

Classic Poetry Series

Daniil Ivanovich Kharms

- poems -

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Daniil Ivanovich Kharms (December 1905 – 2 February 1942)

Born Daniil Ivanovich Yuvachov he was the son of a St. Petersburg political, religious and literary figure, Daniil was to achieve limited local reknown as a Leningrad avant-garde eccentric and a writer of children's stories in the 1920s and 30s.

He was married twice (to Esther Rusakova and Marina Malich). His wives sometimes appear in those of his poems that are lyrical or erotic.

In 1931 Kharms was first arrested, then released to a spell of internal exile in Kharkov. This marked him. He lost all but his bravest friends, he could not get a job anywhere, and he was set up for destruction later. Arrested in 1941 he starved to death in a prison hospital in early 1942. He was only 37 at the time of his death.

Works

His short stories while humorous, were considered vulgar, violent and irrational. Shaped with a strong sense of narrative form, his stories moved quickly and effortlessly to their conclusion. Kharm's work has been categorized with popular Russian humor vaudeville, circus clowns, folk drama, and low-class raunchy jokes.

None of Kharms stories were published in his lifetime except a few he was able to disguise as children's literature. Kharms was considered an absurdist writer in that he demonstrated in his stories the meaninglessness of human existence and at the same time the desire of people to have meaning in their lives.

Kharms' stories are typically brief vignettes often only a few paragraphs long, in which scenes of poverty and deprivation alternate with fantastic, dreamlike occurrences and acerbic comedy. Occasionally they incorporate incongruous appearances by famous authors (e.g.: Pushkin and Gogol tripping over each other; Count Leo Tolstoy showing his chamber pot to the world; Pushkin and his sons falling off their chairs; etc.)

The poet often professed his extreme abhorrence of children and pets, as well as old people; his career as a children's writer notwithstanding.

Kharms' world is unpredictable and disordered; characters repeat the same actions many times in succession or otherwise behave irrationally; linear stories start to develop but are interrupted in midstream by inexplicable catastrophes that send them in completely different directions.

His manuscripts were preserved by his sister and, most notably, by his friend Yakov Druskin, a notable music theorist and amateur theologian and philosopher, who dragged a suitcase full of Kharm's and Vvedensky's writings out of Kharm's apartment during the blockade of Leningrad and kept it hidden throughout difficult times.

Kharm's adult works were picked up by Russian samizdat starting around the 1960s, and thereby did have an influence on the growing "unofficial" arts scene. (Moscow Conceptualist artists and writers such as Kabakov, Prigov, Rubinstein, were influenced by this newly found avant-garde predecessor).

Influence

Beginning in 1970's many of Kharm's children's texts were set to music, and were often heard on the radio.

The Russian-American jazz pianist Simon Nabatov has released a CD of settings of Kharm's texts, entitled A Few Incidences (with singer Phil Minton).

Ted Milton staged a performance around Kharm's texts, entitled In Kharm's Way (with laptop musician Sam Britton).

The band Esthetic Education composed his poem Juravli I Korabli. It appeared on their debut album Face Reading, and on their live album Live at Ring.

Composer Hafliði Hallgrímsson has composed music featuring Daniil Kharm's writings translated into English.

Eserleri:

Kharm, Daniil (2009). Today I Wrote Nothing: The Selected Writings of Daniil Kharm. Edited and translated from the Russian by Matvei Yankelevich. New York: Ardis Books

A Romance

He looks at me with a madman's eyes -
It's your house and porch I know so well.
He gives me a kiss with his crimson lips -
Our ancestors had gone to war in scales of steel.

He brought me a bouquet of crimson carnations -
It's your austere face I know so well.
He asked in return for a single kiss -
Our ancestors had gone to war in scales of steel.

He touched me with his finger bearing a dark ring -
It is your dark ring I know so well.
Together we tumbled down on a Turkish divan -
Our ancestors had gone to war in scales of steel.

He looks at me with a madman's eyes -
Dwindle away, o you stars, and fade, o you moon!
He gives me a kiss with his crimson lips -
Our ancestors had gone to war in scales of steel.

Daniil Ivanovich Kharmis

A Song

We shall close our eyes,
O people! O people!
We shall open our eyes,
O warriors! O warriors!

Lift us up above the sea,
O angels! O angels!
Drown the enemy under the sea,
O demons! O demons!

We have closed our eyes,
O people! O people!
We have opened our eyes,
O warriors! O warriors!

Give us strength to fly over the sea,
O birds! O birds!
Give us courage to die under the sea,
O fish! O fish!

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An Evening Song To She Who Exists By My Name

Daughter of the daughter of the daughters of the daughter Pe
foreto the apple you ate of yee
beguiling Adam's heights foreto you favorite daughter of the daughter of Pe
being the Mother of the world and the world itself and the child of the world being
open the eye of the soul of grain
open the shores and do not turn yee head about
open the fallen shadows of thrones to the larch
open through Angels singing birds
open the sighing breath in the air of the sown winds
that call you down to them that call you
that love you
that yellow find yee in life.

The steam bath of your faces
the steam bath of your faces
foreto opening memory's window take a look around what is situated in the distance
take a count of the moving and the restless
and count out on your hand A those restless ones
those restless ones foreto taking from movement accepting life
long to move and yet still sleepth
or quick say: from movement comes life
but in stillness death.

Origin and Power will fit into thy shoulder
Origin and Power will fit into thy forehead
Origin and Power will fit into the sole of thy foot
but you will never take fire and arrow into your hand
but you will never take fire and arrow into your hand
foreto the ladder of thou head
daughter of the daughter of the daughters of the daughter of Pe

O fy lily of mine eyes
fe the inkwell of mine cheeks
trrr the ear of mine hair
quill of happiness reflection of the light of mine things
key of ashes and bosom of flowing pride
take cover in silence people of this mine country
foreto wink number height and horse's ride

Of willfulness shall we sing sister
of willfulness shall we sing sister
daughter of the daughter of the daughters of Pe
name-day girl of your own name
of your own legs the wind and of your own bosom the bee
of your own hands the strength and my breath
uneasyseeable depth of my soul
the light that sings in my city
joy of the night and forest of the graveyard of still standing times

with courage come into the world and life's witness
come to me in my dreams.

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But The Artist...

But the artist sat the nude model on the table and moved her legs apart. The girl hardly resisted and merely covered her face with her hands.

Amonova and Strakhova said that first the girl should have been taken off to the bathroom and washed between her legs, as any whiff of such an aroma was simply repulsive.

The girl wanted to jump up but the artist held her back and asked her to take no notice and sit there, just as he had placed her. The girl, not knowing what she was supposed to do, sat back down again.

The artist and his female colleagues took their respective seats and began sketching the nude model. Petrova said that the nude model was a very seductive woman, but Strakhova and Amonova said that she was rather plump and indecent.

Zolotogromov said that this was what made her seductive, but Strakhova said that this was simply repulsive, and not at all seductive.

-- Look -- said Strakhova -- ugh! It's pouring out of her on to the table cloth. What is there seductive about that, when I can sniff the smell off her from here.

Petrova said that this only showed her feminine strength. Abel'far blushed and agreed. Amonova said she had seen nothing like it, that you get to the highest point of arousal and it still wouldn't secrete like this girl did. Petrova said that, faced with that, one could get aroused oneself and that Zolotogromov must already be aroused.

Zolotogromov agreed that the girl was having quite an effect on him. Abel'far sat there red in the face and she was breathing heavily.

-- However, the air in this room is becoming unbearable -- said Strakhova. Abel'far fidgeted on her chair and then leapt up and went out of the room.

-- There -- said Petrova -- you see the result of female seductiveness. It even acts on the ladies. Abel'far has gone off to put herself to rights. I can feel that I will soon have to do the same thing.

-- That -- said Amonova -- only shows the advantage we thin women possess. Everything with us is always as it should be. But both you and Abel'far are splendiferous ladies and you have to keep yourselves very much in check.

-- Yet -- said Zolotogromov -- splendiferousness and a certain lack of bodily hygiene are what is to be particularly valued in a woman.

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First Poem From The

Pyotr Pavlovich (entering the room):
Zdagger Upper Ooster Ooster
I am carrying someone's elbow
Zdagger Upper Ooster Ooster
Where's Professor De Dispenchin?
Zdagger Upper Ooster Ooster
Where on Earth are office hours?
If this little clockie dangling
Its two weights a-reaching down
Oldish clockie while still pending
Flew an arc without a frown
Zdagger Upper Ooster Ooster
I broke down the rhythm of time
Carabeester on a booster
Works instead of Zdagger Upper
Hand is stretched ever farther
Yielding something arrow-handed
From one minute to another
Rushing blindly as if branded
Right from milk-white clockface down
Pancake's winding Ooster Ooster
Tightly wrapped in dressing-gown
Proudly sits the Carabeester
He is during office seconds
Looking into metered engine
So the time will not be wayward
Like Professor De Dispenchin
Like Andrey Semyonich Zdagger
Single-handed Zdagger Upper
Cares for Zdagger Upper Ooster
His lost hand adjusting aptly
Fixing fingers with a hammer
Zdagger Upper he is nailing
Zdagger Upper Ooster them.

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Foma Bobrov And His Spouse

GRANNY Bobrov (Playing patience) Now that's the card. Oh, it's all coming out topsy-turvy! A king. And where am I supposed to put that? Just when you want one, there's never a five around. Oh, I could do with a five! Now it'll be the five. Oh, sod it, another king!

She flings the cards on to the table with such force that a porcelain vase falls off the table and smashes.

GRANNY Oh! Oh! My Gawd! These bloody cards! (She crawls under the table and picks up the pieces). This'll never glue back together again. And it was a good vase, too. You can't get them like that any more. This bit's right over there! (Stretches for the piece. BOBROV enters the room).

BOBROV Granny! Is that you clambering about under the table?

GRANNY Yes, okay, okay. What do you want?

BOBROV I just came to ask you: you wouldn't happen to have a chest of tea?

GRANNY Come on then, give me a hand up from under the table.

BOBROV What have you done, dropped something? Oh, you've broken the vase!

GRANNY (Mimicking him) You've broken the vase!

(BOBROV helps GRANNY up. But as soon as he lets go of her, GRANNY sits back down on the floor).

BOBROV Oh, you're down again!

GRANNY Down, so now what?

BOBROV Let me help you up (Pulls GRANNY up).

GRANNY The cards were going badly. I tried this and that... But don't pull me by the arms, get hold of me under the armpits. All I got, you know, was king after king. I need a five and all the kings keep turning up.

BOBROV lets go of GRANNY and GRANNY again sprawls on the floor.

GRANNY Akh!

BOBROV Oh, Lord! You're down again.

GRANNY What are you on about: down, down! What are you after, anyway?

BOBROV I came to ask if you've a chest of tea.

GRANNY I know that. You've already told me. I don't like listening to the same tale twenty times. The thing is: akh, I'm down again! and a chest of tea. Well, what are you looking at! Get me up, I'm telling you.

BOBROV (Pulling GRANNY up) I'll just, excuse me, put you in the armchair.

GRANNY You'd do better to prattle on a bit less and pull me up in a proper fashion. I meant to tell you, and it almost slipped my mind: you know, that door in my bedroom isn't shutting properly again. No doubt you messed the whole thing up.

BOBROV No, I put a staple on with fillister-head screws.

GRANNY Do you think I know anything about staples and fillister heads? I don't care about all that. I just want the door to shut.

BOBROV It doesn't shut properly because the fillister heads won't stay in the woodwork.

GRANNY That'll do, that'll do. That's your business. I just need to... Akh! (She again sprawls on the floor).

BOBROV Oh, Lord!

GRANNY Have you decided to fling me to the floor deliberately? Decided to have a bit of fun? Oh you useless devil! You're just a useless devil and you might as well clear off!

BOBROV No, Granny, 'onest injun, I just meant to put you in the armchair.

GRANNY Did you hear what I said? I told you to clear out! So why aren't you going? Well, why aren't you going? Do you hear? Clear off out of it! Well? Bugger off! (exits)

BOBROV)

GRANNY Off! Go on! Away! Bugger off! Talk about a reprobate! (Gets up from the floor and sits in the armchair). And his wife is simply an indecent madam. The madam walks about absolutely starkers and doesn't bat an eyelid, even in front of me, an old woman. She covers her indecent patch with the palm of her hand, and that's the way she walks around. And then she touches bread with that hand at lunchtime. It's simply revolting to watch. She thinks that if she's young and pretty, then she can do anything she likes. And as for herself, the trollop, she never washes herself properly just where she should do. I, she says, like a whiff of woman to come from a woman! And as for me, as soon as I see her coming, I'm straight into the bathroom with the eau de Cologne to my nose. Perhaps it may be nice for men, but as for me, you can spare me that. The shameless hussy! She goes around naked without the slightest embarrassment. And when she sits down she doesn't even keep her legs together properly, so that everything's on show. And -- there, she's well just always wet. She's leaking like that all the time. If you tell her she should go and wash herself, she will say you shouldn't wash there too often and she'll take a handkerchief and just wipe herself. And you're lucky if it's a handkerchief, because just with her hand she smears it all over the place. I never give her my hand, as there's perpetually an indecent smell from her hands. And her breasts are indecent. It's true, they are very fine and bouncy, but they are so big that, in my opinion, they're simply indecent. That's the wife that Foma found for himself! How she ever got round him is beyond me.

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I Love Sensual Women

I love sensual women and not passionate ones. A passionate woman closes her eyes, moans and shouts and the enjoyment of a passionate woman is blind.

A passionate woman writhes about, grabs you with her hands without looking where, clasps you, kisses you, even bites you and hurries to reach her climax as soon as she can. She has no time to display her sexual organs, no time to examine, touch with the hand and kiss your sexual organs, she is in such a hurry to slake her passion. Having slaked her passion, the passionate woman will fall asleep. The sexual organs of a passionate woman are dry. A passionate woman is always in some way or another mannish.

The sensual woman is always feminine.
Her contours are rounded and abundant.

The sensual woman rarely reaches a blind passion. She savours sexual enjoyment. The sensual woman is always a woman and even in an unaroused state her sexual organs are moist. She has to wear a bandage on her sexual organs, so as not to soak them with moisture.

When she takes the bandage off in the evening, the bandage is so wet that it can be squeezed out.

Thanks to such an abundance of juices, the sexual organs of a sensual woman give off a slight, pleasant smell which increases strongly when the sensual woman is aroused. Then the juice from her sexual organs is secreted in a syrupy stream.

A sensual woman likes you to examine her sexual organs.

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Petrov and Kamarov

Petrov: Hey, Kamarov, old chap!
Let's catch a few of these gnats!
Kamarov: No, I'm not yet up to that;
We'd do better to catch some tom-cats!

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Sleep Teases A Man

Markov took off his boots and, with a deep breath, lay down on the divan. He felt sleepy but, as soon as he closed his eyes, the desire for sleep immediately passed. Markov opened his eyes and stretched out his hand for a book. But sleep again came over him and, not even reaching the book, Markov lay down and once more closed his eyes. But, the moment his eyes closed, sleepiness left him again and his consciousness became so clear that Markov could solve in his head algebraical problems involving equations with two unknown quantities.

Markov was tormented for quite some time, not knowing what to do: should he sleep or should he liven himself up? Finally, exhausted and thoroughly sick of himself and his room, Markov put on his coat and hat, took his walking cane and went out on to the street. The fresh breeze calmed Markov down, he became rather more at one with himself and felt like going back home to his room.

Upon going into his room, he experienced an agreeable bodily fatigue and felt like sleeping. But, as soon as he lay down on the divan and closed his eyes, his sleepiness instantly evaporated.

In a fury, Markov jumped up from his divan and, hatless and coatless, raced off in the direction of Tavrichesky Park.

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The Hunters

Six men went hunting, but only four returned.

Two, in fact, hadn't returned.

Oknov, Kozlov, Stryuchkov and Motylkov returned home safely, but Shirokov and Kablukov perished on the hunt.

OKNOV went around very upset the whole day and wouldn't even talk to anyone. Kozlov walked round behind Oknov with great persistence, badgering him with all manner of questions, by which means he drove Oknov to a point of extreme irritation.

KOZLOV: Do you fancy a smoke?

OKNOV: No!

KOZLOV: Do you want me to bring you that thing over there?

OKNOV: No!

KOZLOV: Perhaps you'd like me to tell you a funny story?

OKNOV: No!

KOZLOV: Well, do you want a drink? I've got some tea and cognac here.

OKNOV: Not content with just having smashed you over the skull with this stone, I'll rip your leg off as well.

STRYUCHKOV AND MOTYLKOV: What are you doing? What are you doing?

KOZLOV: Pick me up from the ground.

MOTYLKOV: Don't you get excited now, that wound will heal.

KOZLOV: And where's Oknov?

OKNOV (Ripping off Kozlov's leg): I'm right here.

KOZLOV: Oh, my gosh golly!

STRYUCHKOV AND MOTYLKOV: Seems he's ripped the leg off him as well!

OKNOV: Ripped it off and thrown it over there!

STRYUCHKOV: That's atrocious!

OKNOV: Wha-at?

STRYUCHKOV: ...ocious...

OKNOV: What's that?

STRYUCHKOV: N-n... n-n... nothing.

KOZLOV: How am I going to get home?

MOTYLKOV: Don't worry, we'll fix a wooden leg on you!

STRYUCHKOV: What are you like at standing on one leg?

KOZLOV: I can do it, but I'm no great shakes at it.

STRYUCHKOV: That's all right, we'll support you.

OKNOV: Let me get at him.

STRYUCHKOV: Hey, no. You'd better go away!

OKNOV: No, let me through! ... Let me!... Let... That's what I wanted to do.

STRYUCHKOV AND MOTYLKOV: How horrible!

OKNOV: Ha, ha, ha.

MOTYLKOV: But where is Kozlov?

STRYUCHKOV: He's crawled off into the bushes!

MOTYLKOV: Kozlov, are you there?

KOZLOV: Glug-glug!

MOTYLKOV: Now look what's become of him!

STRYUCHKOV: What's to be done with him?

MOTYLKOV: Well, we can't do a thing with him, now. In my view, we'd better just strangle him. Kozlov! Hey, Kozlov! Can you hear me?

KOZLOV: O-oh, yes, but only just barely.

MOTYLKOV: Don't you upset yourself mate, we're just going to strangle you. Wait a minute, now! . . . There, there, there we are.

STRYUCHKOV: Here we are, and again! That's the way, yes! Come on, a bit more . . . Now, that's that!

MOTYLKOV: That's that, then!
OKNOV: Lord have mercy on him!

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The Red-Haired Man

There was a red-haired man who had no eyes or ears.
Neither did he have any hair, so he was called red-haired theoretically.

He couldn't speak, since he didn't have a mouth. Neither did he have a nose.
He didn't even have any arms or legs. He had no stomach and he had no back and he
had no spine and he had no innards whatsoever. He had nothing at all!

Therefore there's no knowing whom we are even talking about.
In fact it's better that we don't say any more about him.

Daniil Ivanovich Kharms