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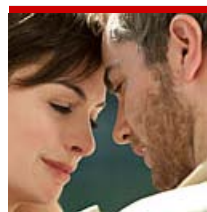
Science: Handwriting As Character

Monday, May 25, 1942

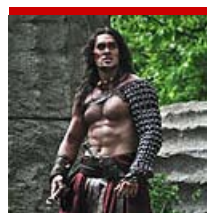
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Graphology (handwriting analysis), long in the same U.S. doghouse with such pseudosciences as astrology, palmistry, phrenology may not be so phony as scientists have thought it.

Last week in Manhattan, quiet, greying, sharp-faced Dr. Walter William Marseille, former Berlin psychologist, described graphology's partial emergence from the doghouse to do a routine job of work: rating customer reliability for Spiegel's, Chicago mail-order house, which sells clothing, furniture and household goods to more than two million installment accounts.

Emergence. Marseille studied psychology at Heidelberg and Berlin, got his Ph.D. in 1926 for a critical study of graphological theories, later practiced in Berlin and Vienna as consulting psychologist and personnel adviser for public-utility and industrial corporations. He left Austria on the eve of the Nazi invasion. In 1940 Paul Lazarsfeld, public-opinion researcher, retained him to make a handwriting analysis of mail received by several U.S. Senators during the debate on the conscription bill. His educational rating of the letter-writers (later checked by interviewers) attracted the attention of FORTUNE'S Elmo Roper, who is also a director of Spiegel's. At Roper's suggestion, Spiegel's gave Marseille a trial: 20 handwritten order blanks from reliable customers, 20 from known delinquents. Looking solely for indications of honesty or dishonesty, he failed dismally. Next, he was given 200 specimens—100 of them good accounts, 100 bad; and this time he looked, not for crooks, but for inconsistent,

unreliable, poorly adjusted people. He spotted them correctly in over 70% of the cases. Spiegel's told him to go ahead.

Routine. Instead of quibbling over the significance of high-crossed t's and un-dotted i's, the Marseille system, basically, studies the consistency or inconsistency of style, the degree of integration revealed in an individual's handwriting; rates the subject accordingly as: 1) very good risk; 2) fairly reliable; 3) dishonest; 4) poor budgeter, probably harassed by bill collectors.

Graphology's most intractable foes, handwriting experts (not to be confused with analysts), who specialize in detecting forgeries, were quick to belittle Marseille's claims last week. More hopeful were the psychologists and personnel consultants who would like to see handwriting analysis established on scientific ground. If taken away from fortune-tellers and given serious study, graphology may yet become a useful handmaiden of psychology, possibly revealing important traits, attitudes, values of the "hidden" personality. Research for medical graphology (which studies handwriting for symptoms of nervous diseases) already indicates that handwriting is more than muscular. Most reassuring observation: people who lose their upper extremities, then learn to write with mouth or toes, retain in their new mouth-or foot-writing the essential characteristics of their original handwriting.

*Top to bottom: very good risk, fairly reliable, dishonest, poor budgeter.

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