
My Introduction to Thaumaturgy, or Why I am Not a Wizard

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One summer while I was in graduate school at the University of Connecticut I bought a little Dutch sloop, a fourteen footer which was the love of my life that year. I sailed it on a small lake near the University, but those waters were pretty tame stuff. The boat, I knew belonged back on Narragansett Bay, my spiritual sailing home, so I decided I would find way to spend the next summer in Rhode Island. But I also would need to complete part of my predoctoral internship there. So with some extended effort and what I thought at the time was just a *little* luck, I ended up working for three months at Butler Hospital, a small, non-traditional private psychiatric hospital in Providence. And because of that summer my life changed magically, inexorably and forever.

There wasn't a blinding flash, or even a puff of smoke. Actually, it was a number of years before I knew how much my life had really changed. But I had a glimmer of excitement the very first day I was at Butler when the chief psychologist, Dick York, asked me, with that wonderful elfin grin on his face, "Are you interested in Wechsler profiles? We use them here in an unusual way." I was intrigued, since even before Butler I had been fascinated by Wechsler profiles.

During those three months I learned the beginnings of the Gittinger system of Wechsler interpretation, which was how I thought about it then. There was nothing to read or to study, no monographs, no atlases. It was all listening and asking questions and trying very hard to figure things out so that they made sense. Dick York is a

determinedly non-linear person, so my instruction was total immersion into a sea of confusion. And, of course, there were lots of other things going on at Butler that summer, including a new superintendent who had come from a state hospital on the west coast, and may have even been suffering from his own favorite diagnosis, *paranoia vera*. The summer was hectic, but nonetheless I went back to Storrs in the fall enthusiastic with what seemed to me to be my smattering of the Personality Assessment System (PAS).

It was several years before I learned the power of that smattering. I married, finished my graduate studies, and was working at American International College as director of the counseling center. The college had just dismissed the head of its new program for learning disability (LD) remediation, and I had been asked to be the interim director until a permanent one could be found. In those days there were very few people knowledgeable about learning disabilities, and I certainly was not one of them. While most of my work was to be administrative, there were several commitments to consult to schools. I was assured that there was one person on the staff who really did know something about learning disabilities, so therefore I was willing to go along on consultations just for window dressing.

Our first meeting was at an elementary school in a nearby town. While we were waiting for the group to assemble I picked up one of the Wechsler Intelligence Scale for Children (WISC)

protocols sitting on the table. I remember that it was of a nine-year-old boy who, despite an average IQ, had a digit span score of 5, an arithmetic score of 4, a block design score of 7 and a picture arrangement score of 14. More or less talking to myself I said something like "Boy, I bet this kid is a handful in class. He certainly can't sit still, probably talks a lot, gets bored all the time and drives his teacher crazy with all the messes that he makes. Yet she loves him and forgives him, and doesn't understand why." I stopped musing, everyone was there, and the meeting began. My colleague Brian held forth competently about remedial efforts for the LD students, and I smiled a lot. After a while everyone thanked us, and we left.

On the way back, a conversation more or less like the following occurred.

"What were you doing with that Wechsler protocol before the meeting started?"

"Just thinking out loud."

"Did you notice those folks' reactions while you were thinking out loud?"

"No."

"While you were talking people were nodding their heads and looking at each other with amazement."

"What do you mean?"

"Evidently you got that kid just right. Where did you lean to do that?"

"Some stuff I picked up during my internship. I don't know much about it."

"Well, I'd say it's pretty heady stuff. Those people thought you were practicing witchcraft!"

Of course Brian reported back that Bob Mac had wowed them with witchcraft. My colleagues wanted to know more, but I was not able to tell others what I didn't much understand myself. So what came of the incident was a vague aura of mystery which my colleagues cast about me. On subsequent visits to schools I continued, now quite silently, to peruse WISC protocols and to make some hypotheses to myself about them, hoping to have them confirmed in the discussions which followed. Many of them were confirmed, and I found that I was able to add insights to some of the discussions by relying on my newfound confidence in John G.'s Wechsler system. What impressed me most was how much my diagnostic acumen had been augmented with the fragment of PAS that I had assimilated several years before, even though in the interim I had thought little about PAS nor had had any of my ideas refreshed. Obviously, even a little knowledge gives the beginner useful insights.

When I recounted my experience to Dick York, he told me about a time when John had come to Butler before my summer there. "You remember X," he said, referring to a nurse at the hospital. "Well, John looked at her protocol and gave his usual astounding reading of her profile. And when he was done he stood up and said, 'and she walks like this.'" And then Dick proceeded to demonstrate the ape-like walk for which X was well-known, beaming with glee as he showed me. John's acute insights, while not usually so physical, are still legendary.

I continued to visit Dick on a regular basis to learn more about PAS, usually by going over cases. I despaired at having nothing to read (that's how it's learned best), so Dick took me to Washington to Psychological Assessment Associates, John G.'s consulting firm. There I obtained copies of a number of privately printed documents, as well as reprints of the Schucman and Thetford (1968, 1970) articles. When Matarazzo (1972) revised Wechsler's volume on adult

intelligence, he included a chapter on Gittinger's system. Despite the imperfections in Matarazzo's ten-page summary, there it was in a widely disseminated volume of very high professional caliber.

Within a year or two Dick York and I began teaching our summer workshops in PAS, which, I believe, were the first instruction in PAS theory for academic credit anywhere. I've been going strong since, and I never intend to stop. PAS has become so much an intrinsic part of my diagnostic and therapeutic armamentaria that I cannot remember how I functioned as a clinician without it.

From time to time I still go over cases in schools, and the school people still are wowed. But I'm not wowing them. John's arcane art is. If there is any magic in John's brilliance it is not wizardry or witchcraft, but rather thaumaturgy, the performance of miracles and wonders. For me, however, none of these terms is accurate. I think that John's ideas are simply the most penetrating and ingenious notions of individual personality and its functioning that I have ever known.

I strongly believe that those of us who have had the privilege of learning from John now have the responsibility both to record what we know and to teach others the skills and insights which we have garnered over the years. Only if we do so will his ideas be saved for posterity. Only if we do so will the potential of his clinical sagacity be maximally fulfilled.

Thank you, John, for enriching my life in a hundred ways. I hope that this *Festschrift* gives you pleasure, and in a small way gives recompense for your gifts to us all.

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