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*An amateur graphologist
pleads for at least a dry run on
an assessment technique of po-
tential value in intelligence.*

HANDWRITING ANALYSIS AS AN ASSESSMENT AID

Keith Laycock

The assertion that reliable clues to a person's character¹ and some of his capabilities may be derived from analysis of his handwriting usually evokes a vigorous *pro* or *con* reaction which seems to originate somewhere in the subconscious mind and not to reflect a reasoned consideration of the proposition. The reaction is at times so strong as to give a psychologist the impression that those who shrink from the idea do so because they fear exposure and those who eagerly embrace it are the kind who like to snoop and pry. Whatever the psychological reasons, one thing is certain: the proposition is a good one for starting a controversy.

The art of handwriting analysis—graphology, as it is more commonly called, especially in Europe—has two branches: an established and “respectable” one devoted to the identification of individuals by their handwriting, and a black-sheep branch dealing with the assessment of personality. The latter is the subject of this paper. I am not a professional graphologist, but I have explored the subject enough to be convinced that this black art has a practical application in the assessment of persons to whom access for other character tests is limited.

Since character assessment (as distinct from capabilities-testing) is as complex as human nature itself, and the art of handwriting analysis is exceedingly difficult in its detail, the most that can be achieved in any short paper is to give an outline of the theory involved, in the hope that those readers who have serious limited-access assessment problems will be encouraged to explore the matter further, independently,

¹By *character* I mean the individual constellation and balance of drives, inhibitions, and habits which determines how (rather than how effectively) a man will behave in a given situation.

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either through study or by enlisting the services of a professional graphologist.

Plotting the Terms of Reference

Anyone undertaking serious study or investigation of graphology—or of any assessment system, for that matter—must settle three formidable related questions before he can safely submerge himself in the “how” of the technique at all, to wit: 1) How far do we propose to go in plumbing the ramified depths of a subject's character? 2) How do we handle the semantic problems which plague character descriptions? 3) What do we do about standards for judging the ethical aspects of character?

It seems to me, on the first question, that we have to specify in some detail precisely what we want to know about a subject's character before we can proceed in any assessment operation, and then keep within these sharply delineated limits to avoid an extensive mire. Most executives appear willing to settle for any assessment system which will consistently and reliably tip them off to those *peculiarities* of a given individual which will be helpful and those which will be harmful in the job they are trying to fill. They seldom appear to be interested in ultimates about anyone's character, in complete “character-pictures” pages long, or in abstract conceptions that have to be interpreted. From the purely practical point of view, then, assessment starts with the job description, and that job description should be supplemented by a list of desirable, undesirable, and fatal traits. In the absence of such a guide, assessment becomes perforce an undertaking to describe all the traits of a given subject, an exceedingly unrealistic exercise in the present state of psychological knowledge and one which, if conscientiously carried out, results in massive and complicated reports, long delayed.

I should accordingly, without prejudice to the usability of graphology in the field of deeper research, answer the first question as follows: We should consider a reasonably acceptable result from this technique to be a report containing a reliable guide to those character-traits of the subject which make him fit or unfit for the job we have in mind, as specified by us, plus a warning on any character-traits that deviate strongly from the average. For example: We specify that we want to fill a bank-teller's job. For this (with apologies to bank tellers)

we want a stable and mediocre person who is conscientious, able to stand dull routine, accurate, and honest, one who is *not* quarrelsome, thieving, aggressive, or imaginative. We assume that in other respects he will be run-of-the-mill. The assessment turns up one candidate who meets the specifications of general mediocrity and willingness to handle other people's money without appropriating it but who is also exceedingly vain, in fact a peacock. Such a potentially dangerous factor ought to be reported to us, even if we have not required it.

Our second problem, semantics, can cause a great deal of difficulty either in the exercise of the graphological art or in the study of it; it is a pitfall into which many have tumbled. What is an "honest" man? What is a "brave" man? Definition of such words is a practical impossibility, since the third unknown, an ethical standard, is involved. If we could establish agreed ethical standards, we could, no doubt, compose definitions which would be adequate, but there does not now appear to be such a set of standards. In fact, at this point in human history there seems to be more confusion than ever over whether the end justifies the means or is inseparable from them. We are accordingly, as far as I can see, limited in using characterological terms to those denoting specific acts such as talking, stealing, lying, etc., and must eschew words with ethical overtones. Many writers and students on the subject have fallen into the ethics trap, so let both student and practitioner beware.

It is necessary to add yet another caution: The analysis of handwriting is an art, not a science, and the quality of the result is dependent upon the caliber and capacity of the artist. Consequently, the statistical evaluation of graphology according to the accuracy of the results obtained by a cross-section of its practitioners is meaningless. The question whether graphology can be used reliably in assessment work seems to me to depend on whether even *one* person can do it consistently, not whether a majority of those who claim to be competent can get results. The evaluator should be aware that a great many so-called graphologists are either dilettantes or charlatans, using an art of which they have a smattering to swindle or astound the gullible. It is, in fact, this swarm of fortune-tellers and mystics, with a small but noisy retinue of supporters making extravagant claims, who have done that recurring

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damage to the reputation of graphology which has served to deprive many a harassed executive of its assistance.

Basis for the Art

As the reader will see from the bibliography attached at the end of this article, much has been written on the "how" of graphology. The bibliography could be much longer without exhausting the list of serious works. The student who reads these books will find that, while there is considerable divergence among them in the area of fundamental theory, there is striking unanimity on the more concrete technical level. This situation no doubt reflects the general dilemma of assessment: it is a lot easier to devise tests that reveal a hidden habit, such as "taking ways," than to uncover the underlying psychological reasons for the habit. We shall therefore try as far as possible to avoid the more abstruse aspects of the subject in discussing next the general validity of the thesis that reliable clues to the character and to some of the capabilities of a person may be derived from competent analysis of his handwriting.

Essentially, two points have to be established, first that the individuality of every person's handwriting is caused primarily by psychological, as distinct from mechanical, characteristics peculiar to the writer, and second, that there is reflected in a given handwriting, in symbol form, a hidden "story" about these psychological factors which a graphologist can "read." The individuality and peculiarity of every person's handwriting is accepted by the courts, and it follows that a person's handwriting must change very slowly and slightly or not at all during his adult life, since otherwise the courts would not accept holographic evidence.

If this individuality in writing were the result of mechanical influences only, then the enormous deviations from letter forms taught in school which some calligraphies exhibit would be due to extreme mechanical idiosyncrasies, not to say difficulties, peculiar to the writer. The fact is, however, that writers with exceedingly peculiar handwritings perform all other tasks with about the same mechanical competence as the next man, and conversely, persons who are markedly unadroit often have more regular handwritings than those of considerable mechan-

ical skill. Mechanical skill, in fact, is one of the abilities which can *not* be deduced from handwriting.

Handwriting is in reality brain-writing, as the following experiment will prove to any reader who cares to try it: Sign your name on a piece of paper. Now take the writing instrument between your molars and sign; then put the instrument between your big and second toes and write your name that way. With some practice legible signatures can be produced in this fashion, which on comparison will be found to resemble closely (with due allowance for mechanical factors!) the work produced by the hand. Even if you cannot control your neck or leg muscles sufficiently to produce legible scrawls, you will be able to see that you are *trying* to direct the instrument held in teeth or toes to produce *the image you have in mind*. (I would warn the reader who attempts this experiment either to make sure of privacy or to let any possible intruder know beforehand what he is trying to do. It can be very embarrassing to be caught barefoot in simian concentration on managing a pencil with your toes.)

There are a number of cogent reasons why psychological rather than mechanical factors dictate the main calligraphic peculiarities of a person who does not have a neurological condition of some sort. Let's look briefly at the influence of a dozen common psychological motivations.

Pride in Appearances. A writer usually feels that his handwriting's appearance represents him to the reader and to the community at large. He accordingly makes a certain amount of effort, depending on the degree to which he feels appearances are important, to make his calligraphy look "good." Therefore his writing will in some degree reflect his personal taste in what looks good, and how much importance he places on looking good.

Social Attitude. Except in the case of memoranda written for notekeeping, the act of writing has strong social implications. It is an act of communication, seeking to reach and influence one or more readers, whether with generous or sinister motives. How the writer moves across the paper toward the reader must, as a matter of common sense, reflect somewhat his attitude. A self-confident, outgoing, cheerful, trusting writer who loves people is bound to cross the page in a very different way than the writer who hates, fears, and dis-

trusts others, and perhaps himself as well. As a matter of common observation such opposite types *act* differently, use different gestures, have different smiles, etc.; it is hardly surprising that their gestures on paper would differ.

Docility and Truculence. The act of writing is an act of conformity: if certain standards are not met, the communication can be read only with difficulty or not at all. Here the people who like to make things difficult for others can have a field day by distorting their handwriting, leaving it just readable enough to make the reading a torture. Those who rebel in principle against conformity will also maim their writing, and so will some gentlemen who fear they may be called to account for what they have written. Others there are who conform rigidly to the set standards, some willingly, some desperately, some furtively, and some because they have no particular personal preferences to express.

The Shock of Early Battles. Writing may bear scars. Learning to write is one of the first great struggles with society which many of us undergo, faced suddenly with a frightfully difficult task which we must perform or remain illiterate. The job can be torture, or a game; that depends on many things. But the attitudes toward writing then established (cramped, worried, overanxious; or relaxed, confident, free-flowing?) are often reflected throughout life.

Emotional Disturbance. Writing is an act of self-expression, sometimes of feelings hidden from the conscious mind. A pen driven by boiling emotions will move very differently than one in the hand of a calculating or apathetic "cold fish." The writer who is tormented by ungratified (perhaps ungratifiable!) sex wishes will unwittingly interject some sex-wish symbols into his calligraphy. Where these wishes include a desire to commit rape-murders, the symbolism can be very sinister indeed.

Energy and Fatigue. Writing is a piece of work, to some a highly disagreeable chore and to all an effort requiring concentration and output of energy. Is the writer ebullient with energy? Or does he wearily drag one foot after the other? Is he tireless or easily fatigued? Is he liberal with his energies, or does he try to economize on every movement? The impact of his pen on the paper will certainly vary with these traits.

Agility and Impatience. As a means of communication, writing is a slow technique. It is adequate only for the slow thinker; to the man whose mind is leaping ahead of his hand it becomes an irritating impediment. But agile minds may react variously to this drag: some devise ingenious shortcuts, others butcher the script beyond recognition. The ruthless ones wade over the paper; the considerate ones torment themselves with conscientious printing.

The Devious Intent. The writer knows that what he has written can be used for purposes he never intended or even foresaw. Therefore the prudent man with ulterior motives writes cautiously, and the self-conscious criminal may choose ornate, imposing script. Men who prowl craftily through life seldom caper across paper.

One's Path to Glory. We all desire to attain status among our fellows. Do we try to gain it by hard work? By sudden, spectacular achievement? By illegitimate methods? By violence? By bragging? Would it not be strange, after receiving a letter full of exaggerated capitals and ornate flourishes, with various senseless embellishments for general effect, to find that the writer was a conscientious, self-effacing, hard-working drudge?

The Root of Evil. We all have some emotional relationship or attitude toward money. Do we spend nights dreaming of it? Squander it? Hoard it? Steal it? Despise it? Feel guilty about having it? Most accountants and bookkeepers can tell you, without even thinking, how a man feels about money by the way he writes a check. Some of them can make quite a good guess also about how far he trusts people.

Practice of the Art

At this point the reader will probably be satisfied that about as many factors in a man's habits, attitudes, and traits influence the formation of his handwriting as he has habits, attitudes and traits, and may agree that peculiarities in handwriting are mainly generated by the psychological peculiarities of the writer. We still, however, have not established the validity of point two, that a graphologist can consistently interpret peculiarities in writing to reveal the peculiarities behind them. If systematic interpretation of handwriting is to be possible, peculiarities or their combinations that indi-

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cate a certain trait of character in one writer must indicate that trait in others, and be subject to interpretation according to some set of rules.

In an article of this length I cannot present the voluminous tabulations which have been compiled by graphological analysts relating specific peculiarities to specific traits. Moreover, simply presenting such tabulations would hardly convince the reader that the tabulated relationships are in fact correct; paper will, after all, put up with anything that is written on it. In my experience, the only way you can convince a real skeptic that this kind of interpretation is consistently possible is to perform it consistently, or else cite performance data from a source he respects. From my own files I can present quite a few cases where graphologists have made astonishingly accurate delineations of the character of persons in whom we had abiding interest of great importance, and I would like to cite two of the most striking ones very briefly. On these I am prepared to produce (for those with proper clearances only) precise documentary proof.

The first concerns a person who carried out a monumental performance in duplicity for several years at considerable risk. A graphologist who knew nothing about him but his penmanship described him in such accurate terms that when a sterilized version of the graphological report was circulated without any other indication of identity to five persons who had known him well, all five recognized him from the description and four concurred in it entirely. The fifth acquaintance agreed on all points except one: he did not think the subject as intelligent as the graphologist assessed him to be. Meanwhile a standard assessment was made by psychologists, who were in agreement that the man had a very high order of intelligence indeed.

The other case, a man who had carried out an even more extraordinary deception, was processed by both a European and an American graphologist. The two descriptions not only concurred in all major points, but were ultimately proved to be far more accurate than we believed at the time they were produced.

This, of course, is not evidence, in the scientific sense, on the critical question of consistent performance. In both cases the handwriting specimens were of the striking kind which

even a layman would recognize as having elements of greatness from the espionage point of view. To the best of my knowledge, and strangely enough when one thinks of the controversy that has raged around this subject, a proper test run has never been devised and carried out, at least not in the United States, to determine whether *any* graphologist can consistently deliver accurate results in the area of character delineation. Consistent results in the psychiatric area concerned with the detection of mental illness appear to be pretty well established,² and these are certainly impressive. That is a different matter, however, from providing data on the character peculiarities of people who are "sane." It is high time that such a determination were undertaken, and at the end of this article I shall take the liberty of making specific recommendations on such a test.

In the absence of a present fund of test data to throw at the skeptic, I resort to offering him a brief description of one or two graphological techniques and the thinking behind them. I hope thereby to bring him to the point of joining the man who needs means for limited-access assessment and helping him generate pressure for carrying out a proper proving problem on the pivotal question—can anybody at all do this work with reasonable accuracy and consistency?

Sorting Out the Symbols

The techniques employed by the graphologist to bring out the hidden character-story in a given handwriting rest upon the interpretation of symbolism in the specimen. There are two kinds of symbol-groups—those common to a society or culture, and those which the writer may have devised on his own, usually unconsciously, to express subconscious wishes, fears, hatreds, and the like. We are all so surrounded and submersed in symbols and symbolism that we are often oblivious to the tremendous expressive and controlling force of this cultural factor. In some way not understood, symbols are linked with the deepest impulses of the mind. They are not merely a matter of simple association, as performed by Pavlov's dog. Some symbols are coarse—the Swastika, the Hammer and Sickle, the Rising Sun, the Dollar Sign, the Cross.

² See Lewinson & Zubin, *Handwriting Analysis*, King's Crown Press, N.Y., 1942.

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Others are less so—the jagged, angular writing that suggest combat, cutting, tearing; the hidden rope and dagger; the blots and drips of ink, like poison and bloodstains, in some writing; the hidden treble clef of the music-lover. Some symbolism is subtle—the receding left margin, making inner reservations; the flung-lance t-cross harpooning its victim; the whole writing back-slanting, as though resisting or reneging.

The interpretation of these symbols requires a process of analysis more or less as follows: First, all deviations from the model calligraphy the writer was originally taught in school, insofar as this can be determined, are noted. That requires a very substantial knowledge on the part of the analyst as to scripts and formats taught in different parts of the world at different times. Second, these and other symbolic deviations are evaluated in terms of the extensive lists of character indicators compiled in tabular form by generations of graphologists. Then the individual indicators are compared and sorted to form groups comprising for example those indicating persistence or lack thereof, aggressiveness or lack of it; and the picture that emerges is then checked for consistency.

A complete re-evaluation has to be made when major inconsistencies are detected or where confusion results. This inconsistency or confusion is generally due to the fact that a given set of peculiarities in handwriting will reflect the corresponding set of positive peculiarities in the writer only about two-thirds of the time, and in the other third the symbolism may be *inverted*, reflecting not the positive trait but a subconscious wish for the missing quality. A bold and massive general's handwriting sometimes comes from a Mickey Mouse of a man who would like to be a general but doesn't dare and hasn't the capacity. At times a complex mixture of direct, inverted, and wish symbols is present, and the graphologist is stuck with a tiresome cut-and-try process until he comes up with a consistent picture. It is no wonder that the charlatan and the dilettante, who don't do the required cross-checking and therefore should stick to simple handwritings, from time to time fall on these inconsistencies and are exposed. Unfortunately, people then blame the art, not the practitioners.

These are the mechanics of the interpretive process, but there also is an "intuitive" factor involved. There are so

many aspects of symbolism to consider more or less simultaneously that something like a computer is really needed to perform the drudgery of comparison; and I believe that the art, if it is ever to become a science, will have to have electronic support for the human brain. But frequently some analysts seem readily to understand specimens of writing that baffle others, and vice versa. Still others seem to interpret handwriting by way of some subconscious response of their own to the latticework of symbols they see, without knowing how they do it.

A notorious case in point is that of Roda Wieser, who once undertook to analyze the handwriting of hundreds of jailed criminals and then compared it with that of "honest" men (i.e., men not in jail!). To cap the comedy, she picked policemen as the "honest" men, apparently not realizing that she was actually only comparing the handwriting of *unsuccessful* criminals with that of a group no better or worse than other men involved in crime, but hardly ipso facto honest. Entangled in the semantic problem and her ignorance of criminology, Roda labored long and hard and produced the strange book listed in the bibliography. Yet she was an almost phenomenal interpretive handwriting analyst; she appears simply not to have known how she did it.

A Kindergarten Case

Let us look, by way of elementary illustration, at one segment of the symbol structure and something of its interpretation. We shall stick to "direct" interpretation only, since the "inversion" and "wish" aspects would confuse matters and are not essential to getting a grasp on principles. In fact, if the reader sticks to the direct approach and does a little study on the side, he can soon qualify for dilettantism and might even become a quack.

When we write a letter by hand on a blank sheet of paper, we enter as it were an open area; and as we write across this field, we move upward, downward, and incessantly forward and backward as well. These four directions and the zones they point to immediately involve a common or "cultural" symbolism. In our society the four have relatively uniform implications; take at random phrases like *high* ideals, *low* life, a *backward* child, a *progressive* firm. In writing, the way

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we behave with respect to these directions and how we distort our movements in these zones has a strong significance in individual symbolism. In interpreting the significance of these symbols the graphologist (as distinct from the charlatan, however well-read) spends hours and sometimes days matching up the various indicators to see how they jibe. He will study slant, pressure, the way of joining the letters, size of print, flow of the lines, speed of writing, extraneous symbols, etc., etc., etc., in each case building up a pyramid of data, which, if he is sufficiently competent, ultimately makes consistent sense. For the purpose of our illustration, we can only show a few fragments of the process.

In the specimen of Figure 1, the right margin goes further and further right and the left margin also slopes to the right. As the writer proceeds he strives to get closer and closer to the reader, ending up practically in his lap. The capitals and upper loops in this specimen show distinctly the writer's freedom of movement in the upper zones, above the line of writing, but note how repressed and hesitant he is in venturing below the line. We conclude that he is far more at home in the world of ideas and ideals than in material and animal activities. The letter-formations are extended toward the right, curtailed toward the left: the writer is in a hurry to get to his goal (or *away* from his origins, himself, his past, etc.). The whole slants upward and onward.

We thus have a small fragment of the giant composite picture we have to construct before we know what the fragments mean. The writer seems at this point to be an idea-man, idealist, or dreamer who is intent upon reaching the reader and careful to keep out of the mire, or else he is pretending to be that kind of person, or wishing he was, and moving full tilt.

Dear John
I feel that you and
I should get to know each
other better and that it is
to our best interest to see
that Mary gets the help she

FIGURE 1

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Figure 2 reproduces a charlatan's analysis (in this instance correct) of two specimens for one pair of traits—talkativeness-secretiveness. I choose this example not only because it deals with one of the easiest human traits to detect in handwriting and by personal contact, but also because application of these indicators is within the capabilities of the lay reader, who may wish to experiment a little on his own, by scanning the writing of persons he knows and whose coefficient of garrulity he knows. I feel reasonably safe in saying that if the reader rules out those specimens which show contradictory indications (such as large scrawly writing with closed and knotted o's and a's) he will soon discover that there is a high degree of correlation between a given writer's talkativeness and the indicators cited in Figure 2, and that the more indicators of either group there are present in a given specimen, the more marked the trait will be.

If the reader wishes rather to test out the effectiveness of some graphologist, what material should he be prepared to submit? At least several pages of work, if possible from different sittings, one at least bearing a signature. The writing should be on unruled paper in ink or good pencil, produced with an instrument that suits the writer and under writing conditions to which he is accustomed. Ball-point writing is anathema because the effort to control the flow from this atrocious instrument makes the pressure-friction pattern meaningless. The graphologist is entitled to know the writer's age, sex, national origin, and profession, since he cannot tell these facts from the specimens, and they are invaluable interpretive aids. An "effeminate" handwriting produced by a male, for example, or the "masculine" writing done by some women must be examined with care to determine how much of the masculinity or femininity is real and how much is affectation, secret-wish expression, etc.

At this point I rest my Introduction to Graphology, hoping at least to have disabused the eager convert of the notion that he can soon and easily train himself to detect other people's secrets, and to have quieted the fear of exposure that may be haunting others. My object was to persuade the sincere skeptic that he cannot simply say "It can't be done," and to induce the man who has limited-access assessment prob-

I am going to town
in the morning is there
anything I can bring
you? We are not yet

Exhibit A

I am going to town in the morning
Is there anything I can bring you?
We are not yet settled in the country but

Exhibit B

- A. An extreme case of talkativeness: The writing is large and sprawly, the a's and o's are open. The words tend to "grow" as they flood the page, ignoring the right margin and crashing into the reader. The writing is slanted heavily forward; letters run into each other; the writing slants upward; the capital letters are large but not meticulously formed; t-crosses are well to the right of the t-stem, indicating haste; the writing is broad, heavy and brutal.
- B. A case of acute close-mouth: The writing is small and refined; o's and a's are closed and knotted; t's are hooked to the left. The left and right margins retreat. The slant is vertical and, in some instances, backwards. Lower loops are close-set and one is sealed shut.

FIGURE 2

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lems (and some of our people really have them!) to explore further.

Scope of Intelligence Application

We have a limited-access problem when we have to uncover the character and capabilities of a person who 1) is dead, and so no longer available for questioning, 2) is unwilling to talk and be tested, 3) is out of reach of personal interview, maybe behind the "curtain," 4) is untruthful in his answers to tests and questionnaires, 5) cannot be formally tested and assessed because of expense, time factors, or security considerations, 6) is not supposed to know we are assessing him. Where full access is possible, a battery of tests, particularly of the real-situation type used in OSS, and a careful study of the subject's past performance and reputation will give as reliable a result as we can expect at this stage of our knowledge of man and yield something like a scientific picture of his inner workings. But where access is limited, graphology offers a not unsatisfactory substitute.

In most cases, competent graphologists can supply reliable estimates on the following important character-traits:

Disposition to talk too much. There are, to be sure, some people who can talk much and betray little, but by and large the man who talks a lot lets many a thing slip out of his mouth.

Emotional stability under stress. People who crack easily show cracks in their calligraphy.

Agressiveness, resistance, and tenacity.

Attitude toward money; ability to control the handling of it. (*Not* ability to invest it.)

Disposition to deceive, prevaricate, evade, double-talk (as distinct from capacity to succeed in it).

Ambivalence, *i.e.*, disposition to take both sides of an issue; to have divided loyalties.

Inclination toward opportunism, *i.e.*, to approach moral questions and matters of principle on the what's-in-it-for-me-I-have-to-make-a-living basis.

Desire for power, predominance, prominence.

Willingness to follow the lead of others.

Rebelliousness, crankiness, indisposition to conform, insubordination.

Recklessness and rashness.

Important changes in character (by comparison of present with past calligraphies).

The graphologist can also provide reasonably good estimates on certain capabilities:

Capacity for abstract thinking and logic.

"Diplomacy," ability to deal with people.

Powers of observation.

Imagination.

Then there are a few characteristics on which a graphologist can make a good educated guess:

Sex difficulties. Their existence is often detectable, but their nature may not be.

Disposition to engage in criminal activities, i.e., violation of laws the validity of which the subject acknowledges.

Disposition to engage in violence against persons. (It is important to note that these dispositions may never be overtly expressed either because of fear or other restraining factors or for mere lack of opportunity, provocation, or need.)

Graphological techniques also have medical applications. Some calligraphies bear the warning signs of cancer and circulatory ailments; others the signs of incipient mental illness and nervous breakdown.

There are certain things a graphologist can *not* tell:

Sex of writer.

Age of writer (in chronological terms, as distinct from level of emotional maturity).

Mechanical ability or other special skills.

General level of ability to perform acts to which the subject may be disposed. (For example, subject may be strongly disposed to lie and evade, but inept at putting lies across.)

"Fortune" or future in store for the writer.

Past history of work, crime, etc. (although very cogent estimates can be made as to cultural background from the type and level of calligraphy).

I have the impression that most people with serious limited-access assessment problems would be very glad to get some of the information outlined above about the people they handle

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at a distance. It is an odd coincidence that the graphologist can shed most light on precisely those character traits which are of significance in clandestine operations. The art has thus a peculiar potential in the half-world of espionage and counterespionage, where paranoid and split personalities abound and frustrated executives are the order of the day.

The Dry Run

I hope that there will soon be pressure to resolve the key question—can any person claiming to be a graphologist come up consistently with reasonably good character descriptions? If any one at all can do it, then it can be done. If after all these years no one can be found who can do it then it cannot (for our purposes) be done. It would be all too easy to devise a proving problem to show it can *not* be done, just as it is possible to prove mathematically that a bumble-bee cannot fly. The best way to get a meaningless result would be to tie it into the strange pattern of abstruse psychological jargon which has of late come to infest some quarters of the psychological world and which reflects what I believe to be the sheer delusion that any group of men is able to formulate scientific conceptions of the qualities of human character. Man is, after all, just emerging from the Sea of Ignorance and cannot at this point comprehend so simple a force as gravity. He is hardly in a position to claim to understand the most complex of natural phenomena, man himself. Practical executives want simple, practical descriptions of character-traits without implied moral judgments or technical jargon, and those with limited-access assessment problems are willing to settle for a good deal less.

I would like to recommend the following specific procedure for the proving problem that will eventually have to be run somewhere:

It should be controlled, and the final judgment made, by practical executives, not psychologists, psychiatrists, assessment men, or graphologists. They should be men who need help in assessment problems, and one or two should be executives handling espionage agents. In this matter, neither the graphologists nor the psychological-psychiatric fraternity are disinterested parties. The latter, rightly or wrongly, see in the graphologist what the

doctor sees in the chiropractor—a quack. To what extent this is due to vested interest I cannot presume to judge; but I rather feel it touches upon the Achilles' heel of the entire psyche-testing fraternity, the fact that man is not now competent to assess man scientifically.

A minimum of fifty sets of handwriting specimens should be secured, at least meeting the specifications and including the auxiliary data prescribed on page 37. They should bear false signatures and be written in ignorance of the fact that they are to be used for any purpose other than communication. The writers must be men whose character is a matter of record, not established by some other series of tests. (Famous men cannot be used; graphologists know their handwritings.) The greatest precautions should be taken both to prevent the writers from knowing what is afoot and to prevent the analysts from learning the identity of the writers.

It should be required that the analyses be couched in common everyday descriptive language, with jargon and technical terminology ruled out. They should be short and to the point, and exclude such ambiguities as "This man is basically honest and sincere, but is capable of theft and deception under pressure." A proper statement on these points would run something like one of the following: "The writer will say what he thinks as long as this is safe." "The writer will say what he thinks and take chances to do so, but does not speak recklessly." "The writer will say what he thinks, no matter what the risk." "The writer will steal anything not nailed down." "The writer will not steal under ordinary conditions." "The writer has strong moral scruples against stealing and would rather starve." These are definitive statements with which the layman can come to grips.

Each graphologist tested should be required to state what specific character-traits and capabilities (cf. pages 38-39) he can identify and describe, thus avoiding the danger of pushing him into having to deliver something he cannot. None should be required or permitted to go off the deep end and try to describe a character at large; they should stick to the specific character-traits each claims he can de-

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lineate and let us assume that the rest of the picture will either be deducible from these main traits or "average."

Each graphologist should have the right to reject 20 percent of the specimens if he wishes. We do not want to force him into the educated-guess area, and it will also be most interesting to see whether they all reject the same 20 percent.

Some graphologists may wish to operate as a team, and that would seem as allowable as any other team exercise. But the tests must not be aimed at groups of graphologists; the purpose is to test the performance of individual graphologists without regard to affiliation.

Some European graphologists of stature should be included, as the art is far more advanced in Europe.

A few amateurs should be permitted to participate. Of these I should like to be one.

The content, procedure, and results of these tests should be circulated in the intelligence community.

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