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The Silencing of Children's Literature

The Case of Daniil Kharms and the Little Old Lady

*Abstract: The silencing of childhood continues in discrimination against children's literature today. Yet children's literature should be taken seriously not only for its own sake. Children's literature can and should illuminate our understanding of literature for adults, while literature for adults can and should illuminate our understanding of children's literature. Failure to recognize this mutualism risks silencing children's literature and ghettoizing children's literature research while impoverishing literary studies. To show the value of examining literature for all audiences together, this article examines the example of silenced Russian writer Daniil (Yuvachev) Kharms, a late avant-garde and absurdist writer who wrote in the 1920s and 1930s before his premature death as a result of repression by the Soviet regime. Like that of others who wrote for both adults and children, Kharms's example illustrates the arbitrariness of subdividing the literary production of one individual into two mutually exclusive categories. In the case of Daniil Kharms, and others, literary scholarship benefits from examining an author's oeuvre collectively and disregarding the bifurcation of audiences of which literary studies may at times be guilty. To show this, the present article focuses on the example of the little old lady, a marginal figure who recurs in Kharms's writings regardless of audience, including in the children's picturebook *O tom kak starushka chernila pokupala* (*How a Little Old Lady Went Shopping for Ink*, 1929) and the absurdist novella for adults "*Starukha*" (*The Old Woman*, 1939). Examining the old lady as an anachronistic wizened old muse and embodiment of writing itself across these boundaries in Kharms's authorship illuminates the theme of silencing across both realms of the author's oeuvre, since this figure, who stands for Kharms's silenced authorship itself, embodies Kharms's own marginalization and censorship. Ultimately this article argues for the reunification of divided audiences to repair the fissure dividing the fields of children's literature and literature for adults.*

Keywords: Daniil Kharms, Soviet, silencing, muse, censorship, old woman, marginalization

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If it once used to be said that children should be seen and not heard, then this silencing of childhood continues today in discrimination towards the infantile, including children's literature. Yet I argue that children's literature should be taken seriously not only for its own sake. Children's literature can and should illuminate our understanding of literature for adults, while literature for adults can and should illuminate our understanding of children's literature. Failure to recognize this mutualism risks doing a disservice to both by silencing this subject of study and perpetuating the ghettoization of children's literature research, while impoverishing literary studies. To illustrate the value of examining children's literature and literature for adults together, this article highlights the example of silenced Russian writer Daniil (Yuvachev) Kharms (1905–1942), a late avant-garde and absurdist writer who wrote in the 1920s and 1930s before his premature death as a result of repression by the Soviet regime. Like many other writers, Kharms wrote for both adults and children. Indeed, examples like his illustrate the arbitrariness of subdividing the literary production of one individual into two mutually exclusive categories. This article argues that in the case of Daniil Kharms, and others, literary scholarship can benefit from examining an author's *oeuvre* collectively and disregarding the bifurcation of audiences of which literary studies, in general, and children's literature research, in specific, may at times be guilty.

To demonstrate the value of disregarding an audience-defined boundary in an author's literary production, this article will focus on the example of the little old lady. This marginal figure recurs in Kharms's writings regardless of audience, including in the children's picturebook *O tom kak starushka chernila pokupala* (How a Little Old Lady Went Shopping for Ink), published in 1929, and in the absurdist novella for adults "Starukha" (The Old Woman) written in 1939.¹ This article will argue that examining this figure of the little old lady,² who can be read as a parodistically wizened old muse and embodiment of writing itself, across these boundaries in Kharms's authorship proves more illuminating to the theme of silencing across both realms of the beleaguered author's *oeuvre*. Moreover, the present article will show how this figure, who perhaps stands for Kharms's silenced authorship itself, also serves as a silent embodiment of the author's own experience of marginalization and censorship.

Daniil Kharms and Children's Literature in Soviet Russia

During the early career of Daniil Kharms, who is arguably a late representative of the early twentieth century Russian avant-garde

(Jaccard, *Daniil Harms et la fin de l'avant-garde russe*; Jaccard, *Daniil Kharms i konets russkogo avangarda*; Roberts; Weld, *Voiceless Vanguard*), increasing ideological control and censorship in literature quickly eliminated the possibility for him and his fellow members of OBERIU (Association for Real Art) to publish their writing for adults (Hellman 325). Though some might argue that Kharms, like other writers laboring under Soviet censorship, wrote for children in some part out of necessity (Glotser, "Emu bylo sovsem" 17), his skills and achievements in writing for children cannot be impugned and he remains a popular writer today. As he himself attested during his secret police interrogation, despite his material need to write, his writing for children was of the highest quality (Mal'skii 175, qtd. in Morse). At the same time, as children's literature scholarship has shown, audiences cannot be categorically separated, since writings for children can address audiences of children and adults at the same time (Shavit; Wall; Beckett, *Transcending Boundaries*). Indeed, Kharms too wrote for a mixed audience, as Larissa Klein Tumanov shows in her exploration of dual audience in Soviet literature for children by Kharms and others (Tumanov). Moreover, although children's literature offered for Kharms, as it did for many other prominent writers, artists, and intellectuals, a vital refuge or sanctuary that helped him to survive and enabled these writings (Hellman), one can also question the degree of artistic freedom it offered (Balina), as Kharms's own fate shows.

In the end, as a result of his writings, Kharms was imprisoned, after possibly feigning insanity, in a psychiatric ward where he died in 1942. The talented and original writer thus suffered the silencing of multiple stages of censorship, as well as arrests and imprisonment, before being conclusively silenced by death under tragic circumstances. This article will argue that Kharms's ongoing experience of being silenced during his lifetime finds reflection in the writings he was able to produce, and in some cases even publish, under such adverse conditions. Even such an iconic Kharmsian prose piece for adults as "Golubaia tetrad' no. 10" (Blue Notebook No. 10), in which a supposedly red-haired man who lacks red hair is deconstructed to the point that it becomes "не понятно, о ком идет речь" ("incomprehensible about whom we are talking"), includes deeply charged symbolic language around silencing: "Говорить он не мог, так как у него небью рта" ("He couldn't speak, since he did not have a mouth," Kharms, "Golubaia tetrad' no. 10" 353). Silencing is thus a potent force both around and within Kharms's authorship.

The real and symbolic influence of censorship, then, necessitated the division and diversion of Kharms's authorship toward an

audience of children. Thus, even as it granted him his only form of publication (and a minimal livelihood), children's literature itself represented a kind of silencing for Kharm's. This fact may go some way toward explaining the antipathy toward children Kharm's expresses in his writings for adults, including in the first pages of "Starukha," where the narrator speaks of the offensive shouting of urchins and dreams up forms of execution for them:

С улицы слышен противный крик мальчишек. Я лежу и выдумываю им казнь. Больше всего мне нравится напустить на них столбняк, чтобы они вдруг перестали двигаться. Родители растаскивают их по домам. Они лежат в своих кроватках и не могут даже есть, потому что у них не открываются рты. Их питают искусственно. Через неделю столбняк проходит, но дети так слабы, что ещё целый месяц должны пролежать в постелях. Потом они начинают постепенно выздоравливать, но я напускаю на них второй столбняк, и они все околевают.

From the street the offensive shouting of urchins is audible. I lie there dreaming up forms of execution for them. More than anything I'd like to infect them all with tetanus so they suddenly stop moving. Their parents can drag them home. They will lie in their little beds unable even to eat, because they can't open their mouths. They will be fed artificially. After a week the tetanus will improve, but the children will be so weak that they will have to lie in their beds for a whole month. Then they will start to recover gradually but I will infect them with a second dose of tetanus and they will all croak. (Kharm's, "Starukha" 399)

Such shocking statements are commonplace in writings Kharm's did not intend for children, even as he at the same time very successfully reached an audience of children in the writings he intended for them, a paradox on which his widow Marina Durnovo later commented:

Всю жизнь он не мог терпеть детей. Его нелюбовь к детям доходила до ненависти. [...] Но вот парадокс: ненавидя их, он имел у них сумасшедший успех. [...] при всей ненависти к детям, он, как считают многие, прекрасно писал для детей, это действительно парадокс.

All his life he couldn't stand children. His dislike of children went as far as hatred. [...] But what a paradox: while hating them, he had extraordinary success with them. [...] despite all his hatred for children, he, in the opinion of many, wrote for children marvelously; it's truly a paradox. (Glotser, "Marina Durnovo" 472)

Interestingly, in the above example, the narrator himself seeks to censor and silence, through the strategic use of “lockjaw,” the offensively shouting children – or perhaps his own audience of children, for whom he writes under undeniably regrettable and restrictive circumstances. Indeed, his writings are rife with violence, just as his own life ran its course in a time of revolutionary and post-revolutionary brutality and the worst of the murderous purges under Stalin.

At the same time, it is worth noting that readers and critics also contribute to the silencing or even a kind of censoring of Kharms’s writings by not considering all of his writings together, or by sequestering and thereby silencing one aspect of his writings at the expense of another. Truly, all the writings he was able to produce under such adverse circumstances merit close attention. Furthermore, as Kharms’s example shows, the question of audience may be an entirely arbitrary or deceptive one, since he was not necessarily free to determine what audience he actually was able to reach and he may be writing for a dual audience of children and adults. Moreover, Kharms’s writings show distinct commonalities regardless of apparent audience. For example, infantile features, such as babble, neologisms, and childish word play, abound in his poetry for adults (Weld, “Poeziia Kharmsa”), while themes pertinent or comprehensible only to adults also prevail in his writings for children (Weld, *Voiceless Vanguard*). Although such common features appear across the authorship of Kharms, as an exemplary case, within the repressive Soviet context of the early twentieth century, it is also true in the case of children’s literature in general, if for different reasons. By refusing to be complicit in any act of silencing and choosing not to arbitrarily sequester some forms of writing in order to instead reunite an author’s entire *oeuvre* regardless of audience, literary scholarship can give voice to silenced writers and writing. An approach that goes beyond simplistic categorization by acknowledging a diverse range of audiences thus has the potential to un-silence writings for children, as it were, to give children’s literature its just place in literary studies on the world stage.

The Adventures of the Little Old Lady through the Glass Ceiling

To illustrate this point, I will argue that the recurrent figure of the little old lady stands as a symbolic representation of the dynamics of silencing in ways that cross over between Kharms’s writings for adults and children, thereby showing how productive it can be to read across these artificial boundaries. In this way the Little Old Lady

may be allowed to venture, like Alice, through the looking glass, or glass ceiling, that at times has created an impenetrable and hierarchical distinction between children's literature and literature for adults.

As stated earlier, the figure of the old lady recurs in Kharm's authorship. She appears in his 1929 picturebook *O tom kak starushka chernila pokupala*, in brief prose pieces for children and for adults such as "Vyvalivaiushchiesia starukhi" (Tumbling Out Old Women) from 1936–1937, where a series of old women fall out of a window, and in his most celebrated work, the absurdist novella "Starukha," which was written in 1939. Although I have written about *O tom kak starushka chernila pokupala* before (Pankenier; Weld, *Voiceless Vanguard*; Weld, *An Ecology*), in this article I wish to consider this story and its symbolic system within the context of Kharm's writings for adults to show how his writings for children and adults may prove mutually informative for the act of interpretation.

Examination of the metatextual play in the children's story *O tom kak starushka chernila pokupala* highlights how the old lady represents the author's quest for the means to write, or for publication and self-realization under conditions of hardship, in ways that also can illuminate Kharm's writings for adults. The picturebook *O tom kak starushka chernila pokupala* offers a parable about how an old lady, who also in some sense embodies a lost and confused muse, finally finds ink, or a creative outlet. The story thus gives voice to her silent experience, through children's literature publishing in Leningrad, just as the book's censored author also found a creative outlet in publishing for children. Indeed, like the little old lady, Kharm was also marginalized and anachronistic, in the sense that his adherence to avant-garde aesthetics and his position as a representative of "the last Soviet avant-garde" (cf. Roberts) made him unpublishable. His anticipation of later literary absurdism in literature (cf. Gibian; Kobrinskii; Komaromi; Müller; Shukman) also rendered him out of place in an inimical Soviet context that increasingly demanded only ideologically correct writings and socialist realist aesthetics. From this perspective, the theme of inscrutable time emblemized by the clock without hands at the opening of the novella "Starukha" speaks also of Kharm's anachronistic existence, which ultimately eliminates even him. As such examples show, a broader comparative focus on Kharm's authorship, from within his writings for children, thus also opens up new perspectives on Kharm's work for adults.

Indeed, when placed alongside the children's book, the old woman in Kharm's perplexing and nightmarish absurdist prose piece "Starukha" may also be seen to serve, if far more subtly, as a metaphor for writing as well. This equation, for example, explains the

presence of the old lady at the beginning of the piece, which literally coincides with the start of the narrative and in some sense, metatextually, with the act of writing by the author.

На дворе стоит старуха и держит в руках стенные часы. Я прохожу мимо старухи, останавливаюсь и спрашиваю её: «Который час?»
-- Посмотрите,-- говорит мне старуха.
Я смотрю и вижу, что на часах нет стрелок.
-- Тут нет стрелок,-- говорю я.
Старуха смотрит на циферблат и говорит мне:
-- Сейчас без четверти три.
-- Ах так. Большое спасибо,-- говорю я и ухожу.
Старуха кричит мне что-то вслед, но я иду не оглядываясь.

In the courtyard an old woman stands and holds a clock in her hands.
I walk past the old woman and stop to ask her: "What time is it?"
"Take a look," the old woman says to me.
I look and see that there are no hands on the clock.
"It has no hands," I say.
The old woman looks at the clock face and tells me:
"It's now a quarter to three."
"Oh, okay. Thanks a lot," I say and walk away.
The old woman shouts something after me, but I walk on without looking back. (Kharms, "Starukha" 398)

In a sense, the old woman is herself the living gnomon of the clock face with no hands, and enacts the start of (narrative) time, while the narrator (and author) in some symbolic sense prove hopelessly anachronistic and out of sync. (Narrative) time begins and ends with the old woman, as we shall see. She thus embodies writing itself, as a latter-day muse, although she is unconventional in her bodily form, perhaps, when compared to the Classical past. Yet, her aged shape may be a more fitting and more acutely expressive embodiment of the context of deprivation and austerity in which Kharms is writing in the late 1930s – during the peak of censorship, repression, and the purges of artists, writers, and intellectuals like him. She is an almost conclusively silenced, withered, starved, and moribund muse. Like Kharms's narratives themselves, she does not comply with expectations or logic.

Intertextuality and Crosstextuality

The intertextual richness of "Starukha," as related to the figure of the old woman, stretches into national and international dimen-

sions, as scholars have noted (Carrick; Chances; Cassedy; Kukulin; Pecherskaia; Savel'eva). Nationally it provokes comparison most obviously with the works of Russian writer Fyodor Dostoevsky (Cassedy), particularly *Prestuplenie i nakazanie* (*Crime and Punishment*, 1886), where another old woman is also a victim of violence and a symbolically haunting corpse for the perpetrator Raskolnikov. It also begs comparison with Dostoevsky's *Brat'ia Karamazovy* (*The Brothers Karamazov*, 1879–1880), where the smell of death from a saintly body within a hagiographic signification system finds parodic reflection in the smell of the old woman's dead corpse that pervades in Kharm's novella. Kharm's apparently simple text also engages in transnational intertextuality, as its epigraph from Norwegian writer Knut Hamsun's *Mysterier* (*Mysteries*, 1892) clearly and obviously indicates. Hamsun was one of Kharm's favorite writers and the two writers share many commonalities, despite their differences and unique styles. Indeed, "Starukha" engages with Hamsun's authorship, most particularly with *Sult* (*Hunger*, 1890), which similarly treats a hungry writer and his apparently random actions, failed attempts to find inspiration and write, and abortive romantic encounters in an urban setting.

In addition to such national and transnational intertextuality, to use Julia Kristeva's by now commonplace term (Kristeva 6), I would like to propose what one might call a "crosstextual" reading of Kharm's old women. If children's literature scholarship has rightly noted the phenomenon of crossover literature, which crosses over from an audience of adults to an audience of children or vice versa (Beckett, *Crossover Fiction*; Falconer), and the concept of crosswriting, which incorporates young and adult voices (Knoepflmacher and Myers), then I wish to propose that we might also consider this interaction of texts across audience categories as a phenomenon worthy of consideration. In this sense, "crosstextuality," a pithier portmanteau of "crossover intertextuality," signifies the influence and interactions of texts across boundaries defined by age. Although a term like "cross-textual" may occur on occasion as a concept in other fields, such as religious studies, this article proposes a new usage specific to literary studies which refers to intertextuality across texts intended for different audiences.

Crosstextuality may occur within one author's *oeuvre*, such as when the signification systems in works by Kharm for children and adults may prove mutually informative, or across authors, such as when Lewis Carroll's *Alice's Adventures in Wonderland* (1865) may inform Kharm's writings for adults. Indeed, Lewis Carroll was

another of the Anglophile Daniil Kharms's favorite writers and, though the signs of influence are more evident in his works for children, the comparison to his works for adults proves equally illuminating, since the nonsensical Wonderland atmosphere also pervades Kharms's works for adults, if in its more sinister variant. Crosstextual comparison of these two texts through a Carrollesque lens shows that in Kharms's writings for adults, it is the narrator who is trapped in a nonsensical nightmare haunted by the dead old lady, while in his writings for children, it is the old lady who is trapped in a strange and dream-like Wonderland of modernity. The children's story offers an audience of children an amusing defamiliarized view of the present without shaking the child reader's grasp of reality, while the novella for adults aims to disturb and ends inconclusively. In other words, taking a crosstextual approach to the writings of authors who write for audiences of adults and children or to the comparison of texts across the arbitrary distinction drawn between children's literature and literature for adults, may help to create an equal dialogue between these, highlighting both provocative similarities and illuminating differences. As a pioneering example of such crosstextual work, one might consider Juliet Dusinberre's *Alice to the Lighthouse: Children's Books and Radical Experiments in Art* (1999), which rightly notes the influence of Carroll's text for children on modernist writers for adults. Through the practice of such cross-textual scholarship, children's literature research can emerge as a fully recognized dialogic partner in literary studies, rather than as a marked and inferior subdivision of the unmarked phenomenon of "literature." Although the term crosstextuality, which is intended to articulate the strategic crossing of the boundaries between different audiences, on the other hand might be seen to deepen the division between categories defined by audience, this risk may be worth taking if the term helps to articulate and thereby encourage a necessary and heretofore underutilized scholarly maneuver.

(Meta)Textuality and Kharms's Old Ladies

The act of reading these two texts by Kharms together crosstextually, or irrespective of audience, in order to examine the role of the old ladies common to both texts, reveals a similar textual drama taking place between the writer and the page. This theme also proves reminiscent of Hamsun's work, particularly *Sult*, which describes the travails of a starving writer, as well as of the metatextual ending of *Alice's Adventures in Wonderland*. After all, the entire narrative of

Alice's Adventures in Wonderland is framed by her sleepily daydreaming while reading at the beginning of the book and, at the end of the book, by the animate playing cards of Wonderland that become blowing leaves and also resemble turning pages, as Alice awakens and the story ends. A similar textual and metatextual perspective emerges in *O tom kak starushka chernila pokupala*, in the sense that it tells the story of a writer who struggles with writer's block and grasps at inspiration in the form of the little old lady who haphazardly enters into the headquarters of children's book publishing.

This metatextual level is underscored by Eduard Krimmer's accompanying illustration, which depicts the author (resembling Kharms) facing his editor (resembling his actual magazine editor Samuil Marshak). The inclusion of an editor also embodies within the text an editorial influence, and perhaps even a censoring one in some symbolic sense. Interestingly, the opening of Bulgakov's *Master i Margarita* (*The Master and Margarita*, 1967), which was also written by a heavily censored and silenced writer who knew his novel could not see the light of day in his lifetime, also includes such a scene of a writer and an editor in the opening scene and first chapter of the novel. Perhaps, in these kinds of examples, the editor in the book also silently stands in for the censor of the book.

The would-be writer in "Starukha" also grapples with writer's block, his failure to put words on the page, and the fickle nature of literary inspiration. He even lies to his friend Sakerdon Mikhailovich about how much writing he has done, while the self-evident reality in the text, apparent to the reader, proves very different from his intentions, aspirations, and claims. Yet, at the same time, the narrative itself manages to make a whole lot out of nothing in a typically Kharmsian style (which in this sense also resembles that of Hamsun's *Sult*).

-- Ведь я последний раз ел вчера, с вами в подвальчике, и с тех пор ничего ещё не ел,-- сказал я.

-- Да, да, да,-- сказал Сакердон Михайлович.

-- Я всё время писал,-- сказал я.

-- Чёрт побери! -- утрированно вскричал Сакердон Михайлович.

-- Приятно видеть перед собой гения.

-- Ещё бы! -- сказал я.

-- Много поди наваляли? -- спросил Сакердон Михайлович.

-- Да,-- сказал я.-- Исписал пропасть бумаги.

"The last time I ate was yesterday, with you in the cellar bar, and since then I haven't eaten anything," I said.

"Yeah, yeah, yeah," said Sakerdon Mikhailovich.
"I was writing the whole time," I said.
"The devil take you!" exclaimed Sakerdon Mikhailovich exaggeratedly. "It's a pleasure to see a genius before you."
"I should think so!" I said.
"Did you get a lot done?" asked Sakerdon Mikhailovich.
"Yes," said I. "I got through a mass of paper." (Kharms, "Starukha" 412)

Both texts, like Hamsun's, thus dramatize the textual struggles of writer and the page, both on the pages and through means of the pages, as it were. The only level on which the narrator's claims are true, however, are on a metatextual level, since the story by now has filled a lot of pages. Interestingly, Kharms's writings for adults often subvert the expectation they create and vacate meaning, in some sense, while Kharms's writings for children do the opposite by revealing a sudden fullness of meaning in a kind of final epiphany.

The unspoken presence in these writings is censorship, which silences, erases, and eradicates writing and perhaps drives away inspiration. Or at least alters inspiration and the muse beyond all recognition. Instead of the nubile and fecund womanly muse of past poets, these beleaguered and silenced Kharmsian writers, who populate his prose for children and adults, receive only fleeting and bizarre visitations from an aged, wizened, and moribund muse instead. Yet this parodistic muse's aspect is considerably darker for an audience of adults.

Crosstextually examining the old lady as muse thus makes an all the more powerful statement about writing under duress and under such conditions of censorship, which holds across Kharms's writings for all audiences. In all cases, the old lady as muse offers a uniquely defamiliarized view on the world that the writer makes use of in telling an unexpected story. It seems that, for Kharms, the old lady proves a more fitting muse for absurdly repressive times such as these and for the anachronistic artist trying to survive under circumstances that defy all logic. The wizened old lady muse thus also stands as a tellingly mute embodiment, if not exactly mouthpiece, for marginalized, silenced, and struggling figures such as Kharms – both Kharms the children's writer who struggles to publish and, perhaps even more so, Kharms the would-be writer for adults who cannot publish at all. Considering that the writers in both texts, as representatives of Kharms himself, are hamstrung and silenced, though in the prime of life and height of their creative powers, might not their muse also be marginalized, senile, vulnerable, and weak? In

this sense, the muse's aged body and physical aspect also bear witness to and offer a silent protest of its own against the onslaughts of the times, which leave the writer prematurely aged by his privations, and even drive the writer, like his muse, to the grave.

Structurally, we might observe that both texts, though different in genre, form, and audience, employ a structure that begins and ends with the presence of the old lady, as I would argue, "muse." Both start by presenting the old lady and both end with her departure or the resolution of the drama in which her misplaced body is intimately involved. In this sense, both stories depend very much on her, as an embodiment of the oddly abortive or circular story itself. In "Starukha," the misplacing of the corpse of the old woman immediately precedes the abrupt and self-conscious end of the story: "На этом я временно заканчиваю свою рукопись, считая, что она и так уже достаточно затянулась" ("At this point I temporarily conclude my manuscript, considering that it is already drawn out enough as it is," Kharms, "Starukha" 430). Similarly, in *O tom kak starushka chernila pokupala*, the old lady's highly symbolic quest for ink is resolved when the writer with writer's block she encounters at the end of the story trades her story and defamiliarized view of the world for the ink she needs to write: "Расскажите нам о том, как вы чернила покупали, а мы про вас книжку напишем и чернил дадим. Старушка подумала и согласилась. И вот тонкий человек написал книжку: О том, как старушка чернила покупала" ("Tell us about how you went shopping for ink, and we will write a story about you and give you ink. The old lady thought about it and agreed. And so the thin man wrote the book: *How An Old Lady Went Shopping for Ink*," Kharms *O tom kak* 27). If the children's book thus offers the story of its own beginning at its end, then the novella for adults does something similar in the sense that it becomes clear at the end that, once the old woman's corpse has disappeared (thereby eliminating the absurd storyline about the need to get rid of this seemingly incriminating dead body which itself appeared out of nowhere), there is no story any longer. This crosstextual structural similarity underscores both texts' shared dependence on the old lady as muse and embodiment of the story. Yet, the tone of the two tales is very different, since the clever metatextual ending of the children's story offers a satisfying and optimistic end, if circular in its logic. The novella for adults, however, conclusively thwarts the reader and its own narrative, in a typically Kharmsian fashion, by suddenly negating itself rather than offering any satisfying conclusion. Yet it too observes a kind of circularity surrounding the old lady and the lack

of any logic or resolution. In this sense, both texts structurally may be seen to resemble a circular prison in which the writer or narrative prove to be trapped. Similarly, the moribund muse, whose senility and obsolescence signal that she is headed toward death and oblivion, also in some sense seems to express of the plight of the silenced writer who knowingly writes from within walls closing around him to form his own coffin.

Conclusion

Ultimately, this study, by employing the case of Daniil Kharms' little old lady, seeks to argue for the reunification of audiences, previously cleaved in two, and for crosstextual reading as an act to repair this fissure in literary studies. Perhaps this Solomonic cleaving of the subject of our study, which separates children's literature from literary studies or kindred of another kind, though it may be a well-intentioned act of possession, in some senses can be seen to do a disservice to the subject and the field of study. If so, then this article proposes that scholars can and should act to reinstate children's literature in broader crosstextual contexts, thereby also reasserting the rightful place of children's literature and its many silenced writers in the world of letters writ large. In this way children's literature and its study truly will come of age (cf. Nikolajeva), be seen as well as heard, and reach its majority and equal status as a subject of study.

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Notes

1 Kharms's novella *Starukha* has been translated and published numerous times, including in Matvei Yankelevich's excellent 2009 translation in *Today I Wrote Nothing: The Selected Writings of Daniil Kharms* (Ardis, 2009). Kharms's children's story *O tom kak starushka chernila pokupala* has not been translated and published in English. All translations in this article are mine.

2 In Russian the words "*starukha*" and "*starushka*" are very similar apart from the diminutive ending of the latter. "*Starukha*" may be translated as "old woman" and has a coarser and more derogatory feel, while "*starushka*" here is translated as "little old lady" to retain the diminutive effect and kinder tone.