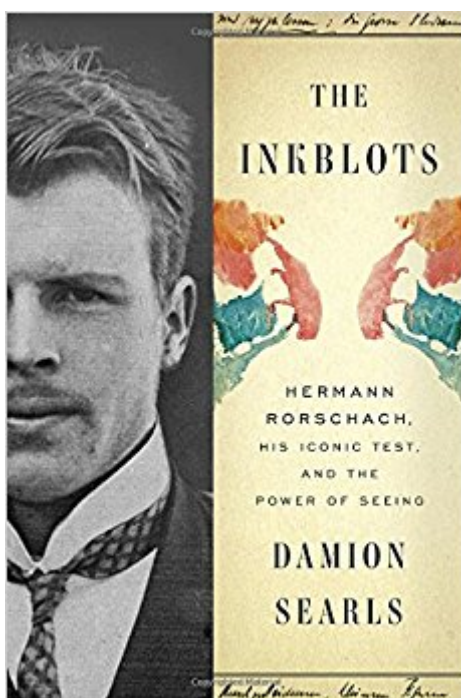


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# The Inkblots: Hermann Rorschach, His Iconic Test, And The Power Of Seeing



## Synopsis

The captivating, untold story of Hermann Rorschach and his famous inkblot test. In 1917, working alone in a remote Swiss asylum, psychiatrist Hermann Rorschach devised an experiment to probe the human mind: a set of ten carefully designed inkblots. For years he had grappled with the theories of Freud and Jung while also absorbing the aesthetic movements of the day, from Futurism to Dadaism. A visual artist himself, Rorschach had come to believe that who we are is less a matter of what we say, as Freud thought, than what we see. After Rorschach's early death, his test quickly made its way to America, where it took on a life of its own. Co-opted by the military after Pearl Harbor, it was a fixture at the Nuremberg trials and in the jungles of Vietnam. It became an advertising staple, a cliché in Hollywood and journalism, and an inspiration to everyone from Andy Warhol to Jay Z. The test was also given to millions of defendants, job applicants, parents in custody battles, and people suffering from mental illness or simply trying to understand themselves better. And it is still used today. In this first-ever biography of Rorschach, Damion Searls draws on unpublished letters and diaries and a cache of previously unknown interviews with Rorschach's family, friends, and colleagues to tell the unlikely story of the test's creation, its controversial reinvention, and its remarkable endurance—and what it all reveals about the power of perception. Elegant and original, *The Inkblots* shines a light on the twentieth century's most visionary synthesis of art and science.

## Book Information

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## Customer Reviews

“Impressively thorough” part biography of Herman Rorschach, psychoanalytic super sleuth, and part chronicle of the test’s afterlife in clinical practice and the popular imagination. Searls is a nuanced and scholarly writer | genuinely fascinating. •New York Times Book Review “It seems incredible that no one before Damion Searls has ever written a biography of Rorschach. His early death may have deterred other would-be biographers, but Searls sails past it with style: the second half of his book traces the fortunes of Rorschach’s famous test, which became a household word in America after World War II, when the U.S. Army used it on draftees. Searls uses this unlikely-seeming artifact to illuminate two histories, one scientific, the other cultural, both full of surprises. •Lorin Stein, The Paris Review “A marvelous book about how one man and his enigmatic test came to shape our collective imagination. The Rorschach test is a great subject and is worthy of it: beguiling, fascinating, and full of new discoveries every time you look. •David Grann, author of The Lost City of Z “Searls, a writer and translator, provides a rich cultural history of the Rorschach test, along with the first proper biography of Hermann Rorschach himself. With The Inkblots, the Rorschach, in all its ambiguity, finally has the richly complex life history it deserves. •New York Magazine “Tremendously rich... [Searls] probed unpublished letters, journals and other material to illuminate the way setting and circumstance influenced Rorschach’s life and work.... [A]n exhaustively researched story of Rorschach’s brief life and an engaging consideration of his enduring test.” •San Francisco Chronicle “This excellent book begins as a biography and becomes, when [Rorschach] suddenly dies of a ruptured appendix at the age of thirty-seven, a cultural history of his creation.” •Harper’s “Searls provides a detailed recounting of a man whose creativity and curiosity about the human mind drove him to create a new way of ‘reading’ people • an innovation that was quickly embraced, and misunderstood, by the masses.” •Discover “What is an amazing book. The Rorschach inkblot is like the enigmatic corpse in a mystery novel, and Damion Searls is the passionate and encyclopedic detective who unpacks the intricate and twisted story of how it came to be. By the end, one feels that Rorschach and his test are the key to understanding the whole 20th century. Searls is a wonderful writer: funny, compassionate, and unfailingly attentive to all the magical coincidences

(or are they?) and twists of human history.

•Elif Batuman, author of *The Possessed* "If the test's subtlety has been hammered out by overfamiliarity, Searls restores much of its potency in this rich, resonant book. A dual biography, *The Inkblots* tells the story of the test's inventor, Dr. Hermann Rorschach, while tracing the strange half-life of his cards as they appear, Zelig-like, at key 20th-century moments. Along the way, it almost inadvertently uncovers a hidden history of social attitudes and cultural shifts over the past 100 years.

Searls creates a warm-blooded portrait of a man who feels like a Hollywood biopic in waiting.

•The Sunday Times "In this broad yet richly nuanced book, literary translator Damion Searls gives to English readers for the first time the remarkable story of the Swiss psychiatrist whose iconic test provoked interest and head-shaking everywhere. [The Inkblots] is rich with entertaining and unexpected details.

•New York Journal "A richly detailed, sensitive biography of Rorschach's short life and long afterlife.

•Kirkus Reviews "Very little has previously been known about Rorschach's private life; Searls now fills in many blanks, drawing a more rounded portrait of the Swiss psychiatrist. Rorschach's genius is apparent, and his famous inkblots ever fascinating.

•Booklist "Searls has painstakingly woven together both the enduring strengths of Rorschach's iconic test and the controversies and convolutions surrounding it, all while capturing Rorschach's distinctive design, to which the inkblots owe their longevity. The book's engaging narrative, born of both detailed research and artistic sentimentality, is a fitting tribute to its enigmatic subject.

•Science "A fascinating account of the Swiss artist-scientist and the rise, fall, and perseverance of his test. [Searls] offers a compelling account of cultural, intellectual and social ferment.

•Macleans "A deft, surprising, and illuminating portrait of Hermann Rorschach, and a compelling case that his improbable inkblot experiment should earn him a place in the pantheon of psychology.

•Joshua Wolf Shenk, author of *Lincoln's Melancholy* "Who knew? Most of the founding lions of psychoanalysis often seem as petty and infantile as they were (at times) brilliant and inspired. But to hear Damion Searls tell it in this absorbing new biography, Hermann Rorschach was a different sort altogether: humane, empathic, loving, deeply sane, and possessed of a true artist's soul. Searls's account of Rorschach's afterlife is no less fascinating, as every culture that encountered his test seemed to project its own values onto it. In the end, true to Rorschach, Searls locates the heart of being human at the endlessly unfurling intersection of vision and self-awareness.

•Lawrence Weschler, author of *Seeing is*

Forgetting the Name of the Thing One Sees – and Mr Wilson’s Cabinet of Wonder  
“The life of this fascinating man is a much-needed contribution to the history of psychoanalysis. This is sure to become the standard reference for both Hermann Rorschach’s life and times and the history of the inkblot test from his time to ours.”  
• Deirdre Bair, author of Jung: A Biography  
“In this accessible biography of Rorschach, Damion Searls shows us the young psychologist, who died at a tragically early age, making his way among the feuding early 20th century thinkers in psychology, including Freud and Jung. Vividly sketched with many new sources, The Inkblots reveals Rorschach to be a fascinating character: part artist, part clinician. A marvelous portrait.”  
• Peter Galison, Joseph Pellegrino University Professor, Harvard University  
“The Inkblots is three books in one: an engaging biography of Hermann Rorschach; a vivid and meticulously researched history of his eponymous inkblots; and a fascinating exploration of the psychology of perception. This is a book that challenges us to consider the relationship between what we see and who we are.”  
• Peter Mendelsund, author of What We See When We Read  
“Damion Searls’s book is a refreshing biography of Hermann Rorschach and a cultural history of his famous inkblot test. Rorschach died almost a century ago and this book reveals fascinating details about his life and the enduring controversies regarding the meaning of his inkblot test.”  
• Joel E. Dimsdale, author of Anatomy of Malice: The Enigma of the Nazi War Criminals

Damion Searls has written for Harper’s, n+1, and The Paris Review, and has translated the work of authors including Rainer Maria Rilke, Marcel Proust, and five Nobel Prize winners. He has been the recipient of Guggenheim, NEA, and Cullman Center fellowships.

What can I tell you? I’m a retired psychologist and hated the Rorschach when I was trained in the late 1970s. Having read the book, I was fascinated by the man Rorschach, and I learned a lot about the test itself and what could be interpreted from it, things I never fully grasped or believed in earlier years. Fortunately, I don’t think I ever used one after I got my license to practice, although I did a few test batteries to assess cognitive disorders, IQs, and memory problems in nursing home patients. I provided psychotherapy help for 30 years, from age 40-70.

I am a Psychologist who used (and taught) Rorschach for over thirty years. I studied under Margarite Hertz at Western Reserve University. This book is an excellent biography and history of

the Rorschach Psychodiagnostic. Fascinating, scientific, and well written to boot. Hard to pass up.

Rohrschach was such a positive person among a number of psychiatrists who didn't believe people could flourish. I truly appreciate Searls bringing him to our attention. I love this book and am recommending it to as many people as follow my twitter and FB fees.

A wonderful book! Impeccably researched and beautifully written, with wonderful photographs and illustrations. It's a captivating, deeply satisfying read. I recommend it highly!

There were some fascinating facts in this account of Hermann Rorschach's work but a large portion of the book could have used a more heavy hand in the editing process.

This book is outstanding. It is very well written. It captures the times and feelings of the people involved. Excellent review of a test that has influenced how assessments of mental functioning work. Absolutely a must read.

Could not finish! Zzzzz

I just finished this rich and fascinating read. Well written, easily read. I learned so much, not just about Rorschach. What a human being he was. Heartily recommend.

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