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### Title

The Inkblots: Hermann Rorschach, His Iconic Test, and the Power of Seeing

### Permalink

<https://escholarship.org/uc/item/9fb2b28g>

### Journal

Journal of Personality Assessment, 100(4)

### ISSN

0022-3891

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### Publication Date

2018-07-04

### DOI

10.1080/00223891.2017.1368023

Peer reviewed

**The Inkblots: Hermann Rorschach, his iconic test, and the power of seeing, Damion Searls, 2017, Crown Publishers (405 pages).**

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In *The Inkblots*, Damion Searls weaves together topics including biography, the arts, psychoanalytic theory, history, and psychological assessment in a fascinating and highly readable volume. Though written for popular consumption, this book will be of particular interest to *Journal of Personality Assessment* (JPA) readers because of its intensive coverage of the development of the Rorschach test and the life of its developer, Hermann Rorschach.

The author's scholarly and exhaustive approach yielded a book from which even the most experienced Rorschacher will learn something new about the inkblots. Searls ([damionsearls.com](http://damionsearls.com)), an award winning historian, author, and translator of authors such as Nietzsche, Proust, and Rilke, has interviewed a wide variety of experts and traveled extensively to Europe to obtain and incorporate original source material. The level of detail about Rorschach's life and the development of the test is fascinating the writing carefully calibrates impressive scholarship against a captivating narrative. The book is adorned with interesting pictures of Rorschach and the people close to him as well as Rorschach cards and other intriguing stimuli.

*The Inkblots* traces Rorschach's early life, including his complex family relationships, struggles to find a cultural and linguistic home, abiding interests in art, philosophy, and Russian culture, love life, and perpetual determination to balance the need to earn a living with his passion for pursuing his intrinsic interests. The development of the Rorschach technique is contextualized in the cultural milieu of early 20<sup>th</sup> century Switzerland, in which Freud's psychoanalysis, Bleuler's descriptive psychopathology, and German expressionism provided the foundation for Rorschach's klecksographic approach to assessment.

The development of the final set of 10 inkblots is appropriately depicted as an organically developing idea, years in the making, which benefited from considerable tinkering, consultation, and research.

The second half of the book discusses some of the more contemporary issues related to Rorschach assessment that will be familiar to JPA readers, including the validity debates of a few decades ago, the role of psychological assessment in our culture more generally, and the development of various administration and scoring approaches including the Exner and R-PAS systems. But it also reaches beyond psychological assessment per se: an enduring theme throughout the manuscript is the connection between the Rorschach inkblots as a clinical technique and as a popular metaphor for perception and ambiguity in contemporary Western culture.

This book's weakness stems from its strength. It is long and detailed, and there are passages that could move more swiftly. It also would not surprise me if some readers have a different take on one or more of the various Rorschach-related controversies than the author's presentation, although in my reading the review was balanced.

In summary, *The Inkblots* is a pleasurable read that offers a new angle on things psychological assessors tend to think about a lot. It has been favorably reviewed by the New York Times, The Guardian, NPR, the New Republic, and the New York Journal of Books among other critical outlets. It is written so as to be interesting to anyone, but I particularly recommend it to JPA readers, who will be surprised by how much they don't know about Rorschach, the test and the man.