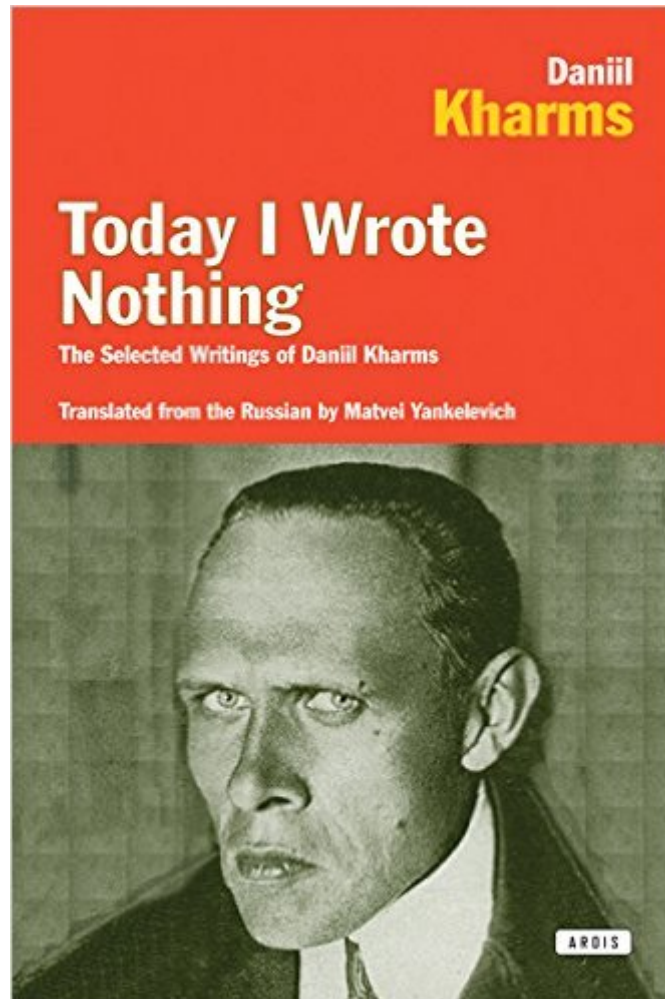


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Today I Wrote Nothing: The Selected Writings Of Daniil Kharms



Synopsis

As featured in The New Yorker, Harper's, and The New York Times Book Review. Daniil Kharms has long been heralded as one of the most iconoclastic writers of the Soviet era, but the full breadth of his achievement is only in recent years, following the opening of Kharms's archives, being recognized internationally. Thanks to the efforts of translator and poet Matvei Yankelevich, English language readers now have a comprehensive collection of the prose and poetry that secured Kharms's literary reputation. A reputation that grew in Russia even as the Soviet establishment worked to suppress it. Both a major contribution for American scholars and students of Russian literature and an exciting discovery for fans of contemporary writers as eclectic as George Saunders, John Ashbery, and Martin McDonagh, *Today I Wrote Nothing: The Selected Writing of Daniil Kharms* is an invaluable collection for readers of innovative writing everywhere. Translated from the Russian by Matvei Yankelevich

Book Information

Paperback: 288 pages

Publisher: The Overlook Press; Reprint edition (June 30, 2009)

Language: English

ISBN-10: 159020042X

ISBN-13: 978-1590200421

Product Dimensions: 5.4 x 0.9 x 8 inches

Shipping Weight: 11.2 ounces (View shipping rates and policies)

Average Customer Review: 4.7 out of 5 stars [See all reviews](#) (11 customer reviews)

Best Sellers Rank: #256,240 in Books (See Top 100 in Books) #87 in [Books > Literature & Fiction > History & Criticism > Regional & Cultural > Russian](#) #2132 in [Books > Literature & Fiction > Short Stories & Anthologies > Anthologies](#) #3832 in [Books > Literature & Fiction > Short Stories & Anthologies > Short Stories](#)

Customer Reviews

I have read Kharms both in English and Russian quite a few times since my dad (a journalist and "ghost" writer in the USSR) introduced me to Kharms in mid 80s (after he had reportedly "snagged" the last copy of the "Incidences" from some street bookseller in Perestroika-era Moscow). Each time I read Kharms I'd browse through any given compilation of "selected writings" and read at random. In later years I'd either re-read the stories I had liked or, on the contrary, choose only to read the ones I had skipped on previously. But today I read everything - the entire "Today I Wrote Nothing"

from cover to cover. Two reasons: this particular collection of Kharms' writings is skillfully organized: the incidences/old woman/blue notebook/other writings sequence is an excellent warm-up. Each pattern-interrupting-absurdly shocking-non sequitur-laden "incidence" - like a notorious Moscow pothole - violently shakes up the mind and loosens the inflexibly default of expectations of sense and logic. These "incidences" quickly warm up the reading mind for the absurdly cold scenery of the "Old Woman" novella. Just as you begin to tire of the "Old Woman" you are thrown into the paradoxical vortex of the 29 vignettes from the "Blue Notebook." And after that - with the mind cracked open for possibilities - you sail off into the greater philosophical, esoteric, metaphysical depths of "other writings" where you after such a deep dive as "On Phenomena and Existences," with compiler's astute guidance, you are helped to resurface to the by-now-familiar "shallows" of the absurd. The sequence of this presentation is no small achievement.

Picture a tall, thin man with blazing light blue eyes parading down the main pedestrian boulevard in a city wearing a tweed suit, Sherlock Holmes double-brimmed hat and smoking a curved ivory Sherlock Holmes pipe, putting himself on display as if he were a perfectly balanced combination of Oscar Wilde and that famous London detective. And, as the crowning moment of his performance, the tall, thin man halts in the middle of a gaping crowd of onlookers and theatrically lies down in the middle of the sidewalk, and then, after several minutes, nonchalantly rises to his feet and continues his stroll. Quite a sight; quite a man. Are we among artists in gay-Paris in 1868 or among Greenwich Village hippies in 1968? No, indeed, we are not -- we are in a totalitarian state, more specifically, we are in 1931 Stalinist Russia. Meet our one-of-a-kind author, Daniil Kharms. Considering the communist ideal of every healthy man and women seeing themselves as a productive, hard-working citizen of the state, taking their place elbow to elbow with their comrades in the field or the factory, it is something of a miracle Daniil Kharms's short life (the state locked him in a mental institution at age 38 where he died of starvation) wasn't even shorter. So, how, you may ask, does this one-of-a-kind writer tell a story? Before making more general comments on several stories and plays, here is a story entitled 'Events' in its entirety:----- One day Orlov stuffed himself with mashed peas and died. Krylov, having heard the news, also died. And Spiridonov died regardless. And Spiridonov's wife fell from the cupboard and also died. And the Spiridonov children drowned in a pond. Spiridonov's grandmother took to the bottle and wandered the highways.

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