

PLAYWRIGHT IN UKRAINE:

FRANK GAGLIANO'S,
"MY CHEKHOV LIGHT" JOURNEY
TO KIROVOGRAD

by Frank Gagliano

ON YOUR MARK. . .

On March 15, 2005 — just three months after the Ukrainian Orange Revolution — I gave a reading/performance of my play, "MY CHEKHOV LIGHT," in the Regional Art Museum in Kirovograd, Ukraine. In many ways, it changed my life.

Pavlò Bosyy, a native of Kirovograd, and a visiting professor of Design in the Division of Theatre, West Virginia U (WVU), had arranged a photo exhibit of stage designs in Kirovograd: "American Scenography Today in Works of West Virginia University Professors and Graduate Students."

In Kirovograd, before coming to the US in 2000, Pavlò had been the Curator of the Kirovograd Museum of Regional Studies; he was also on the faculty of the Kirovograd Pedagogical Academy, and was a major stage designer for the Kropyvnytsky Ukrainian Regional Theatre of Drama and Music.

Pavlò —who, to me resembles, in aspect and energy, the young Mickey Rooney playing Puck, in the MGM movie version of “A Midsummer Night’s Dream” — was a voracious reader, had read my play, "MY CHEKHOV LIGHT"; he’d heard about a recent reading/performance I’d done at New York’s Cherry Lane Theatre and invited me to perform the piece as part of the WVU exhibit in Kirovograd, Ukraine. I quickly accepted. For two reasons: The Ukrainian Orange Revolution had moved and inspired me and I wanted to meet the people who had achieved what seemed like a political miracle; and because I wanted to continue to keep “MY CHEKHOV LIGHT” alive, this time in a (for me) brand new culture.

BACKWARD JOURNEY. . .

I first wrote, “MY CHEKHOV LIGHT,” as part of a monologue play assignment I always give to my first-year West Virginia University playwriting students. In whatever form that first draft took (and in whatever year that was), I gave a first reading/performance of "MY CHEKHOV LIGHT" as part of a special double bill of faculty performers in our WVU Lab theatre series. My colleague, Equity actor John Whitty, performed Samuel Beckett’s, KRAPPS LAST TAPE, as the other half of the bill: A double whammy of contemporary despair-dazzle.

I then read/performed "MY CHEKHOV LIGHT" during an early inaugural season of A Contemporary American Theatre Festival, Shepherdstown-On-The-Potomac; followed by a coupling of "MY CHEKHOV LIGHT" with another theatre piece of mine, “HANNA: A Run-On Odyssey (for Narrator, Performer and Percussion),” which I presented at The New Dramatists and Primary Stages in New York; followed by a reading/performance at Fullerton, California.

When WVU started its association with the E.T.A. Hoffmann Theater in Bamberg, Germany, I was asked to give a reading of "MY CHEKHOV LIGHT" there. The late WVU German professor Jurgen Schlunk translated the play into German and, while I read/performed the piece in English, those in the 200-year-old

E.T. A. Hoffmann Theater audience, who could not understand English, followed the text in German. As a result of that reading/performance the E.T.A. Hoffmann Theatre produced the play, in German, in their Studio Theater in late November, 1999. Also as a result of my Bamberg reading/performance, I accepted a rewrite suggestion from the Artistic Director Rainer Lewandowski. Based on his suggestion, I did a major rewrite on the play.

Over the years, I continued giving reading/performances of "MY CHEKHOV LIGHT" and tweaking the text. Though I had no professional venue for the piece, (cheekily) I even approached a number of leading star character actors to take on the role of Professor Peter Paradise, in hopes that their name value would help interest producers in fully producing it. Alan Bates was one who, even before he read it, warned me that he was booked with projects years ahead. But when he read the play he was intrigued enough to take a wait-and-see attitude about his association with "MY CHEKHOV LIGHT", "in future." Then Alan Bates died.

I also approached Alan Rickman, who was appearing in a Noel Coward play on Broadway at the time. His note to me about identifying with Peter Paradise's conflict of art vs. commercial entertainment gave me hope; but that hope was dashed when Mr. Rickman concluded by writing that, to him, doing a one-man piece was "actor's hell." John Collum, who had appeared in the first New York showcase of my play, IN THE VOODOO PARLOUR OF MARIE LAVEAU, was also heavily booked. He had another reason to say no: He was working on his own one-man piece. Recently, Ed Asner agreed to give a reading of the piece in L.A. , but various obligations and from-left-field projects for me have gotten in the way of that happening. So, I've kept the piece alive, in front of audiences, by my giving reading/performance of it whenever I get the chance.

Since the summer of 2004, the "MY CHEKHOV LIGHT" experiences have taken a new turn for me, away from a reading/performance and toward — what — . . . performance art? Perhaps. And this has surprised me. All along, I thought

(kept saying) that I was merely demonstrating the "MY CHEKHOV LIGHT" text, based on techniques I've developed in my "Holographing-The-Playtext," Text Analysis-For-Theatre-Practitioners classes; techniques for bringing a text off the page and "putting it out there." Now I get the feeling I've gone beyond demonstrating — to channeling — the text.

In the summer of '04, I was a playwright's mentor at The O'Neill Theatre Center, where I gave another reading/performance of MY CHEKHOV LIGHT, followed by one in September at New York's Cherry Lane Theatre (where, after the performance, then Chair Margaret Mckowen, hosted a reception for me in the Lobby), and concluding with my recent reading/performance at the Regional Art Museum in Kirovograd, Ukraine, on 15 March.

In each of these venues the same thing happened; the room I was performing in disappeared.

SINCE JULY -- AND BLURB. . .

At the O'Neill Theatre Center, in Waterford, Connecticut, overlooking the Long Island Sound, the reading/performance took place in a one-room little building that is used for rehearsals and where, before the Playwrights' Conference officially begins, the playwrights read their plays to other playwrights and directors — a tradition at The O'Neill. The room is not air-conditioned and has windows, two entrance doorways with a noisy fan in one, and is in the path of much outdoor noise. Distractions on distractions. At the end of that reading/performance I was surprised to be told that a number of late comers had entered the room while I was performing, and that there were more noises than usual on the grounds outside the room. I had so taken the imaginative leap into the text that, apparently, I had not been distracted by those distractions; just blotted out the O'Neill space and remained in another space in my mind's eye — the space in which "MY CHEKHOV LIGHT" unfolds,

BLURB. . .

Here's the play's promotional blurb, and where the action takes place:

“. . .Oh, Martin, where has it all gone? My life, my youth, my loves, my artistry, my joy.”

In a University Studio theatre, a television star returns to give his alma mater a large donation for a new theatre, and confronts his former mentor—the now embittered, desperate and betrayed lighting designer, Professor Peter Paradise. In this one-performer, theatrical star turn, and in an orgy of words and over-the-top emotions, Professor Peter Paradise lacerates himself for his failed relationships and career, berates his student for selling out, and creates, in his Studio space, a multi-media extravaganza of image, sound, and light — his “Chekhov light” — which, he's sure, will get him to transcend all his pain — and break free from all of the “bottom-line shit down here.”

". . .an edgy theatrical play. . .an orgy of words . . .repeatedly interrupted by staccato-like sentence fragments and myriad reflections. . .One could endlessly debate the parallel to Chekhov's 'Cherry Orchard,' with its reflection on the societal end of an era and its melancholic farewell:" Frankischer Tag; Bamberg, Germany.

The Cherry Lane Theatre, where I next performed “MY CHEKHOV

LIGHT” was, of course, a more realistic setting for the piece; not a black box space, as it is in the play, but one of New York's oldest Off-Broadway

Proscenium theatres; of about 150 seats. It also has excellent acoustics and had personal mystical qualities for me. My first Off-Broadway plays, CONERICO WAS HERE TO STAY and THE NIGHT OF THE DUNCE, had been produced there by Edward Albee in the 1960s. I assumed that the energy and positive

nostalgia from those past productions were what charged my Cherry Lane reading/performance, in an even more intense way than at the O'Neill. But intense it was; and, once again there was something else at play that was keeping me in Peter Paradise's phantasmagoric Theatre-Space world, and shutting out the reality of the Cherry Lane Theatre in New York City.

In Kirovograd, my performance was in an exhibit room, not usually used for performances, -- a space and a performance that, in many ways, turned out to be a major ephiphany-stop in the CHEKHOV journey.

UKRAINE DIARY. . .

9 March 2005/On Lufthansa Flight #243, from (Ugh!) Philadelphia Airport to Frankfurt, I read one of the funniest bits I've read in a long time, from an Agatha Christie mystery I'm finishing, "Death In The Clouds." (Berkeley Mystery, pp.6-7.) In the book, on board what will turn out to be the murder plane, a handsome British dentist is smitten with a young woman aboard. This brings about a straight-faced Dame Christie inner monologue for the dashing dentist:
". . .She's very attractive when she smiles; no pyorrhea there — healthy gums and sound teeth. . .damn it, I feel quite excited, steady, my boy." Then, this punch line: "He said to the Steward, who hovered at his side with the menu, 'I'll have cold tongue.' " ("Sans pyorrhea, no doubt," I write in my notebook).

I then switch from Dame Christie to Mikhail Bulgakov, the Ukrainian, world-class novelist/playwright/actor, who had such a difficult time as a leading Soviet writer, under Stalin. The Bulgakov book I've just started, "The Master And Margarita" — now recognized as a masterpiece, is a mix of Gogol/Fellini/Dario Fo and never published in Bulgakov's lifetime — the fate of so many of Bulgakov's works.

(I had never even heard of Bulgakov, until a playwright colleague, James Nicholson, mentioned him to me, and Pavlò began to fill me in on the works and

sad life of this world-class writer, whom the Soviets tormented and marginalized in Bulgakov's lifetime. Diving into the surreal world of Bulgakov would make the visit to Bulgakov's house later, in Kiev, more memorable.)

In the book, I come across a humorous passage, quite different from the inadvertent humor in the Agatha Christie book. In it, Ivan Nikolayevich is chasing the devil and a huge human-like cat through Soviet Moscow and thinks they can be found in a particular apartment. He runs into the apartment, invades the bathroom. "There in the tub stood a naked woman, covered in soap and with a loofah in her hands. She squinted nearsightedly at Ivan Nikolayevich's intruding figure, and clearly mistaking him for someone else in the hellish light, said softly and cheerily, 'Kiryushka! Quit fooling around! Have you gone out of your mind? Fyodor Ivanovich will be back any minute. Get out of here this instant!' - -and she waved her loofah at Ivan. It was an obvious misunderstanding, and Ivan Nikolayevich was, of course, to blame. But not wanting to admit it, he yelled reproachfully, "Whore! . ." -- and then somehow wound up in the kitchen." (Vintage, 1995, p105)

10 March/ Kiev Airport. As arranged, Irina and Tatiana, my greeters, are holding up a sign with a green background that reads, "GAGLIANO." Both women are tall, slim, stylish and beautiful. Pavlò had prepared me for that. Irina speaks some English; Tatiana, just a few words. Irina is a full-time student at the President's Academy of Public Administration--a prestigious and, apparently, very competitive program that will lead to a very high ranking job in public service. Tatiana is the director of the Kirovograd Regional Museum of Arts. Tatiana and Irina are both single parents. Irina's son is a student in Kirovograd. She is very proud of him. He's apparently very good looking and very tall. I ask her if she's ever thought of coming to the United States, or anywhere else, abroad. "No," she says, "I could never leave my country." Both women had been protégés of Pavlò when he was a force in the Theatre/Museum/Education world in Kirovograd. Tatiana had come up from Kirovograd just to meet us and bring us back to Kirovograd.

I arrive at the Kiev airport two hours before Pavlò's plane arrives. The charmers, Irina and Tatiana, and I, have tea and manage to communicate and wait for Pavlò. When he arrives we all rise to greet him and I trip over a suitcase onto my knees. I would fall a few more times on the ice in Ukraine.

The Kiev hotel Pavlò and I stay in is one of those old Soviet hotels; 1930's New York YMCA model -- sans heat. That first night I sleep fully clothed under two comforters.

11 March/ Meet with Pavlò and Dr. Volodymyr Panchenko, Professor of Literature and Pro-Rector/Vice President for Educational Affairs at The National University (Kyiv Mohyla Academy). Immediately we're ushered into Professor Panchenko's warm office -- photo of new President Yuschenko prominently displayed -- and we all have tea and cakes and candies. That is the first time I see the ubiquitous electric tea pot (taking the place of the samovar, I wonder?). Professor Panchenko is a distinguished man, full of cheer, wearing the dark suit of the Administrator. He and I talk, Pavlò translates. Professor Panchenko is a good advocate for the Academy and claims that this Liberal Arts Institution is one of the best in Kiev. He had visited Chicago fairly recently and chatted about that and seemed to be cautiously feeling me out about my take on current affairs in the US (or, perhaps, I had so wanted to open the door to politics that I wanted to believe that that was what he wanted). When I made clear that I wished we in the United States had had something equivalent to the recent Ukrainian non-bloody Orange Revolution (which I greatly admired and was moved by), he becomes very animated and proudly begins to tell stories about the Orange Revolution, even gives me a DVD about it. Then he takes us on a visit to the Academy Art Center and we pass hoards of students (who resemble students at WVU and who, I suspect, resemble students everywhere -- from Iran to Beijing to Crawford, Texas; animated, chattering, laughing, flirting -- there in the hallways and on the ubiquitous cell phones). On the hallway walls, a huge photo exhibit of the uprising, mainly featuring photos of the students from the Academy who had participated in the

rallies of the thousands in Revolutionary Square. In the photos, it is orange everything, including hair. According to Dr. Panchenko, the stories are true about some of the young policemen, there to keep the peace for the then corrupt government, who would, when they'd get off duty, date the young women students demonstrating, and relationships developed. And is it any wonder? The women are all beautiful, with great smiles. I am impressed with the white, even, teeth of the students. A tribute to Ukrainian Dentistry? In any case, undoubtedly, "no Pyorrea there."

Then Dr. Panchenko takes us to the Academy Art Center for a personal tour of the collection, consisting of pieces that range from the realistic, to abstract works, to contemporary icons of "Christ's Mother" and featuring the work of their local genius, Ivan-Velentine Zazorozhni (1921-1988), whose subject matter and themes are a sophisticated mix of the colorful, stylized, and folk/primative.

When we leave Dr. Panchenko (after taking some photos) and head for the Bulgakov house, I'm aware that, so far, all the people I've met I've liked, quickly admired and wanted to see again. Would that continue? And, at some point on that walk it occurs to me that I haven't given a thought to my reading/performance of MY CHEKHOV LIGHT. I will give the reading/performance in four days and I don't seem concerned. At this point I am usually under great stress.

(ASIDE #1). . .

Actually, I do work on the script; all the time; in my mind's ear; on the opening paragraph anyway. Because I know that if I nail the opening, I'm home free. Here it is:

PETER PARADISE:

It's unfortunate, Martin,
that the things we tend to remember
—to dwell on, as we
—what's the phrase?. . .

ah! —"advance in years"
—if not in wisdom
. . .are the things of regret. . . .

—I was just regretting
—in fact, "dwelling on"
—the recent loss of my wife and--
. . .well.

This paragraph is like an opening musical chord. I know that if I can sustain the thought and through line -- trust the playwright's underline-scoring of the word "tend," and stress that word when "putting it out there" — then go quickly through the dashes — but put on the brakes in the ellipses ... (dot beat dot beat dot) . . .yet keep it all moving and suspended until the first period after the thematic key phrase, "are the things of regret" . . . then I know I will have released all the tone colors of the paragraph; at which point, in the reading/performance, attention is usually grabbed. Then, when I cut off at the phrase "--the recent loss of my wife and—. . ." and give as much air as I can pump into (and fill in) the ellipses . . . until I ease back into the (lower case w) ". . .well," then I will have contacted the opening, and so, too, will have the audience: Usually.

"Regret," of course, is what the play is all about, one of its thematic elements, anyway. The word "regret" resonates throughout, and finally resolves the piece. Emotionally, Peter must truly "regret" the loss of his wife (even though that turns out to be a comic take on the word, "loss" — actually, she's run out on him). But the more important "regret," of course, is the regret Peter suffers as he now confronts his former student, Martin, who has disappointed him to the soul — and who now threatens Peter's world. The pressure of that regret is the major regret that must resonate in the opening chord — even though neither the audience, or Martin — know yet where that pressure is coming from. So, working on the opening musical chord, speaking it out loud, playing with the slow rhythms (as Peter, on headphones and intercom mic, talks in the mic to Martin, who

is in the sound-proofed control room behind the audience), always establishing where and how to breathe and support each line, can be done almost anywhere; on a plane, in the car; shaving; even under two comforters, fully dressed, in a freezing, Soviet-vintage hotel in Kiev.

I do wonder, though, if my kind of preparation of the text will register with a Ukrainian audience, many of whom will probably not know English.

BULGAKOV HOUSE (11 March, still)). . .

Serhiy Zaplatnikov, a student friend of Pavlò, now a graphic designer, joins us. The walk from Mohyla Academy to St. Andrew Street, where the Bulgakov House is located, is not a long one, but it is still cold and windy and the ice is slippery and we — Pavlò, myself, Irina, Tatiana and Serhiy—all hold on to each other and slip and slide our way to St. Andrew's Street.

St. Andrew's Street is a winding, hilly, cobble-stone street, snaking up to Bulgakov's house. Lining the street are Art Galleries, stores, little restaurants and artists selling their wares. Someone tells me that this street is often called Kiev's Montmartre. We walk past beautiful Saint Andrews church.

Pavlò tells me

that the former Ukrainian president had a house on Saint Andrew Street and that his wife loved the view of the church and had the British Embassy torn down so that there would be no obstructions to her view of St. Andrew's. On the way up we pass a little Museum devoted to memorabilia to this one street, this month featuring the history of prostitution on St. Andrew Street and in Kiev. Can't pass that one up. Serhiy Zaplatnikov buys all the tickets. Inside are some artifacts and charming period photos, nothing explicit, mostly of the working girl's, fully dressed, posing; and photos of the often-distinguished male clientele; very-much like the photos one sees from the New Orleans Storyville Red-Light district in the U.S. There is even an old period piano in the Kiev Museum of Prostitution, very much like the upright a "Professor" (like

Jelly Roll Morton) might play in the elegant, fabled, Storyville brothels.

Across from the Bulgakov house I notice a tall woman with a brown cape with a hood setting up some paintings she's selling.

The Bulgakov house, number 13 on Saint Andrew Street, is now a museum run by the city of Kiev. Mikhail Bulgakov and his family lived on the second floor of this two story house. Downstairs, we must put on overshoes over our street shoes (boots, in my case). They are big coverings, like the backs of horseshoe crabs that lace up. The floors upstairs are the original parquet floors and must not be scratched. Today our tour guide — (not called a “docent” because, in Ukraine, “docent” is an Associate Professor in any University) — our tour guide is a thin, sharp-faced little woman, wearing a black shawl (at least I recall that she did; and if she didn't, she should have). She reminds me of my image of the character Charlotta Ivanovna, in Chekhov's, THE CHERRY ORCHARD — only in looks, however; unlike Charlotta in the Chekhov play, this tour guide is not a conjurer or performer — this tour guide speaks softly, seems somewhat shy and might very well have been an original occupant during the Bulgakov family tenure there (from 1906, when Bulgakov and his family moved into the house, until 1921, when Mikhail left for Moscow, never to return). Our Tour Guide (I'll call her Charlotta) is knowledgeable, quietly intense and keeps her eyes on me even as Pavlò translates. It's clear that, in her quiet way, she's a passionate chronicler of the Museum and it's contents.

And with good reason.

The museum is truly unique: A concept museum, you might say. The first rooms we're in are designed from Bulgakov's description of the house of the fictitious Turbin family, featured in his early novel, THE WHITE GUARD, which is set in 1918, during the Russian Civil War. It's clear that the Turbin apartment in the book is modeled after the actual Bulgakov apartment. Much of the furnishings and memorabilia are

authentic, but what is not authentic is painted white. A table may be normal wood color, but the chairs — or some of the chairs — around it may be white. Items on the table may also be a mix of black and white. Everything is solid, grounded in the real; yet, because of the black/white mix, slightly disorienting; strange.

Then, the coup de theatre: Charlotta, the tour guide, shows us a closet in the room. With a sly glint in her dark eyes, she opens the closet. It's

empty. She opens the back wall of the closet. It's a door! We step through! — and we are now in a replica of the rooms in the apartment Bulgakov occupied in Moscow! A Ukrainian "Narnia" Instillation!

In that Bulgakov-Moscow-room something catches my eye out the window facing onto St. Andrews Hill. The woman with the brown cape and hood I noticed when we first approached the Bulgakov Museum is still there. But she seems to have elongated and her face is white—the white of a Mime—and she seems to be floating back and forth among her street-gallery of paintings. I'm sure I point this strange sight out to some of those in the room, but it doesn't seem to register.

The final theatrical touch: Charlotta points our attention to a mirror on the Moscow-room wall; then switches off the lights and, through the mirror we look into a little world and a light show of nightmarish images that soon dissolve to a sky full of stars. Charlotta, standing in front of what we thought had been a mirror but is, in fact, a diorama-cum-light show, now seems to be intoning, rather than speaking, and Pavlò tells me that this is taken from a famous, beautiful passage in Bulgakov's THE WHITE GUARD. I determine to read THE WHITE GUARD. For the moment, I am taken with the magic of the theatrics and intoning of Charlotta, the tour guide of Bulgakov house.

CAMERA. . .

On the slide down the cobble stones of St. Andrews Street we stop while I take photos of larger-than life comic bronzed figures of a man kneeling at the feet of a woman. They are both in period costumes

(www.mykievcenter.com/images/imp6.jpg). Pavlò tells me that they are characters from a classical Ukrainian comedy, "Hunting for Two Birds" ("Za Dvoma Zaitsiamy"). The comedy, apparently, grows out of (at least partially) the use of a humorous, snobbish Russian dialect, and from the following situation: The man is a vain, stupid, barber who proposes to two women; this statue is the barber's proposal to a rich, unattractive woman. Pavlò (Mr. Walking Footnotes And Trivia Sponge) tells me that two actors actually posed for the figures. The male actor had since died but the actress is still alive and had been at the dedication of the statue some years ago, where she spoke a famous line from the comedy: "I was not waiting in vain." I take a photo of our crowd being foolish around Mr. Stupid Barber and Ms. Rich Plain Lady. Then, with my camera, Serhiy takes a photo of me being foolish at the statue.

Then we continue our slide down to Revolutionary Square which is vast. There are some official monuments but nothing that makes an impression; perhaps because there are no signs of a "revolution" — no burnt out cars or bombed-out buildings left as visible reminders of the struggles — but, dutifully, I take photos and look forward to perusing them later. We continue walking past begging gypsies and their begging children, to the warmth of a Ukrainian Cafeteria, where — sometime between the borscht and green tea — I decide to take photos of everyone around the table and realize that my camera is gone. Consternation. A search. An embarrassed restaurant Manager. Outraged friends. No luck. The camera is gone. I feel stupid, violated, outraged — and happy to be free of the damned thing. I won't have to be obliged to take pictures during the rest of my trip. My mind's eye will have to click away from now on. Anyway, for me, photos primarily are taken for other people to look at.

VODKA. . .

On the way back to the hotel, via rush-hour subway and cab, Serhiy Zaplatnikov buys a bottle of vodka (already mixed with orange juice) and olives and crackers and a tin of kippers. First I repack my bag in my room, then join Pavlò and Serhiy Zaplatnikov in Pavlò's room down the hall. Tomorrow morning (Saturday) Pavlò and I will take one of the newer, faster trains from Kiev to Kirovograd, where we'll exhibit the scenic works and where I'll give the reading/performance of MY CHEKHOV LIGHT. Serhiy has taken the newer train in the recent past. We'll have it all to ourselves, he says. Bundled up and warming from the vodka, we sit, eat and talk. It is amazing how natural these conversations, via, translator are becoming. Serhiy is a big guy with an ironic sense of humor and tends to play Devil's Advocate. Because of the theft of my camera and my misery in the cold weather, he asks whether I'd consider returning to such a country. I'm surprised how quickly I say yes. No matter the comfort-obstacles to me, I like everyone I meet; I sense intelligence, energy and great hope for Ukraine from the Ukrainians; the few I've met anyway. Serhiy is not so optimistic about the future of his country, mainly because he seems negative about all societies. It's always the money interests that come out ahead; and the corporations today, which all regimes are beholden to, he insists, are nations unto themselves. They have no national allegiances, he says.

5:00 AM/Saturday, 12 March

Dark. Light snow. The hotel is on a hill. You need to walk down one outside set of stairs. Then there is a long concrete path that leads to the top of another set of stairs that go down to the street. Pavlò and I bring our luggage outside, down to the top of that set of stairs. I wait there for the cab, while Pavlò runs back up to the hotel to get the WVU scenographic exhibit, which is packed in a large separate suitcase. Silence. While I wait, what looks like a oil truck with a large drum on its back, slowly comes into view, slowly towing a car by a long chain over the icy street. The truck stops under the lit street light in

the flying snow, some 30 steps below. The light snow keeps falling and flying. A man steps out of the car at the same time that the tow-truck driver steps out of the truck. The man pays the truck-tow driver who disconnects the chain from his truck and gives the chain to the man in the car. The man in the car puts the chains into the boot of his car; they are his chains. The truck drives off. The car's engine turns over and the car drives away. Pavlò returns, lugging the heavy suitcase filled with the scenic exhibit. The cab arrives. Somehow, all luggage is placed into the cab. We head for the train station.

The train station is fairly new. Warm, modern. But Pavlò points out, "They put in the glitz, but they don't put in escalators or elevators to the train platforms. You have to lug everything downstairs. Typical."

Tatania and Irina arrive. Right on time; both still looking beautiful, full of energy. Tatania, who will be taking the train back to Kiravograd with us, has brought along some bottles of bottled water and some homemade rolls stuffed with jams and meat that she and Pavlò's mother have made for our trip. It is possible that I may be able to spend another day in Kiev on my way back to the States and Irina promises to take care of me. Perhaps it will be warmer in a week's time. Hugs. Goodbyes. I look forward to a train that we'll have all to ourselves.

The train is mobbed. With families, luggage, kids. It is a comfortable train, warm, like most commuter trains I'm used to in the States. Only newer.

It leaves on time. Pavlò, with his usual energy, moves across the aisle, kneels in the aisle with his pad and pen and confers with Tatania. It's light out now. We pass miles and miles of farm land. When Pavlò returns to his seat next to me, he shows me the schedule he and Tatania have arranged for me. I will be meeting many people in Kirovograd, seeing many institutions, lecturing in a class at the Pedagogical Academy and giving at

reading performance of MY CHEKHOV LIGHT at the Kirovograd Pedagogical Academy.

The opening chord of MY CHEKHOV LIGHT begins to sound in my head.

TO BE CONTINUED. . .

KIROVOGRAD. . .

