ABSTRACT

This dissertation focuses on the short story *Starukha (The Old Woman)*, one of the last works of the Russian writer Daniil Kharms (1905–1942). The story, written in 1939, is analysed using the Kharmsian concepts èto and to (this and that) as a heuristic interpretative model. The first chapter gives a detailed analysis of this model, as well as a survey of the critical work done to date on Kharms and *Starukha*.

In the second chapter the model is applied to study the different states of consciousness of the male protagonist. This is significant, because he is the ”I” of the work, from whose point of view everything is being told.

The third chapter takes a closer look at the reality of the world that exists independently of the consciousness of the protagonist. Physical objects can be said to bear – besides their everyday meaning – a hidden symbolic meaning. Similarly, the characters can be considered as representatives of everyday reality and otherworldliness.

The fourth chapter deals with the narrative devices of *Starukha*. The problematics of the relation between fact and fiction plays an essential role in the story. Kharms’s use of *Ich-Erzählung* and different tenses, which contributes to achieving a complicated elaboration of this kind of problematics, is examined in detail.

The fifth chapter provides an intertextual reading of *Starukha*, based on its allusions to the Bible and the Christian tradition. As a result, the whole story can be seen as a kind of meditation on the Passion of Christ.

The final chapter examines how the important Kharmsian concepts of the grotesque and the absurd manifest themselves in *Starukha*. The old woman represents in a grotesque way two opposite systems: the religious and the totalitarian. The absurdity of *Starukha* can be claimed to be illusory. Therefore, it is better to speak about paradoxicality. *Starukha* itself is a kind of paradox, in the sense that it tries to say something of the ultimate truth of reality, which inevitably remains ineffable.