine.** The same way as I had lived before you honoured me by bringing me

here.

**Elizabeth.** Your mother is a fugitive. She had to leave her motherland and go to Paris.

**Catherine.** I know this. She is regarded too loyal to the interests of Russia and the King of Prussia started persecuting her.

**Elizabeth.** Now do get up.

*Elizabeth helps her from her knees. Catherine obeys. Elizabeth walks away from her in thought. Catherine makes two steps aside towards the window and freezes when she notices the letters in the bowl. Elizabeth turns to her and that brings Catherine to her senses.*

**Elizabeth.** God is my witness how I cried when you were so sick after your arrival in Russia and had I not loved you, I would never have kept you here.

**Catherine.** Your Majesty, I am deeply grateful for all the favours and kindness you showed for me then and now and the memory of them will never become effaced and I will always regard as the greatest this my misfortune that I have drawn your disfavour.

*Elizabeth comes closer to Catherine. Peter gets closer to Inquisitor and keeps whispering something to him throughout the conversation.*

**Elizabeth.** You are extraordinarily proud. Remember once in the Summer Palace I asked you if your neck was hurting.

**Catherine.** Yes, Your Majesty. I remember.

**Elizabeth.** Do you know why I asked? It was because I saw that you did not bow but, out of your pride, barely nodded at me.

**Catherine.** My god, Your Majesty, how can you think I wanted show my pride before you? I swear that I never thought that that your question you asked four years ago, could relate to anything like that.

**Elizabeth.** You think that there is no one smarter than you, don't you?

**Catherine.** Had I this conviction, nothing would have dissuaded me better than my present situation and this very conversation, because, in my stupidity, I have not realized till now what you were so kind as to tell me four years ago.

*A short pause. Elizabeth notices that Peter keeps whispering something to Inquisitor and goes to them and joins in on the whisper.*

**Peter.** *(Raising his voice.)* ...She is horribly wicked and very stubborn... **Catherine.**

If you speak of me, I'm very glad to tell you in Her Majesty's presence that indeed I am very angry at those who advise you to do injustice to me and that I became stubborn since I noticed that my pleasing you led to nothing but your hatred. **Peter.** Your Imperial Majesty, you can see for yourself how wicked she is by what she says.

**Elizabeth.** Oh, you don't even know what she told me about your Holsteinian advisers and about Brockdorf concerning the man you ordered to arrest.

**Peter.** *(Astonished.)* Brockdorf...? You... This is quite an anecdote that I didn't know, it proves her wickedness even more.

**Catherine.** *(Aside.)* God knows whose wickedness it proves...

**Elizabeth.** *(To Peter.)* Who is talking of wickedness! You think I forgot how you drilled holes into my room? Not only you dared to pry on me but you made it into a public showing! *(Peter drops his eyes.)* You're a grown up man who behaves like a little brat. You have no notion of governing or keeping any of your affairs in order. Your Holstein minister Schtambke kept correspondence with Bestuzhev. With a prisoner of state!

*Elizabeth comes closer to Catherine.*

But you, you meddle in many affairs that don't concern you. I would never dare to do the same during the reign of Empress Anna. How did you dare, for instance, to dispatch orders to Field-Marshal Apraksin?

**Catherine.** I! I'd never even think of dispatching orders to him.

**Elizabeth.** How can you deny that you wrote to him? Your letters are here in this bowl. *(Points at the letters.)* You were forbidden to write anything to anyone!

**Catherine.** It's true I violated the order and I apologise for that. But since my letters are here, these three letters can prove that I never sent orders to him but I wrote in one of them what people were saying about his behaviour...

**Elizabeth.** Why did you do that?

**Catherine.** Simply because I sympathized with the Field-marshal. I asked him to

follow your orders. The other two have congratulations on the birth of his son in one and New Year wishes in the other.

**Elizabeth.** Bestuzhev says there were many others.

**Catherine.** If Bestuzhev says that he's lying.

**Elizabeth.** Well, since he's slandering you, I'll order to torture him.

**Catherine.** It is your right to do as you please, but I wrote to Apraksin only these three letters.

*Pause. Elizabeth turns around and walks up to Inquisitor, looks him in the eyes, he looks back. Elizabeth starts pacing the room. Comes close to Catherine.*

**Elizabeth.** *(Looks at her closely. Quietly.)* Please, don't think of leaving. I will need to tell you a lot more. A lot. But I can't speak right now *(she makes a slight nod towards others present)* because I don't want to cause further quarrel between you.

**Catherine.** *(Very quietly.)* I can't speak either, although I would love to reveal my heart to you.

## SCENE SIXTEEN "Vivat Victoria!"

*"The Russian army has taken Kolberg. Frederick is in flight."*

*Enter Grigory and Alekhan Orlov.*

*They stand attention. Enters Peter, Vorontsov, Catherine.*

**Vorontsov.** Your Highness, please let me recommend, the Orlovs, heroes of the campaign.

**Grigory.** Your Imperial Highness, Lieutenant of Semionovsky Royal Guard Regiment Grigory Orlov.

**Alekhan.** Your Imperial Highness, Sergeant of Preobrazhensky Royal Guard Regiment Aleksei Orlov.

**Peter.** *(Approaches them. They are a head taller than him.)* Brothers?

**Grigory and Alekhan.** Yes, Your Imperial Highness!

**Peter.** *(Pointing at Grigory and Orlov with his finger. Turning to Catherine.)* O!...

*(Changes his mind, waves his hand at her and turns to Vorontsov.)* O! Lads worthy to be grenadiers of the Great Frederick! *(To Alekhan.)* I can see clearly you are a hero. Which battle did this scar on your face come from?

**Alekhan.** I got it a while ago in a tavern down the Regimental quarters, Your Highness

**Peter.** Ha! In a brawl?! *(He bellows.)* Ahahaha! Quite a hero... Haha. Right. I like it. And you? *(To Grigory.)*

**Grigory.** Distinguished at the battle of Zorndorf. I was wounded and I took prisoner the personal adjutant of King Frederick Count Schwerin.

**Peter.** *(A grimace of disgust, as if he has just eaten something rotten.)* Remember: Count Schwerin is not a prisoner any more. He is my most revered guest. He outranks you. And you will treat him as your commander.

**Grigory.** Commander? Has he swapped sides? Good on him. After our army has taken Berlin, only a miracle could save King Frederick.

**Peter.** No Russian army or any other has taken Berlin! It's nonsense!

*The Orlovs look at each other.*

**Vorontsov.** Your highness, today is a celebration and these two fine officers will be decorated by her majesty... for, uh, the victory...

**Peter.** Chancellor, I get precise information from the King himself. I know better. *(Approaches the Orlovs.)* What a disgusting uniform.

**Alekhan.** What's wrong with it?

**Peter.** Are you dumb? *(To Catherine.)* He's dumb.

**Catherine.** *(To the officers.)* I heard it was a fierce and bloody battle, so many of our soldiers were killed. Were you afraid?

**Grigory.** No, Your Highness. We are the Royal Guard. We are not allowed to have fear in our service. Had I had fear I wouldn't have taken Schwerin prisoner and wouldn't have seen Frederick fleeing us in leaps.

**Peter.** Liar! Frederick doesn't "leap" from anyone. Ever. Frederick is the greatest of all commanders. He is invincible!

**Grigory.** No, Your Highness. I saw him like you with my own eyes. He took to the heels. And rightly so. We were right upon him. He fled like nothing!

**Peter.** How dare you speak like this of the greatest man of all! A giant!

**Alekhan.** Giant? Nah. He's smaller than you...

**Peter.** Shut up. Remember you have committed crimes against my best friend Frederick and you will pay for it. Just wait...

*Music. A splendid ode to victory. (For instance: Aria Gerkules from Alcesta by Herman Raupach, Libretto Aleksandr Sumarokov.) Enters Elizabeth, Shuvalov. Every one bows. The Orlovs stand attention.*

**All.** (*Joyfully.*) Vivat Empress Yelizaveta! Vivat Russia!! Vivat! Vivat! Vivat!

*Shuvalov holds Elizabeth by the elbow. She is not well but makes an effort. They approach the Orlovs.*

**Elizabeth.** (*Happy.*) Ah, thank you lads. Berlin – the thief's den – fell and the foe is in flight. The victory will be ours. Russia is proud that she has sons like you. We all are in great debt to your bravery and sacrifice. Ask whatever you want.

**Peter.** No, Berlin did not fall. It could not.

**Elizabeth.** (*To Peter.*) Don't spoil our celebration. Go, have a sleep. I said: out of my sight. God, why have you punished me with that one?

*He exits.*

*(To the Orlovs.)* I'm proud of you and grateful. You are the Orlovs, which means eagles. Russia stands on your shoulders and flies with your wings. Enjoy your victory. *(To Shuvalov.)* Vanya, help me, sweetheart. I need to sit down.

*Helped by Shuvalov she walks upstage and disappear. Shuvalov return to Vorontsov.*

**Grigory.** (*Quietly to Alekhan.*) Alyosha, what was it?

**Alekhan.** (*Quietly.*) Our future Tsar.

**Grigory.** It? That?

**Alekhan.** (*Nods convincingly.*) Uhuh.

**Catherine.** Please forgive His Highness. He's not well.

**Alekhan.** Ill?

**Catherine.** Something of the sort.

**Grigory.** I know this illness, he needs a drink.

**Catherine.** I see it's true what they say about you. You are fearless...talking like this about your future sovereign. Some would say you are reckless.

**Grigory.** So it's true what they say about you. You're not like your husband.

**Catherine.** You are also impudent.

**Grigory.** I'm a soldier, Your Highness. I say as it is. My profession is to fight the enemies of Russia not to speak with them.

**Catherine.** Obviously you are a good fighter.

**Grigory.** I assure you that my brother Aleksei is a much better soldier than myself.

**Catherine.** You are humble as well.

**Alekhan.** Your Highness, this humbleness was beaten into him by this very fist.

**Grigory.** (*Laughing.*) It's true. I'm no match to Aleksei.

**Alekhan.** And the rest of the regiments are no much for my little brother.

**Catherine.** Your parents did a mighty job bringing up two sons like yourselves.

**Alekhan.** There are five of us, Your Highness.

**Catherine.** And all are in the Guard?

**Grigory.** Yes, Your Highness.

**Catherine.** Then I am sure my family can feel safe. What are you expecting in return for your valour, brothers Orlov.

**Grigory.** A chance to die for *you* as our future sovereign?

**Catherine.** Intrepid. What do you think of the campaign? Will we win?

**Grigory.** Your Highness, Russia cannot be defeated in fight. Only treason can bring her down.

*In another part of the stage.*

**Shuvalov.** (*To Vorontsov.*) Chancellor, do you know that His Highness, the Grand Duke favours two Prussian spies and divulges to them all the information that is discussed at the secret, I repeat, secret meetings of the war conference. All of it lands in Frederick's hands.

**Vorontsov.** As you rightfully pointed out, I'm the Chancellor. And I'm planning to remain so when His Highness, the Grand Duke becomes emperor. What are *you* plans, Ivan Ivanych?



**Shuvalov.** I am with my tsaritsa.

**Vorontsov.** And after?

**Shuvalov.** Look at you all trying to bury her before she dies. You can't wait, can you?

**Vorontsov.** Well, I pity you.

**Shuvalov.** Keep your pity for yourself, Chancellor. You're going to need it.

*Empress' bed appears in the upstage centre. Elizabeth is lying on it. Everyone stands by the bed. She rises looking around as if in surprise. She is dressed like in the awakening scene in her dressing gown. Everyone else disappears.*

**Elizabeth.** Good people, is this it...? But when I had that fall in the church four years ago, I also thought "this is it"... I was so afraid then... But you said it was not yet time... So this is it... (*She stands on her knees and slowly and diligently crosses herself.*) Lord, forgive your sinful slave and deliver her... (*Incense, icons candles appear. She goes back on her bed.*) Wait! I can't go like this. I can't leave her like this. I need more time. A few minutes... I must just make arrangements... But with who? Who can I trust? (*Looking at Shuvalov.* ) Ivan? Vanya! DO something! I cannot anymore! Russia will fall into the hands of my retard nephew... No, not him! He will plunder and desecrate everything. He will hate everything I loved and love everything that I hate... Oh, it's all my fault! Chancellor! Vorontsov!!! Send for Vorontsov. Tell him I want to change my will. Where is he?... Not coming. Drinking with Peter? Too late? But I thought I'd have enough time. I waited till the opportune moment... Waiting is a privilege of the young who never wish to wait... And when you're old suddenly there's no time... Vorontsov!!! I change my will! Don't let Peter be the tsar! Give the throne to his son! And mother! Catherine!

*Catherine appears by the bed.*

**Catherine.** I'm here, Matushka.

**Elizabeth.** (*Holds her hands.*) Oh, what luck! Everyone else has already betrayed me. I'm dead for them. They all already turned away from me and fawn in front of your husband. And I can't do anything anymore. But you must. I know you hate me... Don't give me that "I'm guilty, Matushka". Listen. Everyone wants money and

power. Know this. Everybody will ask for money and favours. It's very rare that someone does not. Such people are gold. Remember, keep everyone on a short leash. Keep the enemies closer than friends. I knew Bestuzhev took money from the British, from the Saxonians, Austrians. Vorontsov takes, Ivan takes, everybody does. I can't change that. To change it I'd have to be as rich as the tsar of heavens and pay them so much that they wouldn't want to take from anyone else. But there are very few like Bestuzhev, who take according to the principal of loyalty. But even he got too greedy to see clear. I ordered to bring Nikita Panin back from Stockholm. He is a good replacement for Bestuzhev. I appointed him the governor to your son. Panin!

**Panin.** I'm here, Your Majesty.

**Elizabeth.** Here? Why aren't you with Duke Pavel?

**Panin.** His Highness is asleep, Your Majesty. I've come to see that you are alright.

**Elizabeth.** You too? Everyone is waiting... It's hard to draw the line between a bribe and an official gift as a sign of respect. I forgive them until they betray me. Betrayal is something I can't forgive. Remember: a thief is obvious and clear. He's obedient because he knows his guilt. The honest and incorruptible are independent and unpredictable. Obstinate. Are they good for governance, on the assumption of the good for cause? You need to decide. Alright. I'm tired...

*Peter appears.*

**Peter.** Doctor, is she bad...? She looks bad... You know, doctor, the first thing I'll do when she dies, I will turn all my armies on Demark. The navy too. I will crush those bastard Danes. I'll make them bring my Schleswig back on their knees. And you, Panin, what do you think about what I've just said?

**Panin.** I didn't hear well, Your Highness, what where you talking about: Her Majesty's bad health?

**Peter.** You just wait a little: soon I will pull your ears and teach you to hear better.

**Panin.** (*Panin bows.*) Your Highness.

*Peter disappears. Panin comes to Catherine.*

**Panin.** Your Highness, I had a conversation with the favourite Ivan Shuvalov. He

told me that in general opinion Piotr Fyodorovich is unfit to be the Emperor. His ascension to the throne will be a misfortune for Russia. That's why everyone wishes that your son Pavel becomes the heir. People differ however in their plans for His Highness's future and yours. Some wish to send only your husband out of the country, others want you gone as well.

**Catherine.** Thank you, Piotr Petrovich. What do *you* think about it?

**Panin.** You wish to know what I answered Shuvalov? I told him that I reject such projects because it will not do to suddenly change what has been reaffirmed by oaths for the past 20 years. But my personal opinion is that if someone proposed the ill empress to send away the father but to keep the mother and son in the country, she might agree to that.

**Catherine.** That is a diplomatic answer, Piotr Petrovich I can see Bestuzhev's school. I wish to know your own view on succession.

**Panin.** I believe everything should be done to prevent Piotr Fyodorovich becoming the emperor. The throne should go to your son, Pavel.

**Catherine.** Pavel is a child. Who do you see as the Regent?

**Panin.** A trusted Council should be established for protection and government of the Empire.

**Catherine.** Bestuzhev school. Where do I fit in this arrangement?

**Panin.** You are the mother of the future Emperor. You need to be by your son...

*In another part of stage.*

**Grigory.** Guardsmen, comrades, we are celebrating now, because we deserve it. Together we went against the unbeatable army of Prussian Frederick and we did not bow to his bullets nor his bayonets. And now we've been to Berlin, his very den.

**Voices.** Vivat Victoria! Vavat Empress, Vivat Yelizavet! Vivat Russia! (*Loud "vivats!"*)

**Voice.** Have you seen the Empress? How is she?

**Grigory.** This is what I want to tell you, friends. Grand Duke Peter calls us, that is you, gentlemen Royal Guard, hateful "janissaries". I personally don't take overly kindly to this epithet. Not long ago His Highness was so kind as to express himself this way: "the guardsmen are only blocking the residence, they are incapable of any labour, nor military exercise, and are only a danger to the government". This was

said by the Grand Duke. Our Grand Duke, lads. The Russian Grand Duke! I ask you: what kind of a Russian Grand Duke is he if, while the Russian soldiers are dying from the Prussian bullets, he brags about being a “true Prussian”, wears a signet with a portrait of Frederick II – I saw it with my own eyes. He showed it to me when he bragged about it to Schwerin, his prisoner. The joyful news of our taking Berlin made the Grand Duke sad and he curses the courage of the Russian army. He hates the Russians. And the Royal Guards in particular. That is us, lads.

**Voice.** Truth that.

**Grigory.** And there’s one more most foul thing. The Grand Duke sits on the Council at the Empress, listens to the war plans and then sends them to our very enemy Frederick. Everything.

**Voice.** How do you know that?

**Grigory.** This is true. The Austrians and the French know it. They made an official presentation of Chancellor Vorontsov about it.

**Voice.** How do you know that?

**Grigory.** From Grand Duchess Catherine.

**Voice.** Oh, you are so close with her? (*Laughter.*) Since when?

**Grigory.** Since Monday morning. What do you care?

**Voice.** Grishka slipped into Catherine’s bed and wants to be a tsar. (*Laughter.*)

**Grigory.** (*Smirks.*) Hey, why not? Ain’t I good enough?

**Voice.** I’ll get close to Her Highness too. Why should you be a tsar and not I?

**Grigory.** (*Laughing.*) You’re not tall enough. Seriously though, Vasily, didn’t you distinguish yourself at Zorndorf? And you, Aleksandr? And you? For Peter we are criminals who went against his best friend. So when Her Majesty dies and he becomes our sovereign, he will have his revenge and our heads will roll.

*Pause.*

The only way is to put our hope into the Grand Duchess. She is already suffering from her husband’s vagaries. But when he becomes the emperor, he’ll lock her in the monastery right away and disown her son the Grand Duke Pavel Petrovich. Then we will really feel what a Prussian rule is like over Russia. Catherine is on our side...

*Orlov disappears. Elizabeth gets up once again.*

**Elizabeth.** Catherine, you still there?

**Catherine.** I'm here, Matushka.

**Elizabeth.** I know you hate me.

**Catherine.** No, Matushka.

**Elizabeth.** Don't lie... Keep an eye on Ivan in prison. Keep him alive . If a contender dies, expect imposters... trouble... Oh, I'm a sinner... You need to be tough. Tougher than everyone...around... don't let them tear the country... into pieces...forgive me... Chancellor. Call for the Chancellor! I want to make my will! Chancellor... Why isn't he coming...?

*She rises from the bed.*

It's come. It is time. (*She bows.*) Thank you, good people. (*Crosses herself to god.*) Farewell.

*She walked upstage and disappears. Fade out.*

**Voice of Peter.** She's dead! The old bitch is dead! Ahahaha!



**ACT TREE. "1762"****INTERLUDE "January"**

*Cell in Shlisselburg Fortress. Prisoner "Grigory" is in his bed. Enter Chekin and Vlasyev.*

**Vlasyev.** Get up, wash yourself. It's time for your food.

**Ivan.** I w-w-w-would l-l-l-like...t-t-t-to go f-for a walk.

**Vlasyev.** What else?

**Ivan.** I w-w-w-would l-l-l-like t-t-t-to see somebody else than you.

**Vlasyev.** *(With a sigh.)* No, you will not go for a walk or see anyone but us until the day you die.

**Ivan.** Why do you abuse me so? What have I done to you?

**Chekin.** You think we love this? Oh, I've so had enough of guarding you, I can't begin to tell you... We've been guarding your door for so many years now!

**Ivan.** H-how m-m-many?

**Chekin.** "H-how m-m-many..." Freak.

**Vlasyev.** Eighteen. Eighteen years. Where's life?

**Chekin.** That's right. We are Royal Guards after all. We ought to be in the capital. By the court... But we're in this asshole instead. *(To Ivan.)* With you. I wish you've croaked already. It'd be easier for all of us.

**Vlasyev.** Quiet you. Our long service will see a great reward.

**Chekin.** When? When he dies? What if he will live another 40-50 years?

**Vlasyev.** There's an order.

**Chekin.** There's an order alright. Only that order was given by the late Empress Yelizaveta Petrovna. We've got a new Emperor now.

**Ivan.** I am the Em-em-em-em...

**Chekin.** Em-em-em-em.

**Vlasyev.** Quiet! Say nothing to him... Have you forgotten the order?

**Chekin.** Ah. He's a dullard anyway. He won't understand anything. Look: em-em-em...

**Ivan.** Emperor.

**Vlasyev.** Alright, emperor. Eat your food. (*To Chekin.*) Let's go play cards or something.

**Chekin.** To hell with those cards. I can't look at them anymore.

**Vlasyev.** What else is there to do here?

**Chekin.** I want to go to the city. I want a woman! To get the hell out of this fortress!

**Vlasyev.** Who wouldn't want a woman...?

**Ivan.** What is woman?

**Chekin.** Quiet, you animal!

*Chekin hits him.*

**Vlasyev.** Alright, enough. Let's go get drunk or something.

*They leave.*

## **SCENE SEVENTEEN "The Crown"**

*The mourning chamber at the palace. Black colours, candles and icons. A coffin with the body of Elizabeth is on a stand in the centre. Royal guards guard the stand.*

*Quiet prayer is heard by the priest.*

*In one part of the stage quietly enter jeweller Jeremia Posier with a hat box.*

*Catherine dressed in a wide mourning dress enters as quietly.*

**Catherine.** Posier, have you brought it?

**Posier.** Yes, Your Majesty.

*He opens the box. Catherine picks up the Imperial crown and looks at it. The speak quietly.*

**Catherine.** You are a miracle maker, Posier! All the missing sapphires, emeralds and rubies are in their places.

**Posier.** Thank you for your praise, Your Majesty. I replaced the missing stones with fakes. That was all I could in one night. I hope you forgive me.

**Catherine.** You've done a great service, Posier. Her Majesty could not be buried with gaping holes in her crown because of stolen jewellery. I owe you. But I have no money.

**Posier.** I know, Your Majesty. You're not a thief of me. But Yelizaveta Vorontsova, your husband's favourite is.

**Catherine.** I will not forget to reward you, jeweller Posier, when time comes.

**Posier.** I only hope I will be able to make the Imperial crown for your own coronation one day.

**Catherine.** One day...

**Posier.** Your Majesty, please don't tell His Majesty about this. He promised to put me in the fortress if I take a commission from you.

**Catherine.** Don't worry, Posier, you can sleep easy. Goodbye. And take this.

*Catherine picks the crown and returns the box to Posier. The other bows and exits.*

**Catherine.** Sleep in peace, Your Majesty.

**Orlov.** *(Invisible. Whisper.)* Kató... Kató...

*Catherine turns around, looks for the source. Walks away from the coffin downstage.*

*Orlov appears. Rushes to her, grabs her hand and kisses it.*

**Catherine.** *(Pulling her hand away. Louder.)* Lieutenant Orlov.

*Orlov stands attention.*

**Orlov.** *(Louder.)* Your Majesty. *(Lowers his voice.)* Kató, how I've been missing you!

**Catherine.** *(Intense whisper.)* Are you out of your mind, Grigory?! The guards might hear us!

**Orlov.** The guards are all my people. One of them is my brother Alekhan, don't you recognise him? I have been very careful. It's all thought through. I could not stand not seeing you.

**Catherine.** Grigory, but coming *here*, to the mourning chamber...!

**Orlov.** This is the only place I see you these days. You don't go anywhere else.



**Catherine.** Of course, I'm in mourning. After the late Empress.

**Grigory.** Indeed. And you look so attractive in this black dress. Kató, it's going to tear me into pieces!

*He takes her in his arms and tries to kiss. She resists.*

**Catherine.** Careful, you brute! Have you forgotten that I'm pregnant?

**Orlov.** This dress conceals it so well! I almost forgot! (*Laughs.*)

**Catherin.** (*Looking around.*) Be quiet.

**Orlov.** (*Seriously.*) But this is why I'm here. How are you going to give birth?

**Catherine.** There's only one way possible, isn't there? It's not your trouble.

**Orlov.** It is mine. It's my child. Peter is bound to find out. We must act now.

Everyone is ready to die for you. I'm ready.

**Catherine.** I don't want you to die for me. Or anyone else, for that matter. And who is everyone?

**Orlov.** My brothers, Kirilla Razumovsky, officers of the regiment.

**Catherine.** One regiment is not enough. What if others will not support us. They have taken the oath to the Emperor.

**Orlov.** We will crush anyone. I will set you free and make you my empress, no matter what! I am ready for anything.

**Catherine.** Anything?

**Orlov.** You only need to ask.

**Catherine.** Good. Then do as I ask. Do nothing. And wait.

**Orlov.** But this is the time...

**Catherine.** No, it's not. When we convince every soldier in every regiment of the Royal guard, when I give birth to your child and we hide it... don't (*She holds her finder at his lips.*) No one must know that I have a child of Lieutenant Orlov. Then we will see. For now we sit quiet. Understood, Lieutenant Orlov?

**Orlov.** Understood, Your Majesty. For you I'll sit quiet, I scream or kill...

*Laughter is heard off stage on the other side.*

**Catherine.** For me you are going to leave now.

*She pushes him out. He manages to steal a quick kiss. Catherine turns around. Sombre. She sits down by the coffin. Enter Peter, Liza, Vorontsov, Gudovich.*

**Peter.** What's this nauseating smoke? Is the coffin on fire?

**Vorontsov.** It is incense, Your Majesty.

**Peter.** What?

**Vorontsov.** The ceremonial liturgical incense of our Orthodox Christian Church, Your Majesty.

**Peter.** Is it? I thought Auntie had gone a bit off.

*Laughs.*

Barbarian church. Barbarian custom. Priests look like savages with their beards. Not for long. I will shave them all. And I throw all of these savage icons out of the churches. The only civilised custom is Lutheran and so it will be here. Hey, do you here priests? I'll bring order now to this brothel. Everyone will stand attention. Like these soldiers. (*Points at the mournful guards.*) What is this disgusting rag you're wearing?

*Silence.*

I've asked you a question, savage slave!

**Vorontsov.** This is the uniform of the Royal Guards Preobrazhensky regiment, Your Majesty, introduced by your grandfather Peter the Great.

**Peter.** Chancellor, everyone must be dressed in Holstein uniforms.

**Vorontsov.** Yes, Your Majesty.

**Catherine.** Your Majesty, out of respect to the deceased empress, please let the coffin guard remain in their traditional green attire.

**Peter.** You're here? What are you doing?

**Catherine.** I am holding vigil

**Peter.** What for?

**Catherine.** Our custom requires.

**Peter.** The weird savage "custom requires". Carry on. You fit in here. Don't you think, Liza?

**Liza.** Pretty. The black suits you. And this aroma is definitely your perfume.

**Peter.** (*Explodes with laughter.*) “Aroma”. (*To Liza.*) This is good. I love you, my peach. (*To Vorontsov.*) Don’t you think, Chancellor.

**Vorontsov.** What, what, Your Majesty?

**Peter.** “What, Your Majesty”. Hahaha. Wasn’t that a great joke.

**Vorontsov.** Indeed, Your Majesty. Very amusing.

**Peter.** You’re a bore, Chancellor. (*To Catherine.*) What’s with this crown? Are you going to put it on yourself? Haha.

**Catherine.** No, Your Majesty. This is Her Majesty’s crown. I am going to put it on her head.

*Catherine takes the crown to the coffin and puts it on the head of the dead empress.*

**Peter.** You’re disgusting.

**Liza.** Abominable.

**Peter.** Don’t come close to me ever. This stench. Ugh. Is this really auntie? Let’s check if she is still in the coffin. I have this nightmare. Auntie gets up. Rotten skin hanging from her toothless jaw. She comes to my bed and grabs me by the ear. I want to know she’s really dead. (*They follow him to the coffin.*) I knew it! She is still here. Ooh, rotting carcass. It seems Auntie has gone a bit off. Let’s see if maggots are already crawling over her face.

*They peer into the coffin.*

**Liza.** Eew.

*Peter staggers away from the coffin and vomits in the corner. Liza makes the sign of the cross and peers into the coffin with curiosity and fear.*

**Liza.** Nice crown she has. The stones are shiny. And all are in their places. (*To Catherine.*) Fakes aren’t they? The real once are gone...

**Catherine.** (*Does not move.*) I wonder where.

**Peter.** I’m out of here. (*To Catherine.*) You may stay here forever as far as I’m concerned. It suits you. ...With the dead...

*Peter staggers away and vomits offstage. The rest rush after him. Catherine turns towards the icons and prays. Blackout.*

## **SCENE EIGHTEEN “The Fire”**

*Shkurin is helping Catherine to get to bed. The delivery is approaching.*

**Shkurin.** Keep your spirits up, Your Majesty. It is luck among misfortunes. His Majesty got angry and left the city. At least he won't bother you now, when a new child is about to come to this world. You don't need to hide anywhere.

**Catherine.** It's true, Vasily. It is a true blessing.

**Shkurin.** It's much better than the last time. Remember how His Highness came and didn't want to leave. I got scared then that he would take that note and read it before it burnt. Lucky Her Majesty – god rest her soul! – came quick... It's much better this time. Careful, Your Majesty. And this mourning dress came so handy. It's as if the late tsaritsa is helping you from the grave...

**Catherine.** Thank you. I will rest now.

**Shkurin.** Very good, Your Majesty. You rest a minute and I will run and fetch the midwife. Please be sure. She's a trusted woman. She delivered three of my children. She will remain quiet. I look after that and my wife will look after the child. So have no worry, Your Majesty.

**Catherine.** I just want this to be over.

**Shkurin.** It's going to be alright.

*He exits. And returns very quickly.*

His Majesty! **Catherine.**

Drunk? **Shkurin.** No,  
with Liza.

**Catherine.** You should never rely on ghosts.

*She gets up with difficulty. Shkurin wants to help her but she stops him with a wave.*

**Catherine.** Oh I wish there was a fire or something.

**Shkurin.** (*Realisation.*) Fire...! I'll be back, Your Highness.

*Shkurin runs to exit. Enter Peter and Liza. Shkurin stops.*

**Peter.** Careful, slave. You've almost pushed me off my feet! Are you plotting something against me?

**Shkurin.** (*Bows.*) Your Majesty, I am a slave but I am a loyal one, loyal to Your Majesties...

**Peter.** Shut up, you piece of shit. Get out of my sight.

*Shkurin runs out.*

**Peter.** You're still wearing this mourning dress? She's been buried two months ago. Who are you going to impress? Not me. Whatever. I just wanted to see who else is in this room. I see now. You used to bring aristocrats, now you are down to slaves. A natural progress of a whore.

**Catherine.** You are however distinguished by a true consistency. You've started with whores and stand by them.

**Peter.** Shut up. (*To Catherine.*) Common, tell me. You are the same as me, Lutheran and you observe this barbarian custom? You're a German. This is not your custom. Have you forgotten it? Admit it. This is all lie, it has always been. Because she forced it upon us, you and me. I never wanted it but couldn't do anything. I was an orphan and she abused me.

*Shkurin rushes in.*

**Shkurin.** (*Panting.*) Your Majesty, there's a fire.

**Peter.** Where? What's on fire?

**Shkurin.** A house is on fire on Millionnaya Street. A large house.

**Peter.** (*Suddenly excited.*) Is that a big fire?!

**Shkurin.** Big. Everything the way you like it, Your Majesty. A large house. The blaze is licking the roof already. It will burn right down to the ground.

**Peter.** My carriage!

*He runs out.*

*(After him.)* It's already waiting.

**Catherine.** Oh, thank you, Vasily. Did you invent it?

**Shkurin.** Oh no, the fire is real. I set it myself. It'll keep him away for a while.

**Catherine.** Lord, Vasily, what have you burnt down?

**Shkurin.** My own house, Your Majesty. There was nothing else at hand...

*Black out. The glow of fire. Shkurin looks with a child in his arms.*

**Shkurin.** You will be alright, little one. You will be alright...

*He leaves. Fire burns.*

## **SCENE NINETEEN "The Peace Banquette"**

*A room in the place. The whole mood has changed. The interior is now reminiscent of October Fest. German oak and pine branches. Everyone is wearing Prussian uniforms. The music is different to whatever has been performed in the play before. It is Prussian now. Even pieces by Frederick II can be performed (particularly his marches: March 1741 or Marsch 1756 in the beginning and Der Mollwitzer at the end. Loud.) Perhaps it begins with Prussian soldiers marching in and lining the stage. A large table is in the middle. It is a celebration. Guests shuffle in. Vorontsov is happy. The Shuvalov's are visibly depressed. Present are Vorontsov, Liza Vorontsova, Stroganov, Gudovich, officers and Peter III (he is dressed in a Prussian uniform, boots so tight that he cannot bend his knees, he wears a ridiculously deformed huge hat, face small and spiteful. Ruilier) A huge portrait of Frederick the Great is in a central place, adorned in German fashion. Catherine wears black mourning attire loose enough to conceal her pregnancy. Peter sits at the head of the table stage left with Liza Vorontsova by his side. Next Vorontsov, Ambassadors of Prussia, Austria, Britain, Saxony, France, Shuvalov, Gudovich, Panin, Stroganov.*

*Catherine is on the opposite side.*

**Vorontsov.** (*Stands up.*) Your Imperial Majesty, Ladies and Gentlemen of the Court, Sirs foreign ambassadors, this is an important day. We are celebrating the treaty that concludes the long and bloody war. Your Majesty, thanks to your diplomatic talents the peace is ours. We thank you.

**Peter.** (*Jumps up.*) We have signed an eternal peace treaty and as gesture of generosity we relinquish the Eastern Prussia, all our war gains to the Great Frederick... Let us drink to the eternal peace and friendship between Russia and Great Prussia.

*He drinks. Cannons fire outside. Liza, Vorontsov, drink happily, the rest force themselves.*

**Peter.** Mardefeld, my friend. What's the good news from your king.

**Mardefeld.** Your Imperial Majesty, my King Frederick of Prussia has expressed his deepest feelings of friendship and admiration to his brother, Your Majesty, and thanked the heavens and Your Majesty's magnanimity and for what he called "the Miracle of the House of Brandenburg."

**Peter.** For your efforts you will be rewarded.

**Shuvalov.** (*Gloomy.*) Has anyone heard this and hasn't gnashed  
That a triumphant valiant nation  
Surrendered to the enemy they crushed.

O shame, oh strange abomination!

**Peter.** What was that, former favourite Shuvalov?

**Shuvalov.** A poem written by Mikhailo Lomonosov.

**Peter.** And who is that?

**Shuvalov.** A physicist... astronomer... chemist... geologist... geographer... an artist and a poet, an honorary member of the Swedish Academy of Science and the greatest mind of Russia...

**Peter.** Sounds like the pettiest mind of Russia. (*To Vorontsov.*) Chancellor, remind me to deal with that Lomonosov when I'm back from the war.

**Shuvalov.** The war? I thought we've signed a peace treaty.

**Vorontsov.** Ivan, you want to follow Bestuzhev into the fortress?

**Shuvalov.** I don't follow anyone anymore.

**Vorontsov.** No, Vanya, you must follow His Majesty's will. Like all of us.

**Peter.** Did you hear, Shuvalov? And my will is that you celebrate our peace treaty with the Great Frederick. The real and true great mind! (*With a haughty smile.*) Do it.

**Vorontsov.** Ivan, His Majesty is waiting.

*Pause. Liza is having a great time. Ambassadors are embarrassed. People on the other part of the table try not to see. Catherine looks at Peter. Finally Shuvalov takes the glass and downs it.*

**Peter.** You see? It's nothing terrible. We can still be friends, Shuvalov. You were wrong. Have the courage to admit it. I'll understand. You were young and fell under the tyranny of my late degenerate aunt who was so deeply depraved herself that she fell victim to evil plots of Bestuzhev. That scoundrel filled her with hatred and directed her weak woman's mind against the greatest man in the world for money. And she in turn blinded you with her witchcraft. But she's dead now. And Bestuzhev is far away. We can forgive you. Especially on a great day like this, when this wrong war is over. And we personally made the greatest effort to end it. Yes, ladies and gentlemen. All these years of senseless fighting, we have been working on ending it. We collected all the information on our army plans, numbers and movements and delivered it to King Frederick through our trusted people. Like ambassador Keith here.

*Ambassador of England is shocked and tries to say something but in effect it looks like flaps his mouth like a fish out of water.*

Don't get up, Keith. You've done a great service to King Frederick, the only king worth a service! And now it's time for me and my master to punish those who deserve punishment.

**Ambassador of France L'Hopital.** What does he mean? What master?

**Austrian Ambassador Esterhazy.** I think he means the King of Prussia.

**Peter.** From now on my Holstein and its addition Russia have allied with great Frederick for glory!

**Ambassador of France L'Hopital.** Non, non, non! Attendez un minute... Russia



allied with our enemy Frederick? What about our alliance?

**Austrian Ambassador Esterhazy.** (To French ambassador.) Marquis, stay calm.

**Ambassador of France L'Hopital.** Mais, Compt Esterhazy...

**Peter.** Excuse me, Count Esterhazy, did you say something?

**Austrian Ambassador Esterhazy.** Your Majesty, I am listening to your speech breathless wondering what your peaceful initiatives are going to bring upon my Austria.

**Peter.** Well that's up to King Frederick but I trust Austria will cry. You can tell that to your empress.

**Austrian Ambassador Esterhazy.** I most certainly will, Your Majesty. **Peter.**

Ahahahaha! Now I shall turn my armies to the retched Denmark. **Stroganov.** (*To Panin.*) Please remind me, Nikia Sergeyeovich, what's wrong with Denmark? I thought they were our fiends.

**Peter.** (*Pacing in front of the Portrait of Frederick II.*) I am going to crush that den of thieves like an empty nutshell...

**Ambassador of France L'Hopital.** Has he just broken our alliance. What shall we do? Should we leave?

**Austrian Ambassador Esterhazy.** No, let's stay, Marquis, I believe the dénouement of this act is nigh.

**Panin.** In the beginning of the century in the Great Northern war His Majesty's Duchy of Schleswig-Holstein sided with Sweden and was defeated by Denmark. The Danes have been occupying the northern portions of Schleswig ever since. His Majesty's father Charles Frederick married the daughter of Peter the Great especially in hope that Russia would help to return the lost territory. But the tsar died before he could settle that. So now 40 years later, His Majesty is sending the army to defeat the Danes.

**Peter.** I'll bring fire and death to them for stealing from my father. (*To the Portrait.*) And you, oh Great Master! Will you stand by my side on the smoking battlefield gazing upon the dead enemies?!

*Peter tries to drop on his knees before the portrait like before an icon. Only his knees do not want to bend, the jackboots are too high and too stiff, and he falls down awkwardly. Someone laughs. Peter gets up with difficulty or is helped up. He is furious and looks everyone over.*

Which one? Which one of you laughed? *(To a soldier.)* You? On your knees! *(He puts someone on their knees.)* On your knees before the greatest king of all! You? *(To another soldier.)*

**Soldier.** Your Majesty, please... I beat his soldiers I was in his capital. Don't make me stand on my knees before him! I beg you, Your Majesty!

*The soldier goes down on his knees in front to Peter. Peter runs up to him and begins hitting him with his fists. The soldier does nothing. Peter kicks him.*

Put chains on this lout!

*The soldier is taken away.*

Flog him to bare bones!

*He comes back to the table.*

**Liza.** Your Majesty, you have worked up yourself. Come sit down. Have a drink, sweetie.

**Peter.** *(To Liza.)* You my dear doughnut... only you know what your patty pie wants... *(To the guests.)* Now to the health of the imperial family!

*Everyone rises. Catherine remains stirred. They drink and everyone shouts "Hurrah," cannons salvo outside.*

**Peter.** Gudovich, come here.

*I whispers something to Gudovich. Cannons fire outside continuously and the words cannot be heard. Firing ceases.*

*Gudovich crosses to the other side of the table to Catherine.*

**Gudovich.** His Majesty are asking you why didn't you rise when everyone drank the

health of the imperial family?

**Catherine.** Tell my husband that since the imperial family consists only of myself, my husband and our son I would never think His Majesty would expect me to stand up to drink my own health and show off myself to everyone!

*Gudovich crosses the table again and delivers the answer to Peter.*

**Gudovich.** Her Imperial Majesty were so kind as to say that...

**Peter.** She should know that our family is my Holstein uncles, particularly Prince Georg of Holstein who is the commander of the Russian Royal guard! Go to her and tell her...

*Cannons fire again Gudovich indicates to Peter that he cannot hear. Peter is visibly louder. But still drowned in cannonade. Firing ceases.*

**Peter** ...stupid.

**Gudovich.** ...is what?

**Peter.** Stupid. What are you waiting for...? *(He waves him off.)*

*Gudovich walks towards Catherine.*

**Gudovich.** His Imperial Majesty were so kind as to say that you are...eh...st...

**Peter.** *(To Catherine.)* ...Stupid! And you will always be stupid... Do you hear? *(To Gudovich.)* You, get the hell out of here. I don't want to see you again.

**Gudovich.** Your Majesty.

**Peter.** *(To Gudovich.)* You're banished! Get out! *(To Catherine. Loud.)* You're an idiot, stupid idiot!

*He sits down and downs a glass. Pause.*

**Catherine.** *(Holding back tears. To Stroganov.)* Aleksandr Sergeyich, amuse me with an anecdote, would you?

**Stroganov.** There once lived one Prince in the happy Arcadia. And there lived a shepherdess, who had a lover hot and fervent of pleasure games... One day a

shepherdess...

**Peter.** Stroganov! What is it you're doing?

**Stroganov.** I am telling Her Majesty an anecdote about a Prince of Arcadia.

**Peter.** Who allowed you to do that?

**Stroganov.** Ah, Her Majesty were so kind as to request...

**Peter.** I am the Majesty. You should have known that. Stroganov, I don't want to see you ever again. You're banished. Get out of St Petersburg! And stay quiet out there, if you want to keep your head on your shoulders. Well...?

*Stroganov rises, bows and exits.*

My aunt made a stupid mistake banning executions and this is the result: you are all out of hand! But I will change this. I will break you. I've thrown out that bastard Inquisitor Shuvalov, because I don't have a use of the Secret Chancellery anymore. My friend, the Great Frederick tells me exactly who is plotting against me. I have appointed trustful people to watch those, particularly the Guard and one Grigory Orlov. *(To Catherine.)* As for you... I will conduct a thorough investigation and find out who is the actual father of our so-called son and all the rest of your bastards. And I will place you under arrest. And when I find the truth I will punish you. No more of your viperish plots. Not for long anyway. So don't take this black dress off. It will come in handy when I lock you up in a monastery. And then I will finally marry someone I truly love *(turning to Liza)* my Lizette, my little cutie pie. *(A kiss. To Catherine.)* You fool. Ahahahaha!

**Catherine.** *(Calm.)* Am I under arrest?

**Peter.** *(Laughs.)* I haven't decided yet.

**Catherine.** Then excuse me, Your Majesty, I believe you can continue the celebration without my presence. Goodbye.

*She walks to exit.*

**Peter.** Don't you dare leave the palace. Do you hear? *(She's already gone.)* Until I decide what to do with you. *(He jumps up.)* Fool! I don't want to see you ever again! Stupid bitch... *(Looks around. Pause.)* Everybody, celebrate! Chancellor! Vorontsov!

**Vorontsov.** I'm here, Your Majesty.

**Peter.** My order for every homeowner in Petersburg: every house must be decorated and illuminated in honour of our eternal peace with Prussia. And fireworks. More fire. All soldiers are to parade and go down on one knee before the portrait of the great Frederick. Upon my Imperial will, the rest of our army is now under the command of Frederick of Prussia.

**Vorontsov.** Of course, Your Majesty.

**Peter.** Here's to Great Frederick!

*Cannon fire.*

**Peter.** Tomorrow we shall go to Oranienbaum, have a good time, pack and I will have the Danes by the scruff. We'll set out to war after my Angel Day. Glückliche Engel Tag für mich!

*Cannon fire.*

The Navy sets out tomorrow.

**Vorontsov.** Your Majesty, perhaps we could postpone the Navy's operations. According to the Admiralty's report, a large part of the crews are in infirmaries. They are ill.

**Peter.** (*Approaching Vorontsov. Menacingly.*) Ill? I order that the ill sailors heal themselves now. Carry out, Chancellor. While you're still a chancellor. Nah, nah, I'm joking, my future father-in-law.

*He pats Vorontsov on the shoulder.*

**Vorontsov.** Here's to our Sovereign Emperor Peter III and his swift victory over the wretched Danes!

**Peter.** Yeah.

*Cannon fire.*

**SCENE TWENTY “28 of June”**

*28 June. Night. Peterhof. Palace Monplaisir. Orlov climbs through the window. His sword clanks. Shkurin wakes up.*

**Alekhan.** Ah, sh...

**Shkurin.** (*Whisper.*) Who’s there? I’ve got a pistol. I will shoot you thief!

**Alekhan.** (*Whisper.*) Don’t shoot, Shkurin. It’s me, Orlov.

**Shkurin.** (*Whisper.*) I don’t know if you are. Show yourself. And don’t move.

**Alekhan.** (*Whisper.*) Shkurin, how can I show myself without moving. In order to show myself I must light up a candle.

**Shkurin.** (*Whisper.*) I’ll light up a candle. Don’t you move.

**Alekhan.** (*Whisper.*) Alright but do it quick.

*Shkurin lights up a candle and brings it to the still standing Orlov.*

**Shkurin.** Ah it’s really you!

**Alekhan.** Yes it’s really me.

**Shkurin.** Please don’t be cross with me, Sir. It’s the middle of the night and I’m alone here in the palace to guard Her Majesty. I must be cautious. There were rumours you know. That Her Majesty’s life is in danger. That some ill doers wish to kidnap Her Majesty. But I am so glad, sir, that I see you. Because when the brother’s Orlov are around...

**Alekhan.** Where is Her Majesty?

**Shkurin.** She is asleep in her bed, Sir.

**Alekhan.** Where?

**Shkurin.** In her bedroom. Sir, will you stay with us? I must say it would be most beneficial for our concerns if someone like you were nearby at all times, sir. Your brother Grigory comes often and then I can rest, but he is not here right now and I don’t know....

*Orlov lifts Shkurin up by clinching him by the shoulders, turns around and puts him on the ground.*

**Alekhan.** Excellent. Thank you.

*He quickly goes towards Catherin's room and enters. Catherine is in the bed.*

*Catherine wakes up.*

**Shkurin.** Your majesty, I am very sorry to wake you up...

**Catherine.** What happened?

**Alekhan.** Our friend officer Passek was arrested last night. It's only time before he names everyone involved in the plot.

**Catherine.** How did it happen?

**Alekhan.** He went to the regimental commander that was not yet on our side and asked him how soon will the emperor be dethroned because the soldiers were asking. It was really just a question of time before it came out somehow. We must move now. Everything is ready to proclaim you the Empress.

**Catherine.** What's the time?

**Shkurin.** It's coming to 6 in the morning, Your Majesty.

**Catherine.** Alright. Vasily, the uniform.

**Shkurin.** Yes, Matushka.

*Catherine gets up. And goes behind the screen. Shkurin brings and gives her the uniform of the Preobrazhensky Regiment.*

**Catherine.** Why didn't Grigory come?

**Alekhan.** Stepan Perfilyev came to the regiment last night. We know him to be Peter's spy. So Grigory took him in for cards and booze. While he kept him busy, I took the carriage and rushed here.

**Catherine.** Where are Panin and Hetman Razumowski?

**Alekhan.** Panin is with Grand Duke Pavel. Razumowski is at his place. They have printed the manifesto at the Academy of Science. It names you as the ruler of Russia.

*Catherine comes out from behind the screen dressed in the uniform of an officer of the Royal Guard.*

**Catherine.** Not the autocrat?

**Alekhan.** No. They are planning to deliver them to the Izmailovsky Regiment and bring Pavel there in the morning.

**Catherine.** So that they take oath to my son...?

**Alekhan.** That's why we decided to act before them. The Izmailovsky will take oath to you before they get there, We'll quickly write another manifesto and Panin will have to accept.

**Catherine.** Let's go. Vasily, you're coming with us.

**Shuvalov.** Your Majesty, what about your usual surprise for the His Majesty's Angel Day? They will come here today for the feast. We must prepare. Cooks, tables, fireworks... The dinner... What about this parade dress?

**Alekhan.** I think this time His Majesty will have to fast.

**Catherine.** Leave it where it is. Bye, Vasily.

*Catherine and Alekhan exit. Shkurin makes the sign of the cross after them. Exits.*

*Monplaisir is empty. The day begins. Sounds of unrest, crowds hum, clacking of weapons, screams, "For our Matushka the Empress!!", "Stop, soldiers! Remember your oath!", "Go to hell, scoundrels!", "Beat him!", etc. – the revolution.*

*Catherine appears on the balcony of the Winter Palace. The voice of Catherine:*

*"Soldiers, officers I am hear and safe thanks to you. My son, the Grand Duke Pavel is here with me! Listen! "By the grace of God, We Yekaterina the Second, Empress and Sovereign of All the Russias etc., etc., etc. To all the righteous sons of the Russian Fatherland it became clear what danger to the entire Russian State was indeed imminent, namely: our Greek Orthodox law fist felt shock and annihilation of its religious traditions, so Our Greek Church was subject to the outmost danger of changing the ancient Russian Orthodoxy for a different religion. Secondly, the glory of Russia, raised to the highest degree by her victorious arms, through a great her bloodshed, with the conclusion of the new peace treaty with her very evildoer was given away into a complete and utter subjection; in the meantime the internal order that constitute the unity of Our Fatherland was absolutely brought to ruin. That is why, being convinced of this danger for all Our faithful subjects, We were forced, having taken God and His justice in our aid, and particularly seeing the willing for it of all Our faithful subjects, obvious and sincere, to access autocratically to Our Russian Throne, in which all Our faithful subjects gave a solemn oath of loyalty."*



*Enters Peter, Liza, Vorontsov, Gudovich, Mardefeld, all are in good spirits.*

**Peter.** *(To the Prussian Mardefeld.)* ...You won't regret this, Von Holtz. My wife always prepares a surprise for me for my Angel day. Every time it's something different but always entertaining...

*Shkurin bows.*

O, this is our old valet! Hello, my friend.

**Shkurin.** Good day, Your Majesty.

**Peter.** Where is the celebration?

**Shkurin.** What celebration is His Majesty enquiring about?

**Peter.** *(Laughs.)* I knew you were dumb, Shkurin. *(To Mardefeld.)* These slaves have no brain. You need to beat it into them. *(Liza laughs. To Shkurin.)* It's the Angel Day of your Emperor, moron. We are going to celebrate it here in Peterhof. Where is the dining chamber?

**Shkurin.** I have no instructions about the dining chamber.

**Peter.** Ah, the marquees are set in the park? Where?

**Shkurin.** I know nothing of any marquees, Your Majesty.

**Peter.** How come?

*Shkurin shrugs.*

**Peter.** I want to see Her Majesty. Where is she?

**Shkurin.** Her Majesty is not here.

**Mardefeld.** This must be her surprise...

**Peter.** What surprise? *(To Shkurin.)* Where is my wife?!

**Liza.** You said that I am wife now. I'm here.

**Peter.** Yes, I know. I mean the other one... *(To Shkurin.)* Where is she?

**Shkurin.** Her Majesty was so kind as to leave at 6 o'clock this morning.

**Peter.** What nonsense...

*He searches for her. Opens cupboards, looks under tables into the windows, under the bed.*

**Mardefeld.** Tell me, my friend, where did Her Majesty go?

**Shkurin.** That I cannot know.

**Vorontsov.** (*Grabs Shkurin by the shirt front.*) You lying tick! Tell it now! Who did she go with?

**Shkurin.** She left with the Royal Guard.

**Peter.** (*From under Catherine's bed.*) Liza! I told you she was capable of anything.

**Liza.** Is this her dress? Tasteless.

**Peter.** (*Runs up to a stand with the dress.*) I hate you!!! I hate you I hate you!!!

*He slumps on a chair and begins to weep. Liza runs to him and weeps too.*

**Peter.** Chancellor, Mikhailo Illarionovich... you must deliver my message to her. My message... I will forgive... She must tell her soldiers to stand down... Will you?

**Vorontsov.** Yes, Your Majesty.

**Peter.** (*Smiling.*) Oh, you are a true friend, Mikhailo Illarionych. Tell her... tell her... that it is not too late.

*Vorontsov leaves. Posier and Vorontsov arrive in the Winter Palace at the same time. The squeeze through the crowd.*

**Vorontsov.** Make way for Chancellor! Make way for Chancellor.

*He approaches Catherine.*

I was sent by the Emperor in order to amicably but with all the appropriate grievance call upon Your Majesty to stop the uprising immediately, while it is still in its initial stage. In that case no obstacle will exist to a full reconciliation. It is not too late.

**Catherine.** Chancellor, have a look out the window. Do you see the crowds?

Everything has already been decided and it is the expression of the unanimous will of our nation. Do not your own eyes tell you that it is too late? Will swear the oath to me?

**Vorontsov.** Your Majesty, you can be assured that I will never harm your rule neither with word or deed but I will never break my oath to the living emperor.

**Catherine.** Then you won't be cross, I hope, if I put you under arrest in your

residence.

*Vorontsov is taken away.*

**Shkurin.** (*In Monplaisir. Cleaning up.*) His Majesty was so kind as to depart. Sailed to the Navy base in Kronstadt. Made a mess and left...

**Catherine.** Posier, I'm glad to see you. I remember my debts. You will be rewarded.

**Posier.** The way I wished, Your Majesty?

**Catherine.** Yes, Posier. I have the commission.

**Posier.** In that case I have no time to lose.

**Catherine.** I will see you soon, Posier.

**Posier.** Your Majesty, I only beg you, please... because the soldiers rejoice so...so merry... Since the religion is not going to change... I'm a foreigner and afraid to walk alone...

**Catherine.** Posier, you are my friend. Go without fear. In my name.

*Posier bows and exits. In Monplaisir Peter is depressed. Liza is crying. Gudovich is pacing. Prussian Mardefeld is sitting. Shkurin is sweeping.*

**Gudovich.** (*Stops pacing.*) Your Majesty, what if you take a small retinue of most prominent aristocrats straight to St Petersburg. Show yourself in front of the people and the Guards... The presence of the sovereign will have a strong affect, affect the people and turn the circumstances in your favour. Your grandfather Peter the Great did exactly that.

**Mardefeld.** That Peter was Great...

**Peter.** Tell my order to my Holstein guards: arrive here and organise the defence along the perimeter in the park.

**Mardefeld.** Your Majesty, if the regiments arrive here from St Petersburg, your guards will be no much for them. It would be a terrible bloodshed.

**Peter.** My guards! They will fight!

**Mardefeld.** Naturally. But it's the Royal Guard... But the Royal Guard is not the entire army. There is the navy too.

**Vorontsov.** That's right, Your Majesty. Kronstadt Fortress is only an hour sailing

away. The sailors will never go against their oath.

**Peter.** (*Jumps up. Suddenly hopeful.*) Yes, the Navy. They will protect me. I will go to them. To the boats! To Kronstadt!

*He exits. Liza runs after him. Mardefeld and Gudovich follow walking. Shkurin sweeps after them. In the Winter Palace Catherine is in the Royal Guards uniform, with her Orlov Alekhan, Panin and her party.*

**Orlov.** Two Royal Guards infantry regiments, the Royal Cavalry Guards, two regiments of hussars and two regular infantry regiments, altogether 12000 men are ready to march.

**Catherine.** We move out to Peterhof...

*They leave. In Monplaisir Peter is brought in by servants. He is put on the bed. Enter Liza. Gudovich, Mardefeld, retinue.*

**Shkurin.** Oh, what happened to his majesty? Is he alright?

**Gudovich.** His Majesty is in bad spirits.

**Shkurin.** No luck in Kronstadt?

**Gudovich.** The garrison directed guns at us. At their own Emperor!

*Liza cries.*

**Peter.** (*Jumps up.*) I sent my wife another letter. What did she answer?

**Mardefeld.** Your Majesty, there was no answer and the messenger did not return.

**Peter.** ...and another...

**Gudovich.** The guardsmen did not come back, Your Majesty.

**Peter.** But in that one I agreed to abdicate! To avoid a civil war! As long as she lets me go back to my Holstein. What else does she want?! Gudovich, you know her, what else could she want.

**Gudovich.** Your Majesty, no one knows her better than you. You are her husband.

*Liza cries.*

**Peter.** Shkurin, you know her well...

**Shkurin.** Your Majesty, I believe this... (*He points to the window.*)

*Sounds of many soldiers shouting: "Give him to us!!" "Let's break the Prussian's neck!!!" Peter, like a hunted hare, runs to one corner then another, another – no place to hide. Enter Alekhan, Grigory, Panin. Peter finds himself in front of them.*

...will give you all the answers.

**Peter.** Panin..? Oh, how glad I am to see you! Liza!! Panin is here!!

*Liza rushes to him.*

**Liza.** Nikita Ivanovich, save us!!!

**Peter.** Yes, Nikita Ivanovich, in the name of your pupil and my son Pavel...

**Panin.** In your last message to Her Majesty you declared Pavel illegitimate.

**Peter.** I was wrong! I was tired and confused. He's legitimate. He's mine!

**Liza.** (*Drops on her knees and crawls at Panin's feet.*) Please! I beg you. In the name of everything sacred. Save us.

**Panin.** Your Majesty, I brought the text of your abdication. Sign it.

**Peter.** Yes, yes, yes. But I already sent my abd...

**Panin.** This is a more desired text.

**Peter.** "In the time of my short and autocratic reign I have discovered from my own experience that I do not have sufficient strength to carry such burden and administration of such a country not only in autocratic but in any other form is beyond my understanding and it was for that reason that I noticed wavering which could be followed by a complete ruin of the said country to my eternal infamy... I voluntarily and solemnly declare to all of Russia and the whole world that for the rest of my life I renounce abdicate from the rule."

**Panin.** Sign it.

*Peter signs. Panin takes the paper.*

**Peter.** Where is my wife? I need to speak to her. I want to tell her...

**Panin.** On Her Majesty's orders, you are to be transferred to the Palace in Ropsha. A regiment of Royal guards is assigned for your protection.

**Peter.** I have my own Holstein guards.

**Alekhan.** Not anymore. Your Holstein guards are themselves under guard. Haha.

**Panin.** These officers of the Royal guard will take you now.

**Alekhan.** Come, Sir.... How do I call him now?

**Panin.** “Former Emperor” will do.

*Liza goes with him. Alekhan stops her.*

**Alekhan.** Only the “Former Emperor”.

**Liza.** *(Again throws herself at Panin’s feet.)* No!!! Don’t separate us! *(Groveling.)*  
Please!

**Peter.** *(In tears. Searching for Panin’s hand to kiss it. Panin is avoiding.)* Nikita Ivanovich, sir... Anything...! Only don’t separate me from my Liza..!

**Panin.** *(To Mardefeld.)* Sir Mardefeld, please accept my hospitality and join me in m carriage to St Peterburg.

**Mardefeld.** With pleasure.

*Panin and Mardefeld leave. Alekhan takes the Former Emperor away. Grigory escorts Liza and Gudovich.*

**Shkurin.** Well, thank god.

*He begins weeping. Blackout.*

## **SCENE TWENTY ONE “The End of the Emperor”**

*3 July, 1762. A room in the house in Ropsha. Windows are heavily draped. It is dark everywhere were the candles are not lit. Alekhan Orlov is at the table. He is writing. The table has plates and bottles all over - the remnants of the guarding soldiers and officers' feast.*

**Alekhan.** "Matushka gracious Sovereign, we all wish you to live uncountable years. We and the whole team are well at this time, only our freak is very ill and got a

sudden colic. And I am afraid that he might die this night, and even more afraid that he might live. The first danger is that he keeps speaking nonsense which is even funny for us but the other danger is that he is indeed dangerous to us all because sometimes he speaks as if he was in his former rank. Upon your personal order I gave soldiers a half-year pay... Some soldiers spoke with tears in their eyes of your kindness that they have not deserved to be rewarded so in such a short time."

"To Matushka of all the Russia's": "Matushka our gracious sovereign. I do not know what to do now. I am afraid of your majesty's wrath, that you might think ill of us and that we might be the cause of death of your evildoer and of Russia and also of our law. Now the lackey Maslov attached to him has become ill too. As for the man himself, he is now so ill that I don't think he will survive till evening. He has completely fainted, which the whole team knows now and prays that he be off our hands as soon as possible. The same Maslov and the officer dispatched can confirm to your majesty his condition right now. Should you doubt myself. Your slave wrote this..."

Prince! Baryatinsky! Vanya!

*He goes to the door.*

*Who's on duty by the door?*

*Door opens on him. Enter colonel of Izmailovsky Regiment Prince Ivan Sergeyeovich Baryatinsky.*

Where've you been! This needs to be dispatched to Her Majesty in the capital.

**Baryatinsky.** We have visitors.

**Alekhan.** What visitors?

**Baryatinsky.** Perhaps they can deliver the letter and save us going.

*Enter Fyodor Volkov, Captain/lieutenant Aleksandr Martynovich Shvanvich, Prince Boryatinsky, Real State Counsellor Grigory Nikolayevich Teplov. They bring bottles.*

**Alekhan.** Shvanvich, you old son of a bitch! I'm alone but I'm not leaving this time. Nor ever again.

**Shvanvich.** We aren't in a tavern, right?

**Alekhan.** Right.

**Shvanvich.** It's your brother who's now in favour with the Empress. So I figure it's time to make peace. *(He produces bottles and puts them on the table.)* Right?

**Alekhan.** Now you're talking. *(To Baryatinsky.)* Sit down, Prince! Now that's better. 'Cause I was started catching melancholia in this hellhole, if you know what I mean.

**Teplov.** What are you talking about?

**Baryatinsky.** You don't know? *(To Alekhan.)* He's an outsider. *(Laughs.)* A civilian. *(Pats him on the shoulder. Teplov winces.)*

*All sit down at the table. Cards appear. Shvanvich begins dealing. Baryatinsky open bottles. Alekhan lights up pipe candles. They light up long pipes.*

*(To Teplov.)* Shvanvich and the Orlov brothers go back a long time. No one in all the guard regiments can ever defeat them in a fistfight. Not one on one. But Shvanvich here tried.

**Alekhan.** And lost miserably.

**Shvanvich.** Once or twice.

**Alekhan.** Or thrice, or more.

**Baryatinsky.** Until he saw Alekhan alone in a public house...

**Shvanvich.** Enough, Prince. Let bygones be bygones. Whoever remembers the past, may he lose an eye...

**Alekhan.** *(He points at the scar across his face.)* And that who forgets, may he lose both. You had to pull your sword out.

**Shvanvich.** We were drunk, Alekhan. We ought to make peace.

**Baryatinsky.** By getting drunk. *(Laughs. To Teplov.)* Yes, they've been drinking in different taverns since.

**Teplov.** I thought this was a war wound.

**Shvanvich.** We were at war.

**Teplov.** Do you warn each other about your drinking plans?

**Alekhan.** No, he must leave if we show up.

**Shvanvich.** And he must leave if he's alone. But that's over now. So I say we make



peace.

**Alekhan.** Is that why you came all the way from Petersburg?

**Teplov.** Not exactly. Matushka the Empress ordered rooms to be prepared in Schlisselburg Fortress and put Peter there.

**Alekhan.** Tsss. Not so laud. He's in the other room.

**Teplov.** So what? He will find out you know.

**Alekhan.** Yes, in an appropriate moment. He's miserable as it is.

**Shvanvich.** O, do I sense pity in your voice?

**Alekhan.** He's been going from bad trow worse. He vomited and shitted all night. His colic is bad. I don't wish to see more of it. Not until it's absolutely necessary.

**Shvanvich.** You like your prisoner.

**Alekhan.** Shvanvich, have you come to make peace here? I don't want to stay here a minute longer than it's required.

**Teplov.** True that. Back in the capital everyone is reaping rewards. Panin is Chancellor now.

**Shvanvich.** Your brother is a Major-General.

**Alekhan.** My little brother? (*Smiles.*) Good. There'll be enough rewards for us.

**Baryatinsky.** I hope you're right, Alekhan.

*Peter yells from the room.*

**Shvanvich.** What's with him?

**Alekhan.** How should I know? Am I a doctor? Ill.

**Teplov.** Things are not so good, sirs officers. Preobrazhensky and Izmailovsky regiments are in open revolt. Soldiers talk between each other openly surprised at their deed. "Why have we brought down the grandson of Peter The Great himself and put his crown on some German lass?" Sailors that were never even told, walk around the city and spit at the guardsmen, calling them traitors, saying that they sold their emperor for beer.

**Shvanvich.** That's true, Alekhan. They spit at me in the face without fear. So you are doing well sitting here.

**Teplov.** The night before last (30-1), hundreds of soldiers from the Izmailovsky Regiment got completely drunk and came to the palace. They yelled that Preobrazhensky Regiment killed Matushka! Catherine had to get up and come out to

them to calm them down. They screamed: “foul” and “treason”. The Preobrazhensky Regiment feel they have been neglected and lost their privileges because they were not the first to support the revolution. Last night they besieged the palace again. They shouted the Preobrazhensky Regiment would free Peter III. They cry that the foreigner may only have a right to reign as regent by her son or by her husband. And one more thing, Semionovsky Regiment is in turmoil. They cry Ivan Antonovich for the throne. You have three hundred Semonovsky soldiers around this palace. This is why we've hurried here.

**Baryatinsky.** No, they can't want that. They would be mad.

**Teplov.** You speak as if you thought there aren't enough fools in Russia.

**Baryatinsky.** No joke.

**Shvanvich.** No joke.

**Teplov.** Or worse. What if they reconcile?

**Alekhan.** Who?

**Teplov.** The freak begs her to meet. What if she does? What if her woman's heart softens and yields to his grovelling? What if they come together again? In the face of the unrest?

**Alekhan.** This cannot be. He's a complete asshole and has been so and will always be.

**Teplov.** (*Smirks.*) This is politics. This is where you are an outsider, Monsignor Orloff. In politics assholes are always welcome. However it's your brother who sleeps with her. Maybe you know better.

**Alekhan.** Hey, hey hey!

**Teplov.** I only want to say that I know for sure that she ordered to move Ivan from Shlisselburg to the Fortress of Keksholm and prepare comfortable quarters in Schlisselburg. You ask for who? She wants to keep him close. He's not going anywhere abroad.

*Pause.*

I'm just saying. She's only a woman. But if the freak indeed gets back to the palace, we all will lose our heads.

**Alekhan.** So what are you proposing?

*Peter vomits behind the door and groans.*

**Alekhan.** He's in a bad way. Maybe he'll crock out himself.

**Teplov.** God willing.

**Shvanvich.** How long we must wait?

**Alekhan.** No. My orders from Matushka are to protect him.

**Teplov.** How so? Doesn't the instruction say that in case of an imminent danger of Peter being freed he must be killed?

**Alekhan.** I have no such instruction.

**Teplov.** That's the instruction that applies to Prisoner Ivan, which was approved by your prisoner. In case someone decides to change the tsar. What if we don't get Peter to Schlisselburg.

*Peter moans.*

**Shvanvich.** With a bit of luck he'll die on the way.

**Alekhan.** I understand (*Points at Teplov.*) that this guy is a deviant, but you, Shvanvich?

**Teplov.** Friends, we don't need to quarrel, we need to find a way out of our predicament.

*Alekhan gets up and goes to his door. Opens it.*

**Alekhan.** What? Is it bad? I've sent for your doctor.

**Peter.** This room is too small.

**Teplov.** Give him some wine. That'll help.

**Alekhan.** Do you want wine? Have a bite to eat. Come to the table.

*Peter comes out of the room. He is very pale and miserable.*

**Peter.** Shvanvich? Teplov, you're here too? Have you all betrayed me?

**Alekhan.** Alright, come and sit with us calmly. Or else you'll go back into your room.

**Peter.** Oh, please, don't send me back in there! It's too small. I'll die there.

**Baryatinsky.** Then sit down quietly.

**Peter.** I would like to walk.

**Alekhan.** Sit.

*Peter cautiously sits down at the table.*

**Alekhan.** You want to eat?

*He pulls a plate towards Peter. Teplov pushes a glass towards him and pour wine.*

**Teplov.** Have some of this. You'll feel better.

**Peter.** What is it?

**Shvanvich.** Cough mixture. Bahahaha.

*They laugh. Peter smiles. Shvanvich pours for himself and Teplov. He raises the glass and empties it. So does Teplov. Peter drinks.*

**Shvanvich.** See? A few of these and your colic will be gone!

*Peter feels sick and goes to vomit but does not.*

**Peter.** Can I have some milk?

**Teplov.** What is this a milk farm or something? Alekhan, do you have milk?

**Alekhan.** Nope.

**Teplov.** Sorry. Share our potluck, as it is.

**Shvanvich.** Yeah, have some more.

**Baryatinsky.** Fancy a game?

**Peter.** I have no more money.

*Orlov takes out his wallet and gives him an imperial.*

**Alekhan.** Take this. You can have as many as you want.

*Peter become animated.*

**Peter.** Could I have a little stroll in the park, please?

**Baryatinsky.** Sure. Come on.

*Baryatinsky gets up and goes to the door. Peter follows. Baryatinsky opens the door and gives a sign to the guards. He invites Peter to come through. Peter goes but is stopped at the door by the guards crossing rifles in front of him.*

**Baryatinsky.** (*Laughing.*) Oh, I'm sorry. You see they don't let you through.

*They all laugh.*

So, if you would be so kind... (*He points to the table.*)

*Peter goes back and sits down.*

**Peter.** Shvanvich, you were in my Holstein regiment! You betrayed me!

**Shvanvich.** Do you remember how you promised me a village with 300 souls as a reward for my service? Where is it?

**Peter.** You'll get it, as soon as I get my crown back.

*Everyone bellows laughing.*

**Baryatinsky.** How do you suppose that will happen?

**Peter.** My brother King Frederick will not leave me alone. He will send his army to take St Petersburg by forces and hang you all.

**Alekhan.** Is that that Frederick who we beat in every battle and whose capital we took? And whose personal adjutant was taken prisoner at Zorndorf by my brother while your hero king ran away?

*They laugh.*

**Teplov.** Her imperial Majesty has just received a letter from King Frederick congratulating her on a successful accession to the throne of Russia.

**Peter.** You are only a handful of guards. The army will come back from Prussia. They gave oath to me! Then you'll see.

**Baryatinsky.** What? The army? The oath? You betrayed the army. We all here fought in that army and shed blood for our fatherland against the enemy. But you behaved like the last treacherous whore. You gave our victory away. You subjected us to the very enemy we beat. You made us wear their uniforms. You think soldiers and officers will forgive you and run back to save you?

**Peter.** I am your rightful tsar!

**Baryatinsky.** Not anymore, you abdicated, remember? And when you were you were a whore...

**Peter.** Prince, you are a traitor. I gave you the rank, I made you my Fligel-Adjutant.

**Baryatinsky.** You also told me to arrest your wife. You put on me that stupid Prussian uniform! You denigrated my religion. So the traitor is you!...

**Peter.** Teplov, I could have thrown you out of the place but I kept you and gave you a position...

**Teplov.** And fucked my wife.

**Peter.** I should have known. They told me I was too soft. You can't be soft in Russia. I should have executed them... cut their heads off... all of them... Only an iron fist can hold this nation of miserable savages in order. I know now. You just wait. Your heads will roll. You just wait, I get my crown back and then neither you, nor you, nor my bitch wife will keep your heads on your shoulders. You are all traitors! This whole nation is the nation of slavish traitors! And you Prince Baryatinsky are the lowest of them all! You betrayed your oath. You have no honour! You, slave!!

*A sword flies across the table and lands in front of Peter. Pause.*

**Baryatinsky.** I descend from the Riuriks from the first Russian tsars. Don't you dare calling me slave, you piece of German shit!

**Peter.** How dare you speak to me like that!

*Shvanvich pulls his sword out of the holster and gives it to Baryatinsky.*

**Shvanvich.** Prince.

**Baryatinsky.** Lieutenant. *(To Peter.)* Pick up your sword.

**Peter.** No, fuck off.

**Shvanvich.** *(A kind advice.)* Take it, Petya.

**Peter.** *(Shaking. Stepping back.)* No.

**Baryatinsky.** And you tell me that I have no honour? *(Yells.)* Pick up the sword and fight like a man!

*Peter impulsively picks up the sword. Everyone moves away, they clear the chairs.*

**Baryatinsky.** Defend yourself!

**Peter.** You are mad!

**Baryatinsky.** I might be mad but I'm no slave!

*He lounges at Peter. He strikes from above. Peter parries awkwardly. Baryatinsky's is a double strike attack. Peter is just holding his sword in a awkward defence. Baryatinsky steps back.*

**Peter.** You are all mad!

*He throws the sword on the floor.*

Go to hell, all of you! You, slaves!

**Baryatinsky.** *(Throws his sword on the table.)* You don't deserve this. I'll squash you like a tick!

*He goes at Peter with his bare hands. Peter runs way around the room. Shvanvich reacts immediately. He rushes at Peter. Together they beat him. He falls to the floor. They converge on him.*

**Alekhan.** Enough! Or you'll kill the bastard.

*They don't react.*

Do you hear? I said enough!

*Rushes to pull them off Peter. Teplov stands in his way.*

**Teplov.** *(Very quickly.)* Alesha, think for yourself. What if he really gets his crown back. Half the guards think you're traitors, they will mutiny. What if Catherine decides to make peace with her husband? They are royalty. They are not us. We are all dead meat then. You taunted him, you beat him, jailed him!

*Alekhan throws Teplov to the side and rushes to the scuffle. He pulls Shvanvich away. Then hits Baryatinsky on the face.*

You'll be dead! And your brothers will be dead! But this way...

*Alekhan pulls Baryatinsky off Peter.*

No man - no problem...

*Alekhan looks down on Peter for a moment, checks him. Then he backs off. His steps are uneven. His face, his hands, his cloths are smeared with blood. They finish huffing and puffing. Pause.*

**Alekhan.** What to do?

**Teplov.** *(Begins tidying up.)* We must clean up. Come on!

*They put the chairs back up, pick up bits and pieces, wipe blood off their faces and hands and cloths. Baryatinsky and Volokov lift Peter's body and carry it into his room. Alekhan is still in disarray.*

**Teplov.** You must write.

**Alekhan.** What?

**Teplov.** A letter to our Empress. That her husband is dead.

*They put the chairs back up, pick up bits and pieces, wipe blood off their faces and hands and cloths. Baryatinsky and Volkov lift Peter's body and carry it into his*



*room. Alekhan is still in disarray.*

**Teplov.** You must write.

**Alekhan.** What?

**Teplov.** A letter to our Empress. That her husband is dead.

*Alekhan comes to the table, pours himself a shot and drinks. He crosses himself, sits down and begins to write. Catherine appears in a different part of stage, holding a paper in her hands, reading. Quietly Inquisitor appears. Catherine notices him and starts.*

**Inquisitor.** (*Bowing.*) Your Majesty wished to see me.

**Catherine.** Oh, Count?! Aleksandr Ivanych, you've startled me.

**Inquisitor.** I felt you wanted to talk privately so I took the secret passage to avoid being seen. I take it His Majesty... His ex-Majesty Peter has left us...

**Catherine.** Lord is my witness, I did not wish for this.

**Inquisitor.** It had to be.

**Catherine.** No! It did not. I never wanted blood and I never will. This was an accident.

**Inquisitor.** Naturally, Your Majesty.

**Catherine.** Aleksandr Ivanych, my best, most trusted friends are implicated in the death of my husband! No matter what our relations were lately, we lived together for 18 years. And now his death will weigh forever on my conscience.

**Inquisitor.** I understand they acted on their own accord, so Your Majesty have no need to feel remorse. Punish the murderers.

**Catherine.** What..? Punish?

**Inquisitor.** Yes, it's murder. Put them to trial. And execute them.

**Catherine.** Am I to punish the very people who risked everything for me, because they had a fight with my husband?

**Inquisitor.** And killed him.

**Catherine.** And killed him. (*She cries.*)

**Inquisitor.** No need for your tears, Matushka. He's not worth it.

**Catherine.** Who do you mean?

**Inquisitor.** Your Majesty, whether you wish it or not, you will have to judge and

punish.

**Catherine.** I don't want to judge and punish I want to pardon.

**Inquisitor.** Then pardon.

**Catherine.** He begged me to let him go back to his Holstein. I could not let him do it.

**Inquisitor.** You were right. That would have been unwise.

**Catherine.** So I ordered rooms to be prepared for him in Shlisselburg fortress...

**Inquisitor.** And you sent the Known Prisoner to another fortress because you did not want to have two crowned prisoners in one place. And during the transfer their ship sunk during the storm. He could have fled. That was highly unwise. Unless...

**Catherine.** Unless what?

**Inquisitor.** Unless he was to die during that storm...

**Catherine.** You've always scared me because I knew of your ruthlessness but that you would think that I'd be so cruel to order my family to be murdered?!

**Inquisitor.** When you were the Grand Duchess, you wished for Her Majesty's quick death. Now you are the Empress and your wishes can be fulfilled.

**Catherine.** You are wrong about me, Aleksandr Ivanych, I'm no monster.

**Inquisitor.** You asked me to come... What do you want from me?

**Catherine.** I need advice... from someone non-partial... What am I to do..?

**Inquisitor.** You think the Inquisitor is the right person to ask?

**Catherine.** I think Aleksandr Ivanovich Shuvalov is the person to ask.

*Short pause.*

**Inquisitor.** Did it happen last night?

*Catherine gives letter to Inquisitor. He scans it.*

**Inquisitor.** Your husband suffered from chronic colic, brought about by his excessive drinking, certain features of his physique and bad nerves. It wasn't a question if but when he would die prematurely. The royal doctors can certify that... His condition worsened after his arrest. The calamity brought his health to a breaking point. He finally suffered a severe attack of colic and died.

**Catherine.** Will they believe it?

**Inquisitor.** No. They will say that a usurper killed their tsar and sat on the throne.

**Catherine.** I'm not a usurper. I am the wife of the late rightful Emperor and the mother of the heir. Do you hear the shouting outside? These are the troops that are rejoicing my victory.

**Inquisitor.** It's not what is rightful but what feels right that drives the mob.

**Catherine.** They are not a mob. They are the Royal Guards. And they swore an oath to me.

**Inquisitor.** They also gave oath to your husband and it didn't stop them from dethroning and... killing him. At the moment they are drunk and happy. But tomorrow they'll sober up and learn that the "rightful" emperor they dethroned was murdered. It will not matter whether you gave the order or it was an accident. They'll blame you, because you benefit from his death, even though they benefit from it too. And many will want to turn on you, especially those who will feel left out by your generosity. They will not be the Royal Guard any more but exactly a mob, just like so many times before. Besides there's the army in Prussia that can return to fulfil their duty in serving their sovereign. The question is which one?

**Catherine.** Which one..?

**Inquisitor.** The one that they'll choose. Yourself, your son, or Emperor Ivan VI. I see that Counsellor Teplov was present in Ropsha last night.

**Catherine.** It seems so.

**Inquisitor.** He is a man without principles. He serves only himself, not you, not even Nikita Panin, even though the other believes it. Their party of courtiers wished to put Paul on the throne with you as a regent and rule themselves. They want the power. For now you've been moving faster than them and their plan floundered. Don't slow down your pace. They already began spreading rumour that the Orlovs killed Peter in order to discredit your most loyal supporters. Know this: Panin wants an end to autocratic rule. He's your enemy. You need to prepare a manifesto about Peter's natural death and bring his body to the capital. Let everyone see it so nobody thinks it's a hoax and that Peter is alive somewhere. Then make the coronation ceremony as quickly as possible. Peter kept postponing it. He thought that he was the Emperor and that's it. In Russia you must be anointed by the church. Next is Ivan VI.

**Catherine.** What about him?

**Inquisitor.** That... *(He points to the window.)* The mob... It's so easy to infect them

with a new idea right now. They might turn to Ivan. My information is precise. There's talk of that among the guards. But don't take it from me. Ask your trusted guardsmen.

**Catherine.** So what is your solution?

**Inquisitor.** He must die.

**Catherine.** I am not a murderer.

**Inquisitor.** You're the Empress. Want it or not, you will have to execute, punish.

**Catherine.** Yelizaveta never executed anyone.

**Inquisitor.** True. She never signed a death warrant but people died on the rack, we burnt, beat, broke, tore nostrils and branded and sent people to Siberia. You will have to do the same or perish.

**Catherine.** I wish to avoid it. I wish to build on reason and humanity.

**Inquisitor.** This is what I reason. You must first get rid of the Known Prisoner.

**Catherine.** No, murder stands no reason. It's immoral.

**Inquisitor.** Your Majesty, it's precisely reason that urges to get rid of a dangerous obstacle. Perhaps you're confusing reason with morality.

**Catherine.** The greatest mind of our time Voltaire shows that reason is the source of moral action.

**Inquisitor.** I don't know much about Mr Voltaire but reason tells me: no man – no problem.

**Catherine.** Don't you have any moral principles at all?

**Inquisitor.** I do. My moral principle is my service to my country and my sovereign. The rest is reason.

**Catherine.** We don't understand each other.

**Inquisitor.** Maybe it's Mr Voltaire's confusion... What is moral - to lock up someone as a child and keep him like that for 20 years or to end his misery?

**Catherine.** He ought to be released.

**Inquisitor.** After 20 years? Is that moral?

**Catherine.** I must see him first and then I'll decide.

**Inquisitor.** Yes. Your predecessors did that too.

**Catherine.** Yelizaveta?

**Inquisitor.** And your husband. None of them knew what to do with him. We knew for sure that the Prussian King and the French king considered kidnapping and using Ivan. I said this to Her Majesty Yelizavet Petrovna, (*Looking up and crossing*

*himself.*) may her soul rest in peace, and I say this to you. Every enemy of yours will try to use Ivan against you. So he's your enemy, even if he might not know it. The longer he lives, the longer there is danger that someone will try to put him on the throne.

**Catherine.** What did you say to my husband?

**Inquisitor.** Nothing. He never saw me. I served Yelizaveta Petrovna like a loyal dog and kept her throne. Your late husband did not wish for my services. Now he's dead.

*Catherine stands up and walks along the room.*

**Catherine.** *(Stops.)* Tell me, did you love the Empress?

*Pause.*

The Secret Chancellery doesn't exist anymore. But there is the new Secret Expedition. Aleksandr Ivanovich, I would like you to take its reigns.

**Inquisitor.** Matushka, I am very grateful for the honour. But I'm old now. I wish for nothing but rest. My pupil will protect you.

**Catherine.** Well, so be it. Thank you for your service.

*Inquisitor bows and disappears. Catherine approaches the window. The soldiers outside see her and roar in jubilation "Yekaterina, vivat!!! Vivat!!! Vivat!!!"*  
*Blackout.*

## **SCENE TWENTY TWO "Prisoner Grigory"**

*The cell in the Schlisselburg Fortress. There are no windows. Dark. Candles. A heavy lock is unlocked from outside. Enter Chekin.*

**Chekin.** Hey, freak! Get behind the blind. Now.

**Ivan.** Fuck off.

**Chekin.** I'll smash your jaw, if you say another word. Get behind the blind now.

*Ivan gets up from his bed and walked behind the blind.*

You'll have a visitation. During that...

**Ivan.** Who wants to see me?

**Chekin.** Shut it. ...During that you must stay calm, keep your hands down, sit quietly, answer questions, abstain from obscenities or you'll be punished severely. Got it?

*Ivan begins laughing. Chekin comes very close to him and puts his fist in front of his face.*

You see this?

**Ivan.** Oh, I'm quiet.

**Chekin.** That's better.

*He goes to the door and opens it.*

He's ready.

*Enter Vlashev followed by Catherine dressed in a uniform of Preobrazhensky Regiment.*

**Vlashev.** Well, this is it, Your... (He is stopped by Catherine's gesture.) Yeah, the prisoner lives here.

**Catherine.** Thank you. Now leave us.

**Vlashev.** But Y...

**Catherine.** Leave us.

*They hesitate a little. Heavy door closes and locks behind Chekin and Vlashev. She takes in the prison environment. Prisoner Grigory is behind the blind. He is blond, eagle-nosed and very pale, thin and dressed in old poor but clean cloths. He has a long red beard. During the scene Ivan jumps up and walks to and fro mumbling something to himself, asking himself questions and laughing at his own answers.*

**Catherine.** Hello. You may come out.

*Ivan comes out from. Behind the blind.*

Have a sit. How are you? Do you have any requests? Does anything trouble you?

*Ivan comes closer.*

Sit down.

*Ivan sits down.*

I've brought some sweets for you. Why are you looking at me so?

**Ivan.** Y-y-y-y... You're a-a-a-a...

**Catherine.** A woman. How do you know! Did you see women before?

**Ivan.** (Nods repeatedly.) My m-m-m-mummy is a woman.

**Catherine.** You remember you mother?

*Ivan nods repeatedly.*

Do you know who you are?

**Ivan.** I am a Holy Ghost and Saint Grigory who has taken the guise of Ivann.

*Ivan jumps up and passes the room.*

*(To himself. When Ivan quotes the bible! his speech becomes smoothen, appears more coherent.)* "But Abraham said, Son, remember that thou in thy lifetime receivedst thy good things, and likewise Lazarus evil things: but now he is comforted, and thou art tormented." *(To Catherine.)* I often go to heaven and see beautiful people there in palaces of gold and white. You are beautiful... *(He comes very close to Catherine.)* Who are you, angel?

*His expression becomes painful and angry. He grabs himself by the crotch, utters a*

*cry of pain, rushes to his bed and throws himself on it face down. For a few moments he fidgets on it, groaning and moaning. It seems he is crying. For a moment Catherine does not know how to react.*

**Catherine.** Who is Ivan?

*Ivan sits up on the bed.*

**Ivan.** *(Thinks.)* Who is Ivan? My body, my flesh... They are that of Ivan the Prince that once was the Emperor of Russia and left this world long time ago. "Naked I came from my mother's womb, And naked shall I return there. The Lord gave, and the Lord has taken away; Blessed be the name of the Lord..." *(Suddenly remembers.)* "But I am a worm, and no man; A reproach of men, and despised by the people. All those who see Me ridicule Me..." *(Accusing someone.)* And you are a most vile creatures here that I detest. *(Confidentially complaining to Catherine.)* They put an evil eye on me, whisper around me and spit on me.

**Catherine.** Who?

**Ivan.** Creatures.

**Catherine.** What creatures?

**Ivan.** "...Many bulls have surrounded Me; Strong bulls ... have encircled Me. They gape at Me with their mouths, Like a raging and roaring lion. I am poured out like water, And all My bones are out of joint; My heart is like wax; It has melted within Me. My strength is dried up like a potsherd, And My tongue clings to My jaws; You have brought Me to the dust of death."

**Catherine.** Do you know who I am?

**Ivan.** I know you, woman.

**Catherine.** How do you know?

**Ivan.** I remember. I saw one before. She was empress. She put me in prison. And my mum. Please, I want to see my mummy.

**Catherine.** Do you know who your parents are, Grigory?

**Ivan.** I am no Grigory. I am emperor Ivan.

**Catherine.** Who told you that?

**Ivan.** My parents and soldiers.

**Catherine.** What do you know about your parents?



**Ivan.** I remember them. But empress Elizabeth did not care for them and kept them badly, in prison and cold, and me too.

**Catherine.** When did you see them last?

**Ivan.** Many years ago. When I was with them, the last two years we were looked after by one officer that was kind and liked us. He was the only one who treated us well.

**Catherine.** Do you remember that officer?

**Ivan.** No, I don't remember him because it's been many years and I was little but I remember his name - Korf.

**Catherine.** Do you know about the Grand Duke Peter and his wife Catherine?

**Ivan.** Yes. I know that they are the usurpers now. But I will get back on the throne and then I will tell to execute them. Please, I want to see my mummy.

**Catherine.** Your mother died.

**Ivan.** When?

**Catherine.** A long time ago.

**Ivan.** When?

**Catherine.** Sixteen years ago.

**Ivan.** You lie.

**Catherine.** I myself stood by her coffin with Empress Elizabeth.

**Ivan.** Why? And my daddy? My daddy will save me. He will come. Daddy! Where? Why are you silent? (*Struggles to keep composure.*) "I will ransom them from the power of the grave; I will redeem them from death. O Death, I will be your plagues! O Grave, I will be your destruction! Pity is hidden from My eyes." Do you know who I am? I'm a fucking bastard.

**Catherine.** Why?

**Ivan.** (*As if mocking a guard abusing him.*) "You're a fucking bustard!"

**Ivan.** "You're a fucking bastard!" He says. I'm a fucking bastard. Everyone's a fucking bastard. But you...

*Prisoner Grigory comes closer to Catherine and sniffs around her.*

"You're a fucking cunt." No. I say him, I have mummy and daddy. "No, you're fucking bastard. And a gaping cunt. I'm gonna stick my bayonet up your arse so that it comes out of your throat and cuts your balls off, you little piece of shit. I'll give

you shit for breakfast.” (*Screams.*) I'll kill you, I'll kill you, I'll kill you, bastards!!! I'll rip your heads off!!! And stick them on the poles!!! (*Stops.*) The Lord is slow to anger and great in power, And will not at all acquit the wicked. The Lord has His way in the whirlwind and in the storm, And the clouds are the dust of His feet. Ha! **Catherine.** You shouldn't get angry. You're making god angry and making it worse for yourself.

**Ivan.** Had I lived with monks in a monastery I wouldn't get angry. But I'm here, don't know where! And I am pissed off... “This is John the Baptist; he is risen from the dead, and therefore these powers are at work in him...” And you... you're no officer! You're a whore!

*He tries to grope Catherine. (He obviously does not know what to do exactly. He only heard the lingo from his prisoners and saw how dogs do it in the yard.) She resists.*

I know that whores like a fuck... Right up the arse...

**Catherine.** (*Pushing him off.*) Get your hands off me!

*Chekin and Vlasyev run in. Vlasyev hits Ivan on the head with the butt of his rifle.*

**Chekin.** How dare you raise your hand at Her Majesty!

*They restrain him on the bed.*

**Ivan.** (*Bloodied.*) Ah, her majesty?! That bitch is no majesty! She's a woman, a low creature, a whore! I am tsar! (*Laughs.*) But God will redeem my soul from the power of the grave, For He shall receive me...

*Ivan, Chekin and Vlasyev disappear.*

**Catherine.** No, dear Ivan, a woman is by far a much superior species than a man...

*Catherine come out of the scene checking her attire. She is calm and business like.*

*Appears Panin.*

## **FINALE “The Coronation”**

*Fortress of Shlisselburg.*

**Ivan.** *(Suddenly clear and present.)* The third century has gone by since the European nations had stepped away from their ancient history in which the feeling reigned and had entered the new era where the thought about the feeling prevails... The nations that are astonished at the new discoveries and technical advances and the acquaintance with many other peoples through seafaring, discovering someone else's antic genius, so powerful with its monuments of art and architecture, are now critical of everything that was their life and faith before. The former religious system lost its authority. At first its rejection manifested in appearance of many religious sects, like Protestants or Schismatics. Now Voltaire openly says that there is no god; it is a superstition. The life before was full of superstition and so it must be changed completely and then the new brave world will appear. The world where god is replaced by reason. Where will it go from here?

*In another part of the stage. It is the Cathedral of the Dormition in Kremlin. Posier enters holding the crown. Enter clergy, Orlov, Alekhan, Teplov, Baryatinsky, Panin, Shuvalov, Austrian, Saxony, French, British Ambassadors and Mardefeld, soldiers. Enters Catherine in her coronation dress. She stands on a rostrum higher than others.*

**Catherine.** In 1744 on 28 June I accepted the Greek Orthodox Belief as mine. In 1762 on 28 June I accepted the Russian throne. There could be no better symbol for my destiny that lies with Russia. The hand of providence and my faith in my future have lead me all the way. No I commit all of myself to working for my country...

*In the part of the stage where Ivan is. Ivan reacts to the noise.*

**Voice of Mirovich outside.** Behind these walls is your righteous tsar Ivan kept in prison so that foreign usurpers and local trash can hold the throne and capture Mother Russia.

*Cathedral of the Dormition in Kremlin.*

**The voice of the Archbishop.** ...I commend unto you Phebe our sister, a servant of the church which is at Cenchrea. Hereby crowned is the Lord's servant Yekaterna Alekseyevna to reign over the Russian land. Be called from now Catherin the Second, the Empress and Autocrat of the Great, the White and the Small Russias. May you reign with god for the glory of Russia. In the name of the Father and Son and the Holy Spirit...

*Fortress of Shlisselburg.*

**Voice of Mirovich outside.** Fulfil your duty, soldiers and free your emperor!

*Cathedral of the Dormition in Kremlin.*

**The voice of the Archbishop.** Amen.

*Choir sings "Amen".*

*Fortress of Shlisselburg.*

**Voice of Mirovich outside.** Break these doors! Cannon, fire!

*Cannon fires which at the same time becomes the salute to the coronation of Catherine.*

For your tsar! For your faith! Attack!!!

*Cathedral of the Dormition in Kremlin. Catherine accepts the crown. It is put on her head.*

*Fortress of Shlisselburg. Rifles fire outside.*

**Ivan.** *(Frightened.)* What? What do you want from me? Piss off!

**Chekin/Vlasyev.** Some idiot is coming to free you. We have our orders from Emperor Peter Fyodorovich. We can't be happier. We've spent ten years in this prison with you. Now it's time for our freedom.

*They advance on him with their swords. Ivan retreats into the corner.*

**Ivan.** No! Please! Don't! Please! Aaaah!

*Cannons fire. A massive "hurrah!" from thousands of soldiers saluting their new empress. Bells ring in the Kremlin. Chekin and Vlasyev fight Ivan who despite multiple stab wounds, resists. The killers stab and hit and kick. Screams and huffing and puffing. Ivan turns around the cell away from his killers. They chase him and he fights back. Blood pours from his wounds. Eventually one of the guards engages Ivan in a close fight and the other stabs him in the back with his sword. Ivan falls. Catherine stands high stage centre in her golden crown, proud. Chekin and Vlasyev stand over the dead body with their swords bloodied, looking down on Ivan, breathing heavily. Cannons fire. The crowds cheer. Titles appear on the screen.*

*"Catherine II reigned for the next 32 years, leading Russia into its Golden Age and earning the title "Great". According to unconfirmed sources in her late years, she wished to bypass her son Paul's right to succession but her stroke cut that plan short.*

*After her death her son from Peter III, Paul tried to dismantle everything she achieved and was murdered in his palace by people closest to him.*

*The officer who tried to free Ivan Antonovich was executed. The family of Ivan Antonovich remained in prison until 1780 without knowing what happened to him. The body of Ivan disappeared. However recently a grave has been discovered by the yard wall of Ivan's prison in Kholmogory. Although unconfirmed, it might be the grave of Emperor Ivan who was this way reunited with his father who never realised that his son was buried on the other side of the wall of his own prison."*

# The End



## **Appendix**

### **Foreign Language Sources.**

#### **Prelude. A Sentimental Journey.**

##### 1. Page 11.

Ей было двадцать пять лет. Оправляясь от первых родов, она расцвела так, как об этом только может мечтать женщина, наделенная от природы красотой. Черные волосы, восхитительная белизна кожи, большие синие глаза навывкате, многое говорившие, очень длинные черные ресницы, острый носик, рот, зовущий к поцелую, руки и плечи совершенной формы; средний рост — скорее высокий, чем низкий, походка на редкость легкая и в то же время исполненная величайшего благородства, приятный тембр голоса, смех, столь же веселый, сколь и нрав ее, позволявший ей с легкостью переходить от самых резвых, по-детски беззаботных игр — к шифровальному столику, причем напряжение физическое пугало ее не больше, чем самый текст, каким бы значительным или даже опасным ни было его содержание (Poniatowski 104-105).

#### **Introduction. Sensing History.**

##### 2. Page 26-27.

Столько было написано и сказано о девятом отсеке, что порой мне кажется, что сама Россия сейчас находится в девятом отсеке. Задыхаясь от нехватки кислорода, в холоде и огне, понимая, что помощи ждать не откуда, она упрямо продолжает бороться за спасение, свято веря, что она преодолет все трудности и снова увидит солнце в небе. (Shigin 406)

## **Chapter One. Semiramida of the North Never Was. Murder, Bestiality and Character Assassination of Catherine the Great.**

### 3. Page 35.

Все-таки мнение истории для меня важнее [...]. Петра при жизни ненавидели и проклинали, однако в памяти потомство он остался с титулом «Великий». Я знаю, что обо мне говорят... все знаю! Но был ли хоть один день в моей жизни, в который бы я не подумала прежде всего о славе и величии России? Пусть бедет суд [...]. Я верю, что пороки мои забудутся, а дела останутся... (Pikul 2: 490)

### 4. Page 35.

Самая оболганная! (Chaikovskaya n. pag.)

### 5. Page 35.

[...О]багрENNую кровью своего мужа, эту леди Макбет без раскаяния, эту Лукрецию Борджиа без итальянской крови [...] (Hertzen 26)

### 6. Page 39.

[Она] склонила голову перед Петром, потому что в звериной лапе его была будущность России. Но она с ропотом и презрением приняла в своих стенах женщину, обогренную кровью своего мужа [...] (Hertzen 26)

### 7. Pages 42-43.

Внезапный отказ руководства "Литературного наследства" напечатать уже набранные письма и материалы Барскова становится понятен из заметки В.Д.



Бонч-Бруевича -- директора Литературного музея, редактора сборников "Звенья", собирателя материалов по истории русской литературы и культуры. Старый большевик сразу оценил значение писем. Он не только приобрел корректурные гранки, но и настаивал на бережном их хранении, хотя и писал (в 1950 г.): "Это исследование "Писем Екатерины II-ой к Потемкину" с предисловием и комментариями Я. Барскова не было разрешено к печати в советское время. Придет время, когда его у нас напечатают. Они нуждаются в острополитическом предисловии. Я хотел их напечатать в "Летописях" Гослитмузея. Получил я их в 1932 г. и тогда намеревался поместить в сборниках "Звенья". На время пришлось отложить. Предисловие Барскова аполитично. Он не вскрыл по ним всю ту мерзость и запустение, которые царили при дворе Екатерины II-ой и ее окружении, -- этой кульминационной точки разложения феодального дворянства и аристократии. Если написать такое предисловие, то и эти письма, и записочки великой блудницы принесут пользу истории... Может быть, удастся их напечатать при моей жизни. Мне очень желательно написать предисловие и политически осветить эту закулисную придворную жизнь того времени, а также характеристику действующих лиц." (Lopatin, n.pag.)

#### 8. Page 44.

В этом романе только один вымышленный герой, но образ его создан на основе подлинных фактов. Все остальные – достоверные личности, а диалоги их подтверждены перепискою и другими документами той эпохи (Pikul I:6).

#### 9. Page 44.

[...К]ак на фундаментальный учебник [...] после научного редактирования [...] рекомендован к печати (Pikul, II:602-604).

10. Page 46.

**Екатерина.** Не в глупости и не в наглости дело. Самозванство не только стремление возвыситься. Что оно на величие посягает, это полбеда. Но оно родится от желанья низвести святыню до себя, оно хочет стереть границу меж высоким и низким и их сравнивать. Алексей Григорьевич, я не знаю, что страшнее — угроза или соблазн? Ибо первую можно отразить, а второй, подобно незримой язве, медленно пожирает тело. И ведь это только внутренний отзвук, а про внешний нечего и говорить. Остальным государствам нужды нет, что пред ними злодеи, чрез их посредство им надобно расшатать Россию (Zorin, Scene 3).

11. Page 46-47.

**Екатерина.** Ты уж не хочешь ли, Гриша, вспомнить, как ты мне привез в Петергоф отречение Петра Федоровича?

**Григорий.** Мне про то вспоминать нет нужды. Этот день во мне вечно жив. *(Помолчав.)* Все тогда еще начиналось. Твое царствование и наша любовь.

**Екатерина.** Вспоминаешь, мой друг, вспоминаешь. И поверь мне, что дело худо, если надобно вспоминать.

**Григорий.** Что поделаешь, в ком душа есть, те и помнят. А в ком ее нет...

**Екатерина** *(гневно прерывая его)*. Кто забывчив, про то не знаю, а вот кто здесь забылся — вижу.

**Григорий.** Так, государыня, виноват...

**Екатерина.** Уж тем виноват, что — себя не слышишь, да и не видишь.

Любезный друг! Не так уже я непостоянна. Всякому следствию есть причина. Ты подстегни свой ленивый ум, да и попробуй себе представить девицу из немецкой провинции, попавшую в этот северный лед к полубезумному грубияну, отданную ему во власть. Девицу, у коей для этой страны нет как будто бы ничего, кроме иностранного выговора. И все-таки не Петровы дочери и не внук его, а она стала Петру наследницей истинной — не по крови, так по делам. А ты, мой милый, за десять лет так и не смог образоваться. Не смог себя приохотить к делу. Ах, Гриша, храбрость и красота и готовность к любовным

битвам стоят многого, но еще из юноши не делают мужа (Zorin, Scene 7).

12. Page 48.

**Екатерина.** Наглость развратницы выходит из всех пределов. Она осмелилась просить меня об аудиенции.

**Алексей** (*усмехнувшись*). Она тебя, матушка, худо знает.

**Екатерина.** Уж пятый день стоит на своем. Нет у нас пыток, вот и упорствует.

**Алексей.** Нет пыток, есть кнут.

**Екатерина.** Что далее, граф?

**Алексей** (*негромко*). Такая женщина, государыня, уж вовсе не для твоего кнутобоя.

**Екатерина** (*встает, побледнев от гнева*). Тебе ее жаль? Так сладко было?

**Алексей.** Что с тобой, государыня?

**Екатерина.** Сладко? Очень уж хороша? Говори! (*Бьет его по щеке.*)

**Алексей** (*глухо*). Что говорить-то?

**Екатерина.** А ей сейчас сладко? Вишь, как чувствителен. Как добросерд!

Сатир, кентавр! Так сам и допросишь. Коли жалеешь. Без кнута.

**Алексей.** Богом прошу, избавь, государыня. Как мне допрашивать?

**Екатерина.** Как ласкал. Ты ведь улещивать искусник. Что мне ученого учить.

**Алексей** (*поглаживая щеку*). Спасибо. Щедра твоя награда.

**Екатерина.** Это тебе — от женщины, граф. А государыня, будь покоен, —

государыня наградит. (*Распахнув двери во внутренние покои.*) Проходи,

Алексей Григорьевич. Скажешь моей Катерине Ивановне, чтоб проводила. Она

и проводит. (*С усмешкой.*) Не хватятся тебя до утра?

*Алексей склоняется к ее руке, медленно идет. С тою же усмешкой она смотрит ему вслед* (Zorin, Scene 7).

13. Page 51.

Для нас она не может быть ни знаменем, ни мишенью; для нас она только предмет изучения. (Pikul I:13; Kluchevsky n. pag.)

## 14. Page 58.

Люди, близко ее знавшие, могли верно оценивать императрицу – как личность государственную, многие ей прощая, ибо, общаясь с самой Екатериной, они видели: Екатерина, будь она хоть трижды самодержавна, не имела возможностей безграничных, напротив, она часто уступала обстоятельствам, которые оказывались сильнее ее. [...] Но был и второй взгляд – со стороны той культурной России, которая, лично не зная Екатерину, обобщала плоды ее самодержавия нараздо шире, иногда обвиняя ее даже там, где она была неповинна (Pikul, II:500).

## 15. Page 59.

Но самой ужасной из всех отается все же «Северная Семирамида», как нашу нынешнюю повелительницу изволят величать Вольтер, Семирамида, пожалуй, лишь в том смысле, что подобно азиатской владычице она взшла на престол через труп своего супруга, однако та азиатка над своими преступлениями, пороками и предосудительностями хотя бы простерла пурпур великих деяний и мудрых учреждений. (Sacher-Masoch n. pag.)

## 16. Page 60.

Вольтер, безусловно, отдавал себе отчет в том, Екатерине, читавшей и запретившей его «Семирамиду», всякое сравнение с героиней трагедии будет неприятно, и потому никогда не употреблял двусмысленный титул «Северная Семирамида» ни в письмах к императрице, ни в своих панегириках ей, а в стихах именовал ее «Северной Минервой», или, на худой конец, новой царицей амазонок Фалестрис. (Dolinin n. pag.)

## 17. Page 61.

**Екатерина.** Значит они меня не услышали. Глупцы.

**Потемкин.** А чего ты ждала, матушка? Четырнадцать сенаторов, четыре члена Синода, шестеро президентов коллегий, генералитет, губернаторы – весь цвет нашего дворянства судил этого разбойника. Чего другого ты могла от них ожидать?

**Екатерина.** Милосердия.

**Потемкин.** Хорошее слово, матушка. Только когда ты его произносишь, я почему-то вспоминаю солдат наших, которые с турком воевали, кровь проливая за величие наше. Да так воевали, что славой себя покрыли на веки вечные. А как только мир подписали, то они по твоему указу, ни дня не отдыхая, против разбойников этих выступили.

**Екатерина.** Милосердие, Гриша, – это не слово, это признание своей вины за то, что мир в котором ты живешь жесток и безчеловечен. (*Gosudarynia...*)

18. Page 62.

**Екатерина.** Почему наша власть так беспринципна? Почему она такая наглая, аморальная? Почему они так относятся к своему народу? Они обложили его как зверя судами, законами, армией. Почему они не боятся? Они не боятся даже меня. Стоит мне сегодня освободить народ, как они прибегут и повесят меня на первой же березе, так что освобожденные мной бужики не успеют насладиться своей свободой. Их снова сделают рабами. (*Gosudarynia...*)

19. Page 62.

**Екатерина.** Почему они так ведут себя по отношению к своему народу? Как будто этот народ покорен ими? Раздавлив, растоптав, обратив в рабов, они не слышат его и не видят. [...] Власть лишила народ всего, а главное, они лишили его будущего. (*Gosudarynia...*)

20. Page 63.

**Екатерина.** Если когда-нибудь власть в России начнет заботиться о своем народе, если они перестанут обращаться со своими подданными как

завоеватели, порабатившие свой народ, если они начнут думать о нем не как о фигуре речи, а действительно, если народ перестанет чувствовать себя немым скотом и увидят себя творцами, вот тогда они оцелят меня и память обо мне.  
(*Gosudarynia...*)

### **The Living History.**

21. Page. 64

Музыкальные хроники времен Империи - это не "зеркало русской истории". "Екатерина Великая" - это попытка создать современный "художественный миф" об одном из самых ярких периодов прошлого нашей страны. А потому у авторов спектакля не было цели скрупулезно следовать "исторической правде". Их интересовала история души, исследование характера [...] ("O spektakle" ...).

22. Page 70.

[...D]er dramatische Dichter ist in meinen Augen nichts, als ein Geschichtschreiber. Steht aber *über* Letzterem dadurch, daß er uns Leben einer Zeit hinein versetzt, uns statt Charakteristiken Charaktere, und statt Beschreibungen Gestalten gibt. Seine höchste Aufgabe ist, der Geschichte, wie sie sich wirklich begeben, so nahe als möglich zu kommen. Sein Buch darf weder *sittlicher* noch *unsittlicher* sein, als die *Geschichte selbst* [...] (Büchner, Letter 57).

## **Bringing Catherine Back to Life.**

### 23. Page 96.

Государыня много раз обращалась к этому произведению, можно сказать, работала над ним всю жизнь, внося что-то новое, уточняя и вымарывая, переставляя куски... (Yeliseyeva 3).

### 24. Page 96.

[...Т]о есть до тех пор, пока в ее жизни не произошел новый крутой поворот, и она не обрела опору там, где не чаяла (Yeliseyeva 4).

[...С]оздается впечатление, что Екатерина обращалась к мемуарам именно в тяжелые моменты жизни (Yeliseyeva 5).

### 25. Page 97-8.

[...] злонамеренно исказила светлый образ своего супруга, изобразив его виновником их неудавшегося брака и тем самым оправдывая его незаконное свержение и убийство. [...] Если ее [информацию] учитывать, все написанное Екатериной получает подтверждение [...] Значит, если главный аргумент сомневающихся в правдивости «Записок» ложен, воспоминаниям Екатерины все же можно доверять? (Soboleva 64-5)

### 26. Page 98.

Всѣ эти подробности, нерѣдко, дѣйствительно, невѣроятныя въ юношѣ 19-и лѣтъ, уже женатомѣ, отмѣчены въ «Записках» Екатерины и до изданія инструкціи признавались многими за преувеличенія, которыми Екатерина хотѣла оправдать свои позднѣйшіе поступки. (Bilbasov I:222)

## 25. Page 98.

На кого ни была бы возложена подобная задача, всякая ее исполнительница оставила бы по себѣ дурную память въ Екатеринѣ. (Bilbasov I:230)

## 26. Page 100.

Екатерина испытала его вкус и, так как опыт еще не остудил в ней страсти и не закалил характер, восприняла чересчур остро. Со временем в более опасных ситуациях не будет ни слез, ни кровопусканий, ни... попыток самоубийства. А здесь целый букет эмоций выплеснулся наружу. Девушка запуталась в чужих интригах и не нашла иного способа развязать клубок, как покончить счеты с жизнью. (Yeliseyeva 158)

## 27. Page 101.

Императрица была какой угодно: доброй, щедрой, сострадательной, но создается впечатление, что она постоянно пребывала на взводе, готовая прицепиться к любому слову. В данном случае Екатерина, без сомнения, была виновата и в политической игре, и в неосторожном поведении. Но нельзя отрицать, что именно выговор Елизаветы, заключавший «тысячу гнусностей» и выглядевший как крик на грани побоев, подтолкнул великую княгиню к роковому поступку. (Yeliseyeva 159)

## 28. Page 102.

Я была въ такомъ сильномъ отчаяніи, что, если прибавить къ нему героическія чувства, какія я питала, - это заставило меня рѣшиться покончить съ собою; такая полная волненій жизнь и столько со всѣхъ сторонъ несправедливостей и никакого впереди выхода заставили меня думать, что смерть предпочтительнѣе такой жизни; я легла на канаве и, послѣ получасу крайней горести, пошла за большимъ ножомъ, который былъ у меня на столѣ, и собиралась рѣшительно



вонзить его себѣ въ сердце, какъ одна изъ моихъ дѣвушек вошла, не знаю зачемъ, и застала меня за этой прекрасной попыткой. Ножъ, который не былъ ни очень остръ, ни очень отточенъ, лишь съ трудомъ проходилъ черезъ корсетъ, бывший на мнѣ. Она схватилась за него; я была почти безъ чувствъ [...] (Catherine 489).

29. Page 103.

В это время Петр, слышавший часть разговора тетушки и до этого уже подготовленный наушниками, вернулся к себе в комнату и сгоряча написал записку. (Yeliseyeva 162)

## Works Cited

- Alexander, John T., *Catherine the Great: Life and Legend*. New York: Oxford UP, 1989.
- Anderson, Jay. *Living History: Simulating Everyday Life in Living Museums*. *American Quarterly*, Vol. 34, No. 3 (1982), pp. 290-306.  
<<http://www.jstor.org/stable/2712780>>.
- Avkhimovich, Irina. "Lord Byron's Critique of Despotism and Militarism in the Russian Cantos of Don Juan". Diss. U of Missouri-Columbia, 2008. Print.
- Benedetti, Robert L. *The Actor at Work. Third Edition*. L. Prentice-Hall, Inc., Englewood Cliffs, N.J. 07632, 1981.
- Benjamin, Walter. *Illuminations*. New York: Schocken Books, 1969.
- Büchner, Georg. *Complete Plays, Lenz and Other Writings*. Translated by John Reddick. London: Penguin Books, 1983.
- Büchner, Georg. *Letters from and to Georg Büchner – Chapter 6. (Briefe von und an Georg Büchner - Kapitel 6)*. Project Gutenberg-DE publication of Deutscher Klassiker Verlag. 21. Dec. 2012. Web. 04 Feb. 2015.  
<<http://gutenberg.spiegel.de/buch/briefe-von-und-an-georg-buchner-6788/6>>.
- Bushkov, Aleksandr, *Yekaterina II: A Diamond Cinderella. (Yekaterina II: Zolotaya Zolushka)*. St Petersburg-Moscow: Publishing House "Neva", 2005.
- Catherine II. *Zapiski imperatritsy Yekateriny vtoroi. (Memoirs of Empress Catherine the Second)*. St Petersburg: Suvorin's Publishing House, 1907.
- Chaikovskaya, Olga. *Empress. The Reign of Catherine II. (Imperatritsa. Tsarstvovaniye Yekateriny II)*. Rusich:1998. Web. 07 April 2015.  
<<http://www.bibliotekar.ru/polk-12/9.htm>>.
- Casben, Brett. *The Great. Sydney Theatre Company*. Australian Stage 6 Jun. 2008. Web. 3 Sep. 2015. <<http://www.australianstage.com.au/reviews/sydney/the-great--sydney-theatre-company-1534.html>>

- Corbut, Luba. *Catherine's Retinue: Old Age, Fashion and Historicism in Nineteenth Century*. *Slavic Review*, Vol. 68, No. 4 (Winter, 2009) pp. 782-803. Web. 30 Aug. 2012. <<http://www.jstor.org/stable/25593789>>.
- Cronin, Vincent, *Catherine: Empress of All the Russias*. London: William Collins Sons & Co Ltd, 1978.
- D'Encausse, Hélène Carrère. *Yekaterina II: Zolotoi vek v istorii Rossii*, (*Catherine II: Un âge d'or pour la Russie*). Moscow: Rosspen, 2006.
- Dolinin A. "Semiramida severa. Primechaniye k dokladu "Pushkin i Bairon: novyje zamechaniya k staroi teme". ("Semiramida of the North. An endnote to the lecture "Pushkin and Byron: New Comments to an Old Topic"). *Ruthenia*, 08 Nov. 2006. Web. <<http://www.ruthenia.ru/document/539839.html#11>>.
- Dorney, Marcel. *Prehistoric*. Brisbane: Playlab, 2013.
- Gosudarynia i razboinik. (The Empress and the Rebel)*. Dir. Yekaterina Toldonova. Perf. Alyona Ivchenko, Dmitry Mulyar, Aleksandr Arsentyev. Master-Film, 2009. Film.
- Griffiths, Tom. *The Intriguing Dance of History and Fiction*. *Text Journal*, Special Issue, No. 28 (April, 2015). Web. 31 May. 2015. <<http://www.textjournal.com.au/speciss/issue28/Griffiths.pdf>>.
- Hertzen, Aleksandr, *My Past and Thoughts. (Byloye i dumy)*. Royallib.com: 2010-2015. Web. 07 April 2015. <[http://royallib.com/book/gertsen\\_aleksandr/biloe\\_i\\_dumi\\_avtobiograficheskoe\\_sochinenie.html](http://royallib.com/book/gertsen_aleksandr/biloe_i_dumi_avtobiograficheskoe_sochinenie.html)>.
- Jameson, Frederic. *Brecht and Method*. London: Verso, 1986.
- Kluchevsky, V. O. *Imperatritsa Yekaterina II (1729-1796). (Empress Catherine II (1729-1796))*. Web. 07 April 2015. <<http://www.magister.msk.ru/library/history/kluchev/kluch001.htm>>.
- Kremmer, Christopher. *From Dialectics to Dialogue: Bakhtin, White and the 'Moorings' of Fiction and History*. *Text Journal*, Special Issue, No. 28

(April, 2015). Web. 31 May. 2015.  
<<http://www.textjournal.com.au/speciss/issue28/Kremmer.pdf>>.

Lopatin, V. S. "Pisma, bez kotorykh istoriya stanovitsa mifom" ("Letters without which History Becomes a Myth"). *Yekaterina II i G. A. Potiomkin. Lichnaya perepiska (1869-1891) (Catherine II and G. A. Potiomkin. The Personal Correspondence)*. Moscow: "Nauka", 1997. Lib.ru, 27 Jan. 2009. Web. 23 April 2015. <[http://az.lib.ru/e/ekaterina\\_w/text\\_0020.shtml](http://az.lib.ru/e/ekaterina_w/text_0020.shtml)>.

Lyall-Watson, Katherine. "Biographical Theatre: Flying Separate from Everything." Diss. U of Queensland, 2013. Print.

Madariaga, Isabel de. *Russia in the Age of Catherine the Great*. London: Phoenix Press, 2002.

Matos, Christine de. *Fictorians: Historians Who 'Lie' About the Past, and Like It*. Text Journal, Special Issue, No. 28 (April, 2015). Web. 31 May. 2015. <<http://www.textjournal.com.au/speciss/issue28/deMatos.pdf>>.

McIntyre, Paul. *The Monster's Apprentice*. Australian Script Centre, 2013. Web. 05 May. 2016. <<http://australianplays.org/script/ASC-1519>>.

Montefiore, Simon Sebag. *Prince of Princess: The Life of Potemkin*. London: Phoenix Press, 2000.

Nelson, Camilla and de Matos, Christine. *Fictional Histories and Historical Fictions*. Text Journal, Special Issue, No. 28 (April, 2015). Web. 31 May. 2015.  
<<http://www.textjournal.com.au/speciss/issue28/Nelson&deMatos.pdf>>.

"O spektakle." ("About the Show"). *Yekaterina Velikaya. Muzykalnyje khroniki vremion imperii v 2-kh deistviyakh. (Catherine the Great. Musical Chronicles of the Times of the Empire in 2 acts)*. Web. 20 Aug. 2015.  
<<http://www.muzkom.net/repertoire/show.php?id=24>>.

Plakat "Tsarskaya okhota". (Poster „The Royal Hunt”). Plakaty.ru. 2002-2012. Web. 3 Sep. 2012.  
<[http://www.plakaty.ru/plakaty/kinoplakaty/tsarskaya\\_okhota](http://www.plakaty.ru/plakaty/kinoplakaty/tsarskaya_okhota)>

- Poniatowski, Stanislaw August. *Memuary. (Memoirs)*. Moscow: Terra-Terra, 1995.
- Pikul, Valentin Savvich. *Favorit. (The Favourite)*. 2 vols. Moscow: Veche, 2006.
- . *Perom i shpagoi. (With Quilt and Sword)*. Moscow: Veche, 2005.
- Pushkin, Alexander. *Polnoye sobraniye sochineniy v 10 tomakh. (Complete Works in 10 Volumes.)* 10 vols. Moscow: GIKhL. 1959-62.  
<<http://rvb.ru/pushkin/toc.htm>>.
- New Monument to Honour Russia's Catherine the Great*. DDP/The Local: 2010.  
<<http://www.thelocal.de/20100503/26951>>.
- Roach, Joseph R. *The Player's Passion. Studies in the Science of Acting*. London: Associated UP, 1985.
- Rokem, Freddie. *Performing History: Theatrical Presentations of the Past in Contemporary Theatre*. Iowa City: U of Iowa P, 2000.
- Rulhière, Claude Carloman de. *A History, or Anecdotes of the Revolution in Russia in the Year 1762*. Boston: 1798.  
<<https://play.google.com/books/reader?id=FcFbAAAAcAAJ&printsec=frontcover&output=reader&authuser=0&hl=en&pg=GBS.PA26>>.
- Sacher-Masoch, Leopold von. *Tolko miortvyie ne vozvrashchayutsya (Only the Dead Never Return)*. Litres: 2008. N. pag. EPUB file.
- Shaw, Bernard. *Great Catherine (Whom Glory Still Adores)*. Project Gutenberg: Release #3488.  
<<http://onlinebooks.library.upenn.edu/webbin/gutbook/lookup?num=3488>>.
- Shigin, Vladimir. *APRK "Kursk": poslesloviye k tragedii. (ASRK "Kursk": An Afterward to the Tragedy)*. Moscow: Olma-Press, 2002.
- Soboleva, I. A. *Printsessy nemetskiye – sud'by russkiye. (German Princesses – Russian Fates)*. St. Petersburg: SPB, 2008.
- Stern, Tom. *History Plays as History*. *Philosophy and Literature*, Vol. 36, No. 2 (Oct., 2012), pp. 285-300.

*Titanic: The Final Word with James Cameron*. Dir. James Cameron. National Geographic, 2012. Documentary.

*The Last Night of the Last Tsar*. Dir. Aleksandr Konyashov. Telekompania “Zagadki istorii”, 2008. Documentary.

*The Lost Secret of Catherine the Great*. Dir. Peter Woditsch. Sophimages, 2003. Documentary.

Troyat, Henri. *Catherine the Great*. Henley-on-Thames: Aidan Ellis Publishing Ltd, 1979.

“V Murmanske otkryt pamyatnik Valentinu Pikulyu”. (“A Monument to Valentin Pikul was unveiled in Murmansk”). *Rossiya K, N.p.* 21 Jul. 2008. Web. 25 Aug. 2014. <<http://www.tvkultura.ru/news.html?id=243390&cid=178>>.

## Bibliography

### Primary Resources

- Catherine II. *Byli i nebylitsy i grazhdanskoye nachalnoye ucheniye. (Facts and Tall Tales and the Civil Primary Education)*. Moscow: Selivanovsky Publishing, 1832.
- Catherine II. *Nakaz yeya imperatorskogo velichestva Yekateriny Vtoryia imperatritsy vserosiyskiya dannyi Komissii o sochinenii novago ulozheniya c prinadlezhachimi k tomu prilozheniyami. (The Instructions of Her Imperial Majesty Yekaterina the Second, the Sovereign of All of Russia, Given to the Commission for Composing the Draft of a New Code of Laws with the belonging to it attachments)*. Moscow: The Senate Press, 1767.
- Catherine II. *Zapiski imperatritsy Yekateriny vtoroi. (Memoirs of Empress Catherine the Second)*. St. Piterburg: Suvorin's publishing, 1907.
- Dashkova, Y. R. *Memoires of Princess Dashkova (Zapiski knyagini Dashkovoi)*. Moscow: Nauka, 1990.
- Documents of Catherine the Great: The Correspondence with Voltaire and the Instruction of 1767 in English text of 1768*. Ed. W.F. Reddaway, Cambridge U P, 1931.
- Ermitazhnyi teatr Velikiya Yekateriny, v kotorom sobrany p'esy, igrannyya v Ermitazhe imperatritsy Yekateriny II, sochinionnyia Samoyu Yeyu i Osobami, sostavlayushchimi eya obshchestvo. (The Hermitage Theatre of the Great Catherine, where Compiled are the Plays Performed in the Hermitage of Empress Catherine II, Composed by Herself and by Persons of Her Circle)*. Moscow: The Senate Press of Selibanovsky, 1802.
- Khrapovitsky, A. V. *Zhurnal vysochaishego puteshestviya yeya velichestva gosudaryni imperatritsy Yekateriny II, samodержytsy vserosiyskoi, v Poludennyya Strany Rossii. (The Journal of the Royal Journey of Her Majesty*

*Catherine II, the Sovereign of All of Russias, to the Southern Lands of Russia in 1787*. Moscow: Novikov U P, 1787.

Lomonosov, Mikhailo. "Oda na den' vosshestvia na prestol yeyo velichestva gosudaryni imperatritsy Yelisavety Petrovny 1748 goda". ("Ode to the Day of Ascension to the Throne of Her Majesty Sovereign Empress Elizabeth Petrovna in 1748"). Russkaya virtualnaya biblioteka, 8 Jun. 2004. Web. 10 Sep. 2012. <[http://rvb.ru/18vek/lomonosov/01text/01text/01ody\\_t/011.htm](http://rvb.ru/18vek/lomonosov/01text/01text/01ody_t/011.htm)>.

*Love & Conquest: Personal Correspondence of Catherine the Great and Prince Grigory Potemkin*. Trans. Douglas Smith. Ed. Donald Smith. DeKalb: Northern Illinois U P, 2005.

Poniatowski, Stanislaus-Augustus. *Memuary. (Memoirs)*. Moscow: Slovo, 1997

*Two Comedies by Catherine the Great, Empress of Russia: Oh, These Times! and The Siberian Shaman*. Trans. Lurana Donnels O'Malley. Ed. Lurana Donnels O'Malley. Amsterdam: OPA, 1998.

*Yekaterina II bez retushi. (Catherine II without Retouch)*. Ed. A. P. Fadeyeva. St. Petersburg: Amfora, 2009.

### **Dramatic Sources**

*Admiral Ushakov*. Dir. Mikhail Romm. Perf. Ivan Pereversev, Boris Livanov, Sergei Bondarchuk and Olga Zhysneva. Mosfilm, 1953. Film.

*Catherine the Great*. Dir. Marvin J. Chomsky. Perf. Brian Blessed and Catherine Zeta-Jones. A&E, 1996, DVD, 2000. Film.

*Favorit. (The Favourite)*. Dir. Aleksei Karelin. Perf. Natalya Surkova, Igor Botvin, Oleg Almazov. Makdos, 2005. Film.

Gremina, Yelena. *Za zerkalom. (Behind the Mirror)*. Theatre.ru, 22 Feb. 1999. Web. 22. Sep. 2002.



- Gosudarynia i razboinik. (The Empress and the Rebel)*. Dir. Yekaterina Toldonova. Perf. Alyona Ivchenko, Dmitry Mulyar, Aleksandr Arsenyev. Master-Film, 2009. Film.
- John Paul Jones*. Dir. John Farrow. Perf. Robert Stack, Marissa Pavan and Charlse Coburn. Warner Bros., 1959. Film.
- Knyazhna Tarakanova. (Princess Tarakanova)*. Dir Kai Hansen and Maurice Maître. Madam Mikulina, Madame Pogorelskaya, Mr Vekov and Mr. Lazarev. Film D'art Russe, 1910. Film.
- McNamara, Tony. *The Great*. Sydney: Currency Plays, 2008.
- Perom i shpagoi. (With Quill and Sword)*. Dir. Yevgeny Ivanov. Perf. Yelena Nikolayeva, Olga Antonova, Anton Makarsky, Aleksei Barabash, Olga Samoshina. Dom Film, 2007. Film.
- Pugachiov*. Dir. Pavel Petrov-Bytov. Perf. Konstantin Starobogatov, Kasim Mukhutdinov, Yakov Malutin and Vladimir Gardin. Lenfilm, 1937. Film.
- Russkiy bunt. (The Captain's Daughter)*. Dir. Aleksandr Proshkin. Perf. Vladimir Mashkov, Sergei Makovetsky, Vladimir Ilyin. NTV-Profit, 1999. Film.
- Russkiy kovcheg. (The Russian Ark)*. Dir. Aleksandr Sakurov. Perf. Sergei Dreiden, Leonid Mozgovoi, Maksim Sergeyev. The State Hermitage Museum, 2002. Film.
- Shaffer, Paul. *Amadeus*. London: Penguin Classics, 2007.
- Shaw, Bernard, *Great Catherine (Whom Glory Still Adores)*. Project Gutenberg, Release #3488. Web. 20. Sep. 2012.
- Tainy dvortsovykh perevorotov. (Secrets of Palace Revolutions)*. Dir. Svetlana Druzhynina. Perf. Natalya Yegorova, Sergey Shakurov, Nikolai Karachentsov and Aleksei Zharkov. Mosfilm, 2000-2003. Film.
- The Rise of Catherine the Great*. Dir. Paul Czinner. Perf. Douglas Fairbanks and Elizabeth Bergner. London Film, 1934. Film.

*The Scarlet Empress*. Dir. Josef von Sternberg. Perf. Marlene Dietrich, John Lodge and Sam Jaffe. Paramount, 1934. Film.

*Tsarskaya okhota. (The Royal Hunt)*. Dir. Vitaly Melnikov. Perf. Nikolai Yeriomenko jr., Svetlana Kryuchkova and Anna Samokhina. Lenfilm, 1990. Film.

*Vechera na khutore bliz Dikan'ki. (Evenings at a Farmstead Near Dikan'ka)*. Dir. Alexandr Rou. Perf. Yury Tavrov, Lyudmila Hityayeva, Georgy Milyar and Aleksandr Khvylya. Gorky Studios, 1961. Film.

*Velikaya. (The Great)*. Dir. Igor Zaitsev. Perf. Yulia Snigir, Natalia Surkova, Pavel Derevyanko, Mark Bogatyriov and Sergei Shakurov. Mars Media, 2015. Film.

Wojtyzsko, Maciej. „Semiramida”. *Sovremennaya dramaturgia (Modern Drama)*, No. 4/1997. Transl. Leonard Bukhov. *Biblioteka Mashkova*. Web. 2 Nov. 2010. <<http://www.lib.ru/PXESY/WOJTYSHKO/med.txt>>.

*Yekaterina. (Catherine)*. Dir. Aleksandr Baranov, Ramil Sabitov and Dmitry Iosifov. Perf. Marina Aleksandrova, Yulia Aug, Aleksandr Yatsenko, and Vladimir Menshov. Amedia, 2014. Film.

*Yekaterina Velikaya. Muzykalnyje khroniki vremion imperii v 2-kh deistviyakh. (Catherine the Great. Musical Chronicles of the Times of the Empire in 2 acts)*. Dir. Nina Chusova. Perf. Irina Grinevich, Nina Shamber, Vladimir Smolin, Aleksei Shamber. Sverdlov Academic Theatre of Musical Comedy, 2008. Theatre Show.

*Yemelyan Pugachiov*. Dir. Aleksei Saltykov. Perf. Yevgeny Matveyev, Via Artmane and Tamara Siomina. Mosfilm, 1978. Film.

*Young Catherine*. Dir. Michael Anderson. Perf. Vanessa Redgrave, Christopher Plummer and Julia Ormond. Turner Pictures, 1991. Film.

*Zolotoi Vek. (Golden Age)*. Dir. Ilya Khotinenko. Perf. Gosha Kutsenko, Victor Sukhorukov, Olga Orlova, Via Artmane. Artes Production, 2003. Film.

Zorin, Leonid. "Tsarskaya okhota". ("The Royal Hunt"). *Pakrovskiye Vorota. P'esy.* (*Pakrovskiye Gates. Plays*). Moscow: "Sovetskiy Pisatel", 1979. OCR Longsoft. Web. June, 2007. <[http://ocr.krossw.ru/html/zorin/zorin-ohotals\\_1.htm](http://ocr.krossw.ru/html/zorin/zorin-ohotals_1.htm)>.

### Secondary sources

Alexander, John T. *Catherine the Great: Life and Legend*. New York: Oxford U P, 1989.

Algrant, Christine Pevitt. *Madame de Pompadour: Mistress of France*. Sydney: Harper Perennial, 2004. Anisimov, Yevgeny Viktorovich. *Russkaya pytk: Politichesky sysk v Rossii XVIII veka (Russian Torture: The Political Police in Russia of XVIII c.)*. St. Petersburg: Norint, 2004.

Bilbasov, V A. *Istoriya Yekateriny Vtoroi (History of Catherine the Second)*. Berlin: 1900.

Brikner, A. G. *Illustrirovanaya istoriya Petra I i Yekateriny II. (Illustrated History of Peter I and Catherine II)*. Moscow: Ekcmo, 2008.

Bushkov, Aleksandr. *Yekaterina II: Zolotaya Zolushka. (Yekaterina II: A Diamond Cinderella)*. St Petersburg-Moscow: Publishing House "Neva", 2005.

Cronin, Vincent. *Catherine: Empress of All the Russias*. London: William Collins Sons & Co Ltd, 1978.

Colburt, Luba. *Catherine's Retinue: Old Age, Fashion, and Historicism in the Nineteenth Century*. *Slavic Review*, Vol. 68, No. 4 (Winter, 2009), pp. 782-803. <<http://www.jstor.org/stable/25593789>>.

Davydova, I. S. "Teatralnost kak kulturnyj fenomen" *Jhurnal: Izvestiya Rossiyskogo gosudarstvennogo pedagogicheskogo universiteta im. Gertsena.* ("Theatricality as a Cultural Fenomenon". *Journal: The News of the Russian State Pedagogical University named after Hertenzen.*) Vol. 16 No. 40. (2007).

Web. 30 Jul. 2015. <<http://cyberleninka.ru/article/n/teatralnost-kak-fenomen-kultury>>.

D'Encausse, H el ene. *Yekaterina II: Zolotoi vek v istorii Rossii. (Catherine II: Un  age d'or pour la Russie)*. Moscow: Rosspen, 2006.

Dixon, Simon. *Catherine the Great*. London: Profile Books Ltd, 2010.

Hedrick, Donald. *Advantage, Affect, History, Henry V*. PMLA, Vol. 118, No. 3, Special Topic: Imagining History (May, 2003), pp. 470-487. <<http://www.jstor.org/stable/1261521>>.

Herzen, Michael von. *Catherine II – Editor of Vsyakaia Vsiachina? A Reappraisal*. Russian Review, Vol. 38, No. 3 (Jul., 1979), pp. 283-297. <<http://www.jstor.org/stable/128970>>.

Madariaga, Isabel de. *Russia in the Age of Catherine the Great*. London: Phoenix Press, 2002.

Martin, Russel E. *The Petrine Devide and the Periodization of Early Modern Russian History*. Slavic Review, Vol. 69, No. 2 (SUMMER 2010), pp. 410-425.

Mashyakova, N. *Yekaterina velikaya: zolotoi vek. (Catherine the Great: The Golden Age.) Itar-Tass-Ural*. 17 May 2008. Web. 31 Jan. 2015. <<http://www.tass-ural.ru/kino/41571.html>>.

McConnell, Allen. *The Empress and Her Prot eg e: Catherine II and Radischev*. The Journal of Modern History, Vol. 36, No. 1 (Mar., 1964), pp. 14-27. <<http://www.jstor.org/stable/1874423>>.

Montefiore, Simon Sebag. *Prince of Princess: The Life of Potemkin*. London: Phoenix Press, 2000.

Montesquieu, Charles de Secondat Baron de. *The Spirit of Laws*. New York: Colonial Press, 1900.

Oldenbourg, Zo e. *Catherine the Great*. London: Heinemann, 1965.

- O'Mally, Lurana Donnels. "How Great Was Catherine?": Checkpoints at the Border of Russian Theatre. *The Slavic and East European Journal*, Vol. 43, No. 1 (Spring, 1999), pp. 33-48. <<http://www.jstor.org/stable/309904>>.
- Péréfixe, Paul Philippe Hardouin de. *The History of Henry IV. (Surnamed "The Great") King of France and Navarre*. London: H. S. Nichols, 1896.
- Pero i shpaga Valentina Pikula [The Quill and Sword of Valentin Pikul]*. Dir. Sergei Kraus. Nashe Kino, 2008. Documentary.
- Pikul, Valentin Savvich, *Favorit. (The Favourite)*. 2 vols. Moscow: Veche, 2006.
- . *Perom i shpagoi. (With Quilt and Sword)*. Moscow: Veche, 2005.
- Pushkin, Alexander. *The Captain's Daughter and a History of Pugachov*. London: Alma Classics, 2012.
- . *Sobraniye sochineniy v 10-i tomach. (Complete Works in 10 Volumes.)*. 10 vols. Moscow: G.I.Kh.L., 1959-1962, Web. RPB, 2000-2016. <<http://rvb.ru/pushkin/toc.htm>>
- . *Zametki po russkoi istorii XVIII v. (Notes on the Russian History of XVIII c.)* in v. 8 *Avtobiograficheskaya i istoricheskaya proza. Istoriya Pugachiova. Zapiski Moro de Braze. (Autobiographical and Historical Prose. History of Pugachiov. Memoires of Moro de Brasey.)* of *Complete Works in 10 volumes*. Leningrad: Nauka, 1977-1979.
- Raeff, Marc. *Russia in the Age of Catherine the Great by Isabel de Madariaga*. *The Journal of Modern History*, Vol. 54, No. 3 (Sep., 1982), pp. 635-638. <<http://www.jstor.org/stable/1906272>>.
- Rounding, Virginia. *Catherine the Great*. London: Arrow Books, 2007.
- Rousseau, Jean-Jacques. *The Confessions*. London: Penguin Books, 1953.
- . *The Social Contract*. London: Penguin Books, 1968.
- Smith, Bonny. *Historiography, Objectivity, and the Case of the Abusive Widow*. *History and Theory*, Vol. 31, No. 4, Beiheft 31: History and Feminist Theory (Dec., 1992), pp. 15-32. <<http://www.jstor.org/stable/2505413>>.

Soboleva, I. A. *Printsessy nemetskiye – sudby russkiye. (German Princesses – Russian Fates)*. St. Petersburg: SPB, 2008.

Soboul, Albert. *Understanding the French Revolution*, London: The Merlin Press Ltd, 1988.

Tacitus. *The Annals of Ancient Rome*. Penguin Books, 1996.

Tolstói, Lev Nikolayevich. *Voina i Mir. (War and Peace)*. 2 vols. Moscow: Act, Folio, 2007.

*The Lost Secret of Catherine the Great*. Dir. Peter Woditsch. Sophimages, 2003. Documentary.

Vitt, V. *Yekaterina II kak kriminalistka. Ugolovno-pravovaya doktrina Nakaza v eya otnoshenii k zapadno-yevropeyskoi teorii i r russkoi deistvitelnosti. (Catherine II as a Criminalist: The Criminal Law Doctrine of the Instruction in its Relation to the Western European Theory and to the Russian Reality)*. St. Petersburg: The „Obshchestvennaya polza” Press, 1909.

“V Murmanske otkryt pamyatnik Valentinu Pikulyu”. (“A Monument to Valentin Pikul was unveiled in Murmansk”). *Rossiya K, N.p.* 21 Jul. 2008. Web. 25 Aug. 2012. <<http://www.tvkultura.ru/news.html?id=243390&cid=178>>.

Voltaire. *Candide*. New York-London: Fine Edition Press, 1957.

---. *Letters Concerning the English Nation*. New York: Oxford U P Ltd. 1994.

---. Vol. IX. The Dramatic Works Part 1 (Alzire, Orestes, Sémiramis, Catiline, Pandora) and Part II (The Scotch Woman, Nanine, The Prude, The Tatler). *The Works of Voltaire. A Contemporary Version*. New York: E. R. DuMont, 1901.

Weinstein, Paul. *Movies as Gateway to History: The History and Film Project*. The History Teacher, Vol. 35, No. 1 (Nov., 2001), pp. 27-48. <<http://www.jstor.org/stable/3054508>>.

Yeliseyeva, O. I. *Molodaya Yekaterina. (Young Catherine)*. Moscow: Veche, 2010.

- . *Povsednevnyaya zhizn' blagorodnogo sosloviya v zolotoi vek Yekateriny.*  
(*Everyday Life of the Noble Estate in the Golden Age of Catherine*).  
Moscow: Molodaya gvardiya, 2008.