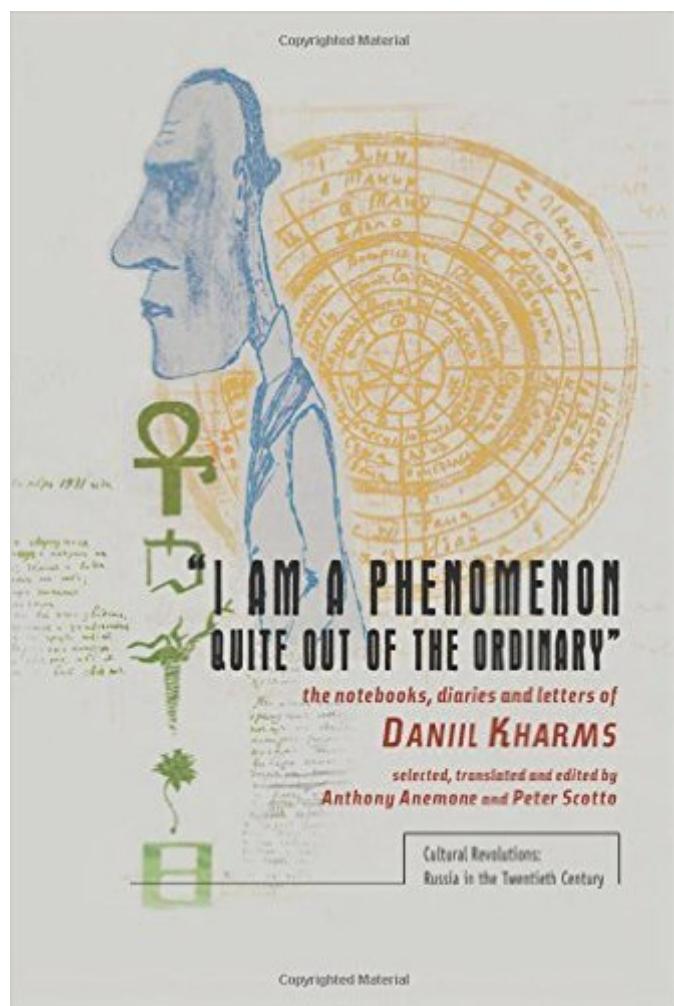


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"I Am A Phenomenon Quite Out Of The Ordinary": The Notebooks, Diaries And Letters Of Daniil Kharms (Cultural Revolutions: Russia In The Twentieth Century)



Synopsis

In addition to his numerous works in prose and poetry for both children and adults, Daniil Kharms (1905-42), one of the founders of Russia's "lost literature of the absurd," wrote notebooks and a diary for most of his adult life. Published for the first time in recent years in Russian, these notebooks provide an intimate look at the daily life and struggles of one of the central figures of the literary avant-garde in Post-Revolutionary Leningrad. While Kharms's stories have been translated and published in English, these diaries represents an invaluable source for English-language readers who, having already discovered Kharms in translation, desire to learn about the life and times of an avant-garde writer in the first decades of Soviet power.

Book Information

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Customer Reviews

In my estimation, the tags for this book are far too narrow to convey the appeal the book should have to readers of almost every ilk. It is biography, historical drama, poignant love story, book of poetry, and study of a cultural moment, all rolled into one. It can be read as individual poems, conversations, and vignettes, but when read from start to finish has the arc of a novel. The translators have written a compelling introduction - itself worth the price of admission - that provides readers entry into Kharms' world even if they've never before heard his name, and know nothing about avant-garde literature or the history of Russia in the 20th Century. The translators have also included a chronology, extensive commentary, and a glossary of names, places, and more, making

this book valuable to scholars, but accessible to a general readership. (These sections have been thoughtfully placed at the end where they don't interrupt the flow of Kharms' own words.) As for Kharms' own words, they are entertaining in the fullest and best sense of the word. An elderly Russian man I met at a reading of "I am a phenomenon" told me he loved Kharms in the original Russian and had believed it was not possible to translate his writings - particularly his poetry - into English without losing the humor, the puns, the rhythm, rhyme, fluidity, and soundplay of Kharms' language. Reading "I am a phenomenon" changed his mind; he said (literally, with tears in his eyes) the translators had captured Kharms perfectly. Being neither a Russian-speaker nor a Kharms scholar, I can only say that Kharms' writing, as expressed in this translation, speaks in full, buoyant, and appealing voice and leaves a marked impression of the man and his times. I unreservedly recommend this book.

The authors have done a really interesting thing here. By letting this very idiosyncratic writer, who until recently was known mostly by Russians, speak in his own voice, they've given the English-speaking reader a quantity of fresh material which really draws you in. Kharms's life was tragic, but he clearly enjoyed the various paths his mental obsessions took him on, and a lot of research has been done here to bring his letters and doodles to life. I get the sense these authors worked hard on the translating to keep the voice true and lively. A nice portrait of a brilliant counter-cultural thinker who would be iconic to many more readers except for the language barrier--and maybe now he can step into a bigger spotlight thanks to this book.

The authors offer enlightenment into Kharms's life from the first page to the last. From the witty and informative introduction, which gives an overview of his phenomenal life, and through the journal entries, Kharms's unique perspective on life and philosophy is illuminating and thought-provoking. A great selection for any library!

Whether you have a scholarly interest in Kharms or other avant garde writers in Soviet Russia, have read some of Kharms' poetry or stories and would like to know more about him, or are simply curious about this enigmatic and eccentric writer, you will find this translation of selections from his notebooks, diaries and letters fascinating and enlightening. It's not just that these documents themselves give you great insight into how Kharms thought and how he viewed the world. They do, and for those of us who have previously only read his prose and poems, this volume does a wonderful job of broadening our picture of Kharms as both a man and a writer. But it's not just

because of the documents themselves that we gain this insight. It's because of the care and skill and insight into Kharms that the translators brought to their work on the volume. They did a marvelous job of choosing what to include from the very large amount of original material, so that the resulting volume is broad not only in regard to the timeframe covered, but also as far as the range of genres and styles included. But on top of that, their translations are just fabulous. You can tell that they weren't just translating words, that they took the time to really understand and then put across the subtle style and feeling of each selection - a Herculean task where Kharms is concerned. And the selections are also arranged in a way that creates a great narrative flow and gives us a fascinating - and deeply moving - picture of Kharms' life. Definitely read this book - every page is a delight!

LOVE LOVE LOVE For anyone with an interest in Russian literature, this book is a must-have!

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