

# The Death of Gogol and the 1969 Eurovision Song Contest

A One-Person Play  
by Tim Luscombe

**Draft 8**  
**ONE HOUR VERSION**  
**May 2012**

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*As the audience comes into the venue, alternately jolly, grand and romantic Eurovision music is playing.*

*As the lights come up on the stage, a Eurovision Song Contest entry, Yo Soy Aquel (Spain, 1966) is playing, and fades from FOH speakers to the CD player on the set.*

*Stuart enters, clutching a many-paged typed document. He's unshaved, rigorously running to seed and on the verge of mental meltdown. He wears pyjamas or sweats – anyway something neutral enough for all the characters.*

**Stuart:** Ok, Stuart, calm down. Breathe. Sorry. Bit of a state.

**Lenny:** *You're in a bit of a state? What about me?*

*Stuart looks at the audience, embarrassed, unsure if this needs an explanation*

**Stuart:** Ignore her.

*He takes some deep breaths*

I'm not always like this. Mostly I'm worse. No. I'm just a bit tense, that's all. (*Back to the document*). This is what they call a labour of love. 10 year's work. (*Slight pause*). Okay, I'll tell you what it is. It's a paper on the gay Ukrainian writer Nikolai Gogol. And tonight it will be read for the first time. By someone other than me, I mean. By a real Ukrainian indeed. Petruso. When I say 10 year's *work*, I don't mean anyone's actually paid me to write it. For money, I teach. TEFL. Teacher of English as a Foreign Language? Though my income is strangely pitiful. So, yes. Nicolai Gogol. *Dead Souls? Government Inspector? The Diary of a Madman?* See, extraordinarily, no academic up to

now has fully acknowledged Gogol's sexuality. This is the first time it's ever been tackled.

Well, when I say 'gay', what I mean is he had a physical and emotional aversion to women and loved Cossacks. Though as far as I can tell, it was all romantic yearning and no actual rumpy-pumpy.

*Stuart strokes his thesis and, when he looks up, he's become Pyotr.*

**Pyotr:** He's a bit how's-your-father is the guv'ner, you know what I mean? Not that I mind really, long as he's got enough coming in to feed us, and we have somewhere to sleep at night. I don't fink he ever does it wiv no one, and he's never tried it on wiv me, but he's just a bit of a bender.

*Stuart looks at the audience, meekly, reassuringly.*

**Stuart:** That's Pyotr, Gogol's life-long servant. See, it's written from Pyotr's point of view. We've become quite pally, Pyotr and me.

**Pyotr:** The other day, like, I was putting fings away after he'd had his breakfast and he calls me in to take a letter to the boy, and he's sitting there as bold as brass, wearing...well, I don't know where to start really... He has this girdle on made of velvet I fink it was, and a flannel camisole. A bloody enormous scarf round his neck of every colour you can fink of, and a great headdress fing on, like them tribeswomen from Finland wear. Huge and crimson, all embroidered wiv gold.

**Stuart:** See? Cross dresser – obsessed with embroidery patterns – wrote stories with Cossacks holding hands, sitting on each others' laps, and cutting each others' heads off. Self-evidently a poof. And a nose! So long, it could get into a snuffbox unaided.

**Pyotr:** Tell them about what happened to him in the end, Stuart.

**Stuart:** No, Pyotr, not tonight. This is a happy evening.

**Pyotr:** I will if you won't, mate.

**Stuart:** No, Pyotr.

**Pyotr:** You see, what happened was he was in such a terrible state about his funny urges that he threw himself into the arms of the church.

**Father Matthew:** Purge yourself of inner filth, my son. Refrain from food and sleep, until your soul is cleansed in the eyes of God.

**Stuart:** Pyotr! No! See, it's always been written about as a suicide. This (*referring to his thesis*) puts forward the argument that it was a ritual murder. Priests and doctors trying to cure a great writer of being who he was. Anyway,

listen, ten years later, and I'm in a frightening amount of debt. But if dying penniless is good enough for Nikolai Gogol then it's good enough for me.

*(Looking at an imaginary clock on the fourth wall)* Oh my God, where's the time gone? Three quarters of an hour! I'm not nearly ready. *(Sniffs under his arms)*. I'd better start getting dinner. It's not that I have absolutely no life, but a date is not a common occurrence. *(Excitedly)* Yes, Petruso is a date! Well, when I say date, he's actually a student. In fact, he's my only student. Left. Which is a bit precarious, financially. But at least he's committed. Gorgeous bod, cheeky grin and a very big nose. Aha! A Gogolian nose! Petruso, Petruso, Petruso! And I've planned to do him a proper Ukrainian meal – *kalachi, krendels, halushki* dumplings and hot spiced vodka with raisins and plums – and then I'll show him my thesis. See, I've been picking up signals. There have been signals. Well, at least, my signals have been acknowledged by him, well, received, well, definitely noticed. I think. Anyway, this thesis no doubt is going to make clear my intentions, which he won't fail to reciprocate, and then we'll, well, you know... He's Ukrainian. Gogol was Ukrainian. Gogol was gay. I'm gay. What can go wrong?

**Lenny:** Put on the *Eurovisie Songfestival*, Stuart, please. You know you want to.

**Stuart:** *(Starting to lay the table for two)* If you don't pay her any attention, she'll get bored and go away.

**Lenny:** It's time for the *Eurovisie Songfestival*, Stuart. It will sooth you, uplift you, it grip you!

**Stuart:** Oh, go on then, Lenny. Just a bit.

**Lenny:** 1969?

**Stuart:** Of course. That's our favourite, isn't it?

**Lenny:** Ah, Stuart, I love you! Let us go to Madrid!

*Stuart begins to search for the video, but gets distracted by his thesis that's lying there. He holds it.*

**Pyotr:** The gov'nor's book came out in 'Peter'. *Dead Souls* it's called. Newspapers mostly liked it. Course, it's only the bad ones the bugger takes any notice of. Which is why we've made a bolt for it and gone south to Madrid. Bloody loves it here, he does. Says it fills him with 'a desire to be turned into a nose' with great big nostrils so he can smell everything. All I can smell is that cabbagey stink you get in the back stairway of every house in Peter, so bad it makes yer eyes smart. We've come from one end o' Europe to the other and we've bloody brought it wiv us.

*Stuart puts the thesis down.*

**Stuart:** So. 1969. This is before the days of *'douze points'*. Oh yes. Very few points. Each country has ten jury members with one vote each. That's it! And very few countries. You sing in your own language, and the whole thing lasts an hour and a half! Gripping! So we're in Spain, right?

**Lenny:** It was in London, the last year, the *Eurovisie Songfestival*, in '68. With Katie Boyle. She have no arms and a big jewel. I am sorry. *M'n* English is *niet zo goed*, but I try. I see it – I, Lenny Kuhr, singer/songwriter and virgin lesbian communist from the Netherlands, and I say to me, 'Lenny, you can sing next year in this *Eurovisie Songfestival*. You can sing and you can won it'. Now here I make a plan. I watch it with *m'n tante* and *m'n grandmoter*. And I say to them '*Grandmoter, tante*, I will won this *Songfestival* next year in '69'. And they say 'Lenny, what you talk about? You study Russian literature at the Leiden *Universiteit*. You do not won this *Songfestival*! You study! You study good and hard, and you make us proud. We are just peasants from the water: water peasants, proud but wet. And you, you Lenny Kuhr, our great-daughter, our sister-daughter, will won a degree from the *Universiteit* and then you will be a doctor and a lawyer and a business woman and we will be proud and wealthy and not wet'. But I say, 'No *grandmoter*, no *tante*, I will write a song and I will won it'. So Katie Boyle, she say:

**Katie:** Hello Netherlands. Are you there, and may I have your votes please?

**Lenny:** She is so English. She have funny teeth and very charming; smiling all the time. And behind her *ogen* you see all the big black boots in the British Empire stamping out the little brown man underfoot with her very charming smile and her funny teeth.

**Katie:** We have the United Kingdom in the lead, by one vote.

**Lenny:** I cannot believe it. A *Eurovisie* travesty. Cliff Richards in the lead with his stupid song and his stupid English country-dance.

*Lenny does a snatch of Cliff and the infamous knee dance.*

Katie say now it is, what you say, a three-house-race. England, France and Ireland. No one notice Spain one vote lurky behind in place four. And Katie take a big breath for the last country, and she say:

**Katie:** Can we have the votes of the Belgian jury?

**Lenny:** And they say:

**Belgium:** Bonsoir, Londres. Ici Bruxelles.

**Lenny:** And she say:

**Katie:** Yes, good evening Brussels.

**Lenny:** And you hear behind her smile 'Aah, you silly little Belgian people, why we even let you vote?'

**Belgium:** *L'Espangne, neuf votes.*

**Katie:** *L'Espangne neuf votes, Spain nine votes.*

**Lenny:** No one before get nine votes, ever! 'La La La' by Castilian Massiel won it for Spain!

*Lenny sings the chorus of Massiel's 'La la la', triumphantly.*

(Sings) La, la la laaaa,  
La la laaaa, la la laaaa,  
La, la la laaaa, la la laaaa laaaa!

(Speaks) And Katie say:

**Katie:** Well, that's thrown the cat among the pigeons.

**Lenny:** So this is my plan: I write a song. Something French, with little musical *dingetjes* from England and Spain in it, to get the votes from France, England and Spain and their capitalist allies and satellites, and I will won the *Eurovisie Songfestival!* And then *m'n grandmoter* and *m'n tante* at last will understand the genius that is Lenny Kuhr! Haha!

**Stuart:** Will you stop bloody fantasising, Stuart, you sappy queen. Petruso will be here and you need to shave and clean your bits at least. *(Pulls the elastic of his sweatpants out and peers down, sniffing hard. He gives into Eurovision)* Oh, sod it. I've still got half an hour. Now, Spain in '69 was a Fascist military dictatorship, and this was a glorious opportunity for Franco to show it off. Austria gave it a miss. "We refuse to sing in eine fascist country." I don't suppose they saw the irony. And! Tonight, for the first time – and not entirely successfully – Spanish TV goes colour. And Salvador Dali has designed the set. Not many people know that, and even fewer believe it, but it's true. So there. And then disaster! Everything goes green. The orchestra, the set, even the hostess Laurita Valenzuela! Horror!

*A seamless join into Pyotr.*

**Pyotr:** Should've known it was going to be a horror story from the start. Austria, France, Burgundy, Savoy, Venice, Hungary, Bohemia. Gov'nor vomited all the way from Naples to Malta. We got to Jerusalem eventually. Where's that then? Guv'nor says it's in Palestine. Is that in Europe? It rained in Nazareth. We was stranded under a tree – him and me and a soggy chicken for two bloody hours. But *Dead Souls Part Two's* got to be written and he says he needs 'divine inspiration'.

*Stuart picks up the thesis and hides it where he can't see it.*

**Stuart:** Shut up, Pyotr. Laurita Valenzuela's making her entrance.

**Pyotr:** Fair enough, mate. You'll be told when the time comes, alright?

*This is interrupted by the Eurovision theme, and Stuart is immediately regripped to the video.*

**Stuart:** Laurita, in beige with a bit of glitter here and there, steps elegantly between Salvador's pink flowerbeds.

**Laurita:** *Televisión Espanola saluda, desde el Teatro Real de Madrid, a todos los telespectadores de la catorceava edición de la Canción de Eurovisión.* Spanish Television has great pleasure in greeting you from the Royal Theatre in Madrid. Well... Welcome all viewers who are now looking in on the 14<sup>th</sup> Eurovision Song Contest. *Guten Abend.*

**Stuart:** Oh my God this is perfection. And, honestly, you need to relax before Petruso gets here. And what better way than with the 1969 Eurovision Song Contest. It's an emotional elastoplast. A televisual herbal bath with extra dermabrasion. The green room is a ferment of anxiety. There's Frida, the French singer – she of the underhung jaw. Duarte Mendez from Portugal – later to be incarcerated for his revolutionary lyrics. And little Jean-Jacques from Monaco – or Monte Cristo as Pete Murray keeps calling it in the commentary. *(Interrupting himself)* Shut up, Stuart! It is now definitely time to panic. Set the table, you muppet. He's going to be here in twenty-five minutes. Flowers. Get the flowers.

*Stuart exits, and immediately returns with a bunch of obviously plastic flowers and a vase. He bungs the flowers in the vase and puts it on the keyboard. He sits, but as Lenny.*

**Lenny** *Godverdoemen.* Plastic flowers. You think perhaps they bring real flowers to the green room, but no, we have the plastic flowers, and the *verdomd* fascist waiters with the *vino blanco* and the *pulpo frito*. They do not know I am a member of the Rotterdam Youth Communist League. I am a fifth column. Maybe I tell that waitress. She is very nice. No, I am too nervous. Twenty minutes and I must sing my song. So I try read *The Diary of a Madman*. *(Picks up the book by Gogol that's lying on the table but she's too nervous to read).* *Godverdoemen.* But I am not the worst. No, no. Lulu look like she vomit. 'Boom bangy bang'. Children song. *Dom*. And she is like a stupid doll, with a little pink skirt and the big long orange hair. I have a red dress; it is very nice. It come down to my shoes. She is married to a bee gee. She has three stylists. I have no stylists. I come by train. She is flied here. With her *godverdoemen* stylists.

**Lulu:** No, you stupid queen, brush gently! For I am Lulu!

**Lenny:** But I am just Lenny Kuhr from the Netherlands.

*Applause from the television.*

It start! Ivan from Yugoslavia, he go first. Sadly, the only Communist song in the *Songfestival*. I must tell you, it is not good. His eyes roll back into his head when he sing, which make him look like an undead.

*(Sings) Dobar dan (Dobar dan)*  
*Buenos días, Buenos días,*  
*Good morning...*

*(Speaks)* You see what I mean? *Twaddledpop*. Stuff that, get *me* on! Wait, it get worse.

*Nek' svi ljudi sad u kolu*  
*Pružē ruke prijateljstva*  
*U taj pozdrav, pozdrav svijeta*  
*(Big finalé) Dober dan!*

*(Back to her book, speaking)* Best to not listen. I choose to write *m'n* thesis on *The Diary of a Madman*, mostly because in it Nikolai Gogol – amazingly – predict his own end. I love the character in it, Aksenty Poprishchin. I think myself like him. I do not mean I have a what-you-call-it stutter like him, and I do not mean he is an 18-year-old Jewish lesbian communist virgin singer-songwriter from the Netherlands like me, no. But he is a little man, a little cog, a little lost. He sit and sharpen goose quill pens for his Excellency the Director. He write in his diary what he do. I give you a little taste.

**Stuart:** No Lenny, not Aksenty. Not the Madman.

**Lenny:** If you can become other people, so can I.

*There's a noise that accompanies Aksenty's diary entries. It's ugly and disturbing. Perhaps it's the sound – distorted and twisted – of his goose quill pens being sharpened. Here it's only a shadow of what it will become later on.*

**Aksenty:** *(Gabbing the diary on the table and writing in it)* D-D-D-December the f-f-f-fifth. There are strange goings-on in S-S-S-Spain. There's a k-king s-somewhere, but no one knows wh-where. Possibly he's right there, but s-some s-sort of family reasons, or fears about neighbouring powers, such as France, have forced him into hiding.

**Stuart:** I am rising above it because I am festive and happy. And there's nothing you can do Lenny to bring me down.

*(Sings) ¿Cuántas noches vagando por mil caminos sin fin?*  
*¿Cuántas noches callando? - Cuánto te quise decir*  
*Una profunda esperanza y un eco lejano me hablaba de ti*

*Desde que llegaste ya no vivo llorando - vivo cantando, vivo soñando*  
*Sólo quiero que me digas qué está pasando*

*Que estoy temblando de estar junto a ti*

*Que estoy temblando de estar junto a ti*  
*Que estoy temblando de estar junto a ti*  
Yeah

**Lenny:** You must imagine the tassels, they move very sexy! It is very jolly Spanish song, cheeky and slinky, and she is very good singer. She is called Salomé. Well, yesterday in the lunch queue she answer to Dolores, but... She ask me what I wear for the *festival*. 'This', I say. 'It is *m'n* long red dress.' 'That?', she say. 'Yes, my mother is giving it to me for the *Nederlandse Songfestival* and I won it with *m'n* troubadour song, so it is *m'n* lucky dress'. She smile, and walk away, with her orange juice and her cantaloupe. Spanish cow. And now I feel like big fat Dutch pig.

**Stuart:** Come on, Stuart, this is serious. The Spanish entry isn't going to get the *halushki* on the table, as Gogol might have said. Better admit defeat on the shower-and-shave front. But at least get the food going! If Petruso's not here in a minute, he'll be late.

**Lenny:** Why make a fool of yourself, Stuart? Why would Petruso want to come to dinner with you?

**Stuart:** Hey, oughtn't you to be on stand by? You're on in a minute.

**Lenny:** (*Screams as she realises she's not where she's meant to be*) Oye, *m'n godverdoemen!* Only England's boom bangy bang! Then me! Lenny's turn!

**Stuart:** Maybe she's right. (*Aghast at his own stupidity*) Course she is! I'm seriously imagining that Petruso's going to be interested in a old fat English pig like me. Hah! Oh, if only I could be Spanish, or French, or Italian, or Ukrainian or... anyway, not me. Or if I can't be Spanish, then maybe, next best thing, to have a boyfriend who's Spanish or Ukrainian or... But I'm not 'cheeky and sexy and slinky' like that song is. Some Don Juan am !! I'm utterly crap.

Maybe Petruso only said he'd come in the first place to shut me up. Yes! God! What the fuck am I going to do? One student. No money coming in and no credit at the bank. No credit at Tesco's, which means no more deliveries. No credit cards because they've all been cut up. I *had* friends, but none of them will speak to me till I pay back the money I owe them. Even Mrs McDermott from downstairs gave me the cold shoulder last time I saw her. What the fuck am I going to do? Oh God oh God oh God oh God oh God oh God.

**Lenny:** *Godverdoemen*, what about *me*?! You are full of your silly worries. No more students, the Ukrainian student doesn't fancy me, blah blah blah. What about *me*?! I am on the standby!! I am in the wings, waiting for Lulu to get off the *godverdoemen* stage! I have to sing my song to 400 million people – now! – in this bloody red dress with a spazza clip in *m'n haar!*

**Lenny:** (*Sings, as Lulu, the end of the song*) My heart goes boom bang a  
bang bang  
Boom bang a bang bang  
Boom bang a bang bang  
I love you! Olé!

(*Speaks*) Yes, Lulu sing 'olé' at the end. She is not sophisticated. (*As if she and Lulu are about to pass each other in the wings*) Here she comes! She is all flushed and skippy like she's just been slapped or had sex. Oh I hate her, she's orange.

**Laurita:** *Vamos a escuchar la cancion de los Paises Bajos. 'De Troubadour'. Intérprete Lenny Kuhr.*

**Lenny:** And I am walking! With m'n guitar! Little Henketje follows! He will sit over there on the little stool with his and play the difficult bits. Now I am reaching the microphone! They are clapping, all the beastly fascists in the *Teatro Real*. A glance with *Henketje*. And now I am playing!

*Music: the introduction to Lenny Kuhr's song 'De Troubadour'.*

Oh *m'n tante* and *m'n grandmoter*, look at your little Lenny! She is singing, singing for the Low Countries, singing for the wetlands, singing for the people whose language goes [*Dutch*] 'g' and [*Dutch*] 'ch'! (*These are hard guttural gurgling sounds from the back of the throat*). Here is the sound of my very own small corner of the great continent that is Europe! The voice of my country, adding to the voices of all of yours!

(*Sings*) *Hij zat zo boordevol muziek, hij zong voor groot en klein publiek  
Hij maakte blij, melancholiek - de troubadour*

*Voor ridders in de hoge zaal zong hij in stoere, sterke taal  
Een lang en bloederig verhaal - de troubadour*

*Maar ook het werkvolk uit de schuur hoorde zijn lied vol avontuur  
Hoorde bij 't nacht'lijk keukenvuur de troubadour, de troubadour*

*En in de herberg van de stad zong hij een drinklied op het nat  
Voor wie nog staan kon en wie zat - de troubadour, de troubadour*

*La la la la la lei la la lei la la... la la la lei la la la...  
La la la la la lei la la lei la la... la la la lei la la la...*

*Oh... la la la la la lei la la lei la la... la la la lei la la la...  
La la la la la lei la la lei lei la... la la la lei la la la...  
La...*

*The music is about to resolve when Stuart re-emerges.*

**Stuart:** Ok, so now he's definitely late. What the fuck am I going to feed him?

*Stuart exits and re-enters with some random food items which he puts on the table.*

Anchovies, Piccalilli and cream. Ready, steady, cook.

Maybe I could get a takeaway delivered. What kind of dream world are you living in? No, go on! (*Gestures towards the landline*) See!

What's the point? You know it's dead. They might have reconnected you. Why would they do that? Have you paid a bill recently? (*Picks up the phone, but the line's dead*).

**Lenny:** While you argue about that, Stuart, it's time for Belgium! He has more hair in front of his ears than behind. But you will like it. It's modern.

*Music: the Belgian song.*

*(Sings) Londen stad lag stil te dromen in de zon  
Van zitten dromen in de zon rondom mij  
Waar ik ging langsheen de zomen van 't gazon  
Stonden de bomen in de zon er zalig bij*

*En toen kwam jij -*

*Lenny imitates the singer Louis Neefs' little dance move. It's a rapid kind of flamenco gesture that lasts half a second, completely out of keeping with the rest of his stage act and the song.*

**Stuart:** (*Suddenly gripped by an optimistic thought*) No, hang on, I see what's happening! He *intends* to be fashionably late! He's probably incredibly soigné and urbane and and and and... Yes, yes, that's it. Or he's stuck on the tube, or can't find the address. It's going to be fine! And when he gets here I'll charm him with my thesis. We'll inspect it over vodkas, and exchange insights and it'll be great, and he'll think I'm fantastic. But then he'll say he's got a girlfriend, and I'll be depressed, but then he'll say 'But if I was ever gonna shag a bloke it'd be you', and I'll say 'Go on then', and he'll say 'Ok', and we'll go at like rabbits till dawn, haha! (*He can't help but do the Louis Neefs flamenco twist*). Anyway.

*A mobile phone announces the arrival of a text. Stuart is frightened, then amazed then thrilled.*

A text? A TEXT?

*He has trouble finding the phone, and then eagerly reads the message, becoming increasingly panic-stricken as it goes on.*

Stuart. You are a very great teacher. My respect for you makes me long not to disappoint. Please notice I not do split my infinitive. So refusal is plenty of remorse, for perhaps you wish more of your kind dinner than I will give to you. So tonight I not come and wish you well and happiness. I am enjoyed our last English session and have sadness is our final lesson. I hope one day United Kingdoms will again win the Eurovision Contest. Petruso.

*Stuart has just enough composure for:*

**Stuart:** Fat chance.

*But then he crumples, and cries.*

Noooooooo!!!! (*Through sobs*) Petruso, you can't leave me like this. What am I going to do without you?

**Lenny:** Stuart?

**Stuart:** What?

**Lenny:** You want I sing Italy for you?

**Stuart:** Yes, please.

**Lenny:** Okay.

*Music: the Italian song 'Due Grosse Lacrime Bianche'. It's a sad, slow love song, very dramatic and heartfelt. Lenny uses it to express and then soothe Stuart's emotions.*

*(Sings) Il nostro cuore dicevi sempre  
Non è una stanza che si affitta*

*Noi ci lasciamo, la stanza è vuota  
La porta aperta resterà*

*Due grosse lacrime bianche  
Come due perle del mare  
È tutto quello che a me rimane di te*

*(Speaks)* Oh yes! That Iva Zanicchi, she is something! An Isadora! A Callas! And the song! At last, something to get into your teeth! She sing: "Two big white tears, like two pearls of the ocean, are all that is for me left of you. Love does not die, for not hearing your voice, the head under the cushion, I am reborn". Well, ok, it sound better in Italian.

*(Sings) Due grosse lacrime bianche  
Come due perle del mare  
È tutto quello che a me rimane di te*

**Lenny:** *Kom op*, Stuart! Time for Germany.

**Stuart:** No. No more songs.

**Lenny:** I agree! We should cut to the voting, and crown Lenny queen of the *Eurovisie* -

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