

# OBERIU

An Anthology  
of Russian Absurdism



NORTHWESTERN UNIVERSITY PRESS  
EVANSTON, ILLINOIS

» » » » » » » » » » » »    « « « « « « « « « « « «

## Holiday

On the roof of a certain building two draftsmen sat eating buckwheat kasha.

Suddenly one of the draftsmen shrieked with joy and took a long handkerchief out of his pocket. He had a brilliant idea—he would tie a twenty-kopec coin into one end of the handkerchief and toss the whole thing off the roof down into the street and see what would come of it.

The second draftsman quickly caught on to the first one's idea. He finished his buckwheat kasha, blew his nose, and, having licked his fingers, got ready to watch the first draftsman.

As it happened, both draftsmen were distracted from the experiment with the handkerchief and twenty-kopec coin. On the roof where both draftsmen sat an event occurred which could not have gone unnoticed.

The janitor Ibrahim was hammering a long stick with a faded flag into a chimney.

The draftsmen asked Ibrahim what it meant, to which Ibrahim answered: "This means that there's a holiday in the city."

"And what holiday would that be, Ibrahim?" asked the draftsmen.

"It's a holiday because our favorite poet composed a new poem," said Ibrahim.

And the draftsmen, shamed by their ignorance, dissolved into the air.

*January 9, 1935*

*Translated by Matvei Yankelevich*

## The Street Incident

One man once jumped off a tram, except he did it so awkwardly that a car hit him.

The traffic stopped and the policeman set about determining the cause of the accident.

The driver was explaining something for a long time and pointing to the front wheels of his car.

The policemen felt the wheels and wrote something down in his book.

A fairly numerous crowd gathered.

Some citizen with dull eyes kept falling off a traffic stone.

Some lady repeatedly glanced at another lady who, in turn, repeatedly glanced at the former lady.

Then the crowd dispersed and the traffic started moving.

But the citizen with dull eyes still kept falling off the traffic stone until finally he too put a stop to this occupation.

At this time some man carrying what appeared to be a freshly bought chair became lodged under a moving tram.

Again the policeman came, again the crowd gathered, and the citizen with dull eyes again started falling off the traffic stone.

Well and later everything was all right again, and Ivan Semenovich Karpov even stopped by a self-service restaurant.

*January 10, 1935*

*Translated by Eugene Ostashevsky*

## A Man Once Walked Out of His House

A man once walked out of his house  
With a walking stick and a sack,  
    And on he went,  
    And on he went:  
He never did turn back.

He walked as far as he could see:  
He saw what lay ahead.  
    He never drank,  
    He never slept,  
Nor slept nor drank nor ate.

Then once upon a morning  
He entered a dark wood  
    And on that day,  
    And on that day  
He disappeared for good.

If anywhere by any chance  
You meet him in his travels,  
    Then hurry please,  
    Then hurry please,  
Then hurry please and tell us.

1937

*Translated by Matvei Yankelevich and Eugene Ostashevsky*