

Rorschach's ink blot test is regarded by many as the clearest window yet found into man's innermost sanctum of personality. For theoreticians and researchers Rorschach did much more, produced a grandiose conception of man based on totally new psychologic concepts.

EARLY LIFE. Hermann Rorschach was born on November 8, 1884 in Zürich. His father was a kindly self-effacing, sickly art instructor, his mother a sociable and sweet woman. For generations back, both his father's and his mother's families were respected craftsmen and farmers in the tiny hamlet of Arbon.

When Hermann was two, the Rorschachs moved to picturesque Schaffhausen on the Rhine, where a sister, Anna, and a brother, Paul, were born. His mother died suddenly when Hermann was ten, and for two years he suffered deeply under a succession of unsympathetic housekeepers. Then his father married a young sister-in-law, who became an adequate stepmother.

At the local high school, one of the best in Switzerland, he acquired the prophetic nickname of Kleck (ink blot), probably because of his artistic bent. When Hermann was 18, his father died, leaving him head of the family.

MEDICAL SCHOOL. At 20 Hermann started his medical education, studying at Neuchâtel, Bern, Berlin, and Zürich, finishing in the short time of five years.

During his first year, Hermann attended an autopsy during which the examiner sectioned the cadaver's brain into thin slices. That night, Hermann dreamed that his own brain was being sectioned in the same way; he actually "felt" each slice falling away. When he awoke, he puzzled about the mechanisms that caused the dream: this was Rorschach's first step toward

psychiatry. He never forgot either the dream or the sensation it had caused, years later he used the dream in his doctoral dissertation.

Dedicated to psychiatry Rorschach spent the last semesters of his schooling in Zürich, where the famed psychiatrists Eugene Bleuler and Carl G. Jung were integrating Jung's Association Test with Freud's revolutionary concepts, applying the new psychoanalytic method to the study of psychotics.

While still at medical school, Rorschach met an old Russian refugee who so stimulated his enthusiasm for Tolstoy's works that he started to learn Russian. Soon, with the help of Zürich's large colony of anti-Czarist emigrées and revolutionaries, he was fluent in the language. During his last year at school, he became engaged to Olga Stempelin, a Russian fellow student from Kazan.

INTERN. After a resplendent Greek-Orthodox wedding and a brief honeymoon in Kazan, Hermann settled down to a four year internship at the Münsterlingen Mental Hospital, a former cloister.

Patients and staff were fond of Dr. Rorschach, and his extraordinarily neat, extensive, and clever case records are still used as models at Münsterlingen.

While at Münsterlingen, Rorschach completed his doctoral dissertation on "Reflex Hallucinations and Kindred Phenomena" under the supervision of Professor Bleuler. He studied the manner in which a sensory perception of one type (optic, acoustic, kinesthetic) is transmuted into another type: in the "autopsy dream" the original visual perception of falling slices was transformed into a kinesthetic sensation; a toothache during his childhood became a musical tune; a painting turned into a feeling of motion.

In addition to his medical work and research studies, the young intern found time for a short histopathologic report on a brain tumor, and for his first dabblings with ink blots. With Konrad Gehring, an old friend and a high school art

Ink Blot Investigator



Top, ink drawing by Justinus Kerner captioned "Three butterflies in one butterfly." Above, ink blot by Szymon Hens, pioneer diagnostician.

teacher, he analyzed the responses of students to a variety of ink blots, trying to discover whether gifted students had more fantasy than others. This study, done sporadically and without systematic notes, was never published.

RUSSIA. In 1913, Rorschach and his wife emigrated to Russia where the young physician, now a full-fledged psychiatrist, found a well paid position at the Krukovo Sanatorium, catering to rich and noble neurotics.

Seven months later, Rorschach was back in Switzerland, at the Waldau Mental Hospital as an underpaid resident. According to some, homesickness ended the Russian interlude, but he most probably left because there was no time or occasion for research.

Rorschach now seriously undertook his studies of comparative religion and sect-psychology. This had actually started several years before when he examined Anton Binggeli, an hysteric religionist. His followers worshiped Binggeli's genitalia, used his urine for reli-

gious rituals, believed that intercourse with the leader exorcised devils out of possessed virgins.* Rorschach found in the sect's history an unbroken line of religiously aberrant groups extending to the 12th century. Disciples, for generations, came from a few sect-prone families, mostly weavers, living along an interracial border line, and in a region where religious zeal was high.

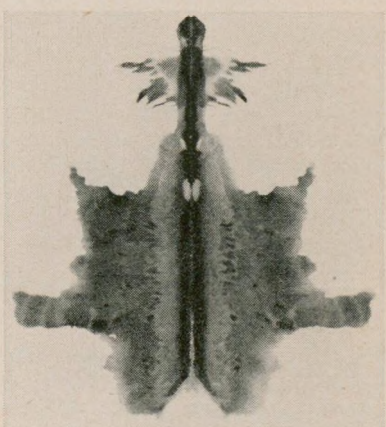
Rorschach discovered that sectarian leaders are of two types: hysterics who draw their relatively uninspiring credos from personal neurotic complexes; schizophrenic leaders who draw their electrifying teachings from the deep unconscious universal archetypes. Some leaders are passive, are pushed or elected into position; others push themselves.

Needing money, Rorschach, in 1915, accepted the better paid assistant directorship of the Krombach Mental Hospital at Herisau, an institution with university connection, but without interns, residents, social workers, or secretaries for the 300 patients under the care of only two psychiatrists. From here Rorschach published various minor articles and book reviews; in 1919 he was elected vice president of the new Swiss Psychoanalytic Society.

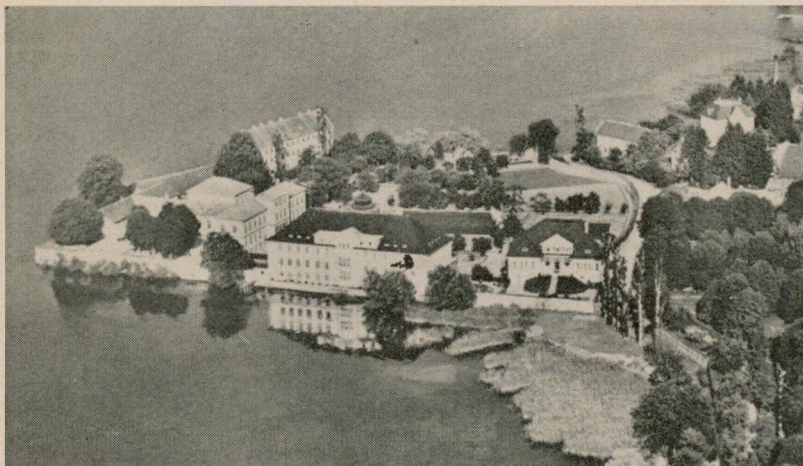
The patients loved him. Although he found it increasingly tedious, he organized games and theatrical soirées. To amuse his patients he bought a monkey, then made extensive notes on the psychotics' reactions to the beast's antics. He used psychoanalysis, although he refused to undergo his own analysis.

Rorschach's hobbies were carpentry (he built toys for his two children), Russian literature, hiking, swimming. Rorschach all his life maintained an active interest in art; he did not paint but sketched and drew exceedingly well, especially faces, human expressions and movements. He often encouraged patients to paint or

*Binggeli was eventually jailed for "exorcising" his own daughter.



Top to bottom: Rorschach test plates numbers I, IV, VII, VI, V, the black and white plates. Bottom plate is one of Rorschach's original experimental plates, rejected as less effective in favor of plate above it. Remaining five plates are blots of color combinations.



Münsterlingen mental hospital where Rorschach wrote his dissertation "Reflex Hallucinations and Kindred Phenomena," first experimented with ink blot tests, collaborating with Konrad Gehring.

draw, used their output in his studies.

Toward the end of 1917, Rorschach took up the ink blot test in earnest. Within three years he had selected ten standard blots out of some 60, had worked out a scoring method, established statistical norms for the basic parameters, using the 300 patients at his disposal, and more than 100 normal individuals. He validated his findings by comparing them with other test results in his subjects, created a new interpretation of psychodynamics, wrote *Psychodiagnostik* and saw it published in June, 1921.

By February, 1922, Rorschach considered *Psychodiagnostik* obsolete, embarked on a much enlarged and somewhat different interpretation. By April 2, Hermann Rorschach was dead; for a week, he had suffered from abdominal pains, but had received no treatment; by the time he was admitted to the Herisau hospital as an emergency case, it was too late; the diffuse peritonitis with jaundice was inoperable, and Rorschach died within 24 hours.

THE MAN. Rorschach, according to some was a romantic genius, one who achieves his *magnum opus* early in life, with much intensity, usually leaving it more or less incomplete, a grandiose design rather than a solid structure.

The romantic genius works with tremendous concentration and speed on many projects at once; he is like a blazing firework.

Many romantic geniuses burn out early in life from sheer creative exhaustion, are then dangerously prone to depressions, from whatever source. Rorschach, though outwardly serene, was deeply troubled shortly before his death. Routine work took too much time from his research, but he was too old, and needed too much money to return to a university-connected institution where he would have time to work.

Private practice in psychiatry and psychoanalysis was, in 1922, financially too precarious for a family man. Further, *Psychodiagnostik*, lacking academic backing, was ignored in Switzerland; in Germany it was considered a part of the despised "psychologic engineers," those who applied psychologic principles in business and industry. Under such pressures it is possible that Rorschach, a romantic genius at the critical age of exhaustion, subconsciously suppressed the symptoms of his illness until it was too late.

INK BLOT HISTORY. Leonardo da Vinci (1452-1519) made apprentices draw lifelike scenes suggested to them in the chance patterns of a patch of mold, or a smudge of

paint. With extraordinary insight, he told his pupils: "All that is good and inferior in you will appear in the corresponding parts of your figures."

In 1857, Justinus Kerner, pioneer German psychiatrist, published *Klecksographien*, a series of ink blots accompanied by the sad verses they had inspired to the author. In passing, Dr. Kerner noted some ill-defined psychologic tie between the shape of the blot and his own response to it.

In 1895, Alfred Binet, the inventor of the intelligence quotient, suggested that ink blots might be useful in measuring "creative imagination." A few years later, Harvard psychologist George V. Dearborn proposed, but did not demonstrate, that a person's reaction to an ink blot might be related to his social and mental capacities and traits.

A decade later another psychologist, George Whipple, published the first standardized ink blots, noted the speed with which a subject formed a response, the degree, number, complexity, and originality of the percepts, and the age and sex of the subject. In 1916, an English investigator first used colored ink blots, and noticed that some patients formed their percept from the whole figure, others from parts of it. It is not known whether Rorschach knew of these experiments.

The immediate stimulus that started Rorschach's ink blot test was the thesis of Szymon Hens, one of Bleuler's students, who had investigated the reactions of 1200 subjects to a variety of ink blots, attempting to discover a diagnostic test for certain psychoses. He found none, but mentioned parenthetically that some patients responded to the whole blot, others to parts of it.

THE WORK. Rorschach classified his subjects' answers into four groups: (1) the approach, whether whole or in detail; (2) the quality, the form, movement, and color of the response; (3) the content, whether human, animal, anatomic,

or inanimate; (4) originality of the response. Each response corresponded to some intellectual or psychic character, so that the final balance sheet represented the subject's whole mind.

Since Rorschach's basic work, hundreds of sums, differences, quotients, ratios, and percentages in the balance sheet have been calculated.

Rorschach's real fame stems from his discovery of the *Erlebnistypus* (roughly, the state of mind), and its psychologic interpretation; the test reveals the *Erlebnistypus* through the number and ratio of movement to color^o responses. In a movement response the subject changes the shape he perceives in the ink blot into an idea associated with a motion, something that the subject has or would like or dislike to do; it measures the degree of self-interest and preoccupation, i.e., introversion.

These responses probably occur in the cortex: color responses are autonomic and indicate moods (affects), and the subject's reaction

^oA movement response is any answer that indicates actual or potential motion (e.g., a man lifting); a color response is one that is based on the different colors of the test plates (a red hat).

PSYCHODIAGNOSTIK

METHODIK UND ERGEBNISSE EINES WAHRNEHMUNGSDIAGNOSTISCHEN EXPERIMENTS
(DEUTENLASSEN VON ZUFALLSFORMEN)

VON
Dr. med. HERMANN RORSCHACH

Mit dem zugehörigen Test
bestehend aus zehn teils farbigen Tafeln



1921

ERNST BIRCHER VERLAG IN BERN UND LEIPZIG

"Psychodiagnostik," Rorschach's text on association responses to ambiguous stimuli.

to the world, his extraversion. The combination of cerebral introversion with autonomic extraversion determines the individual's character at the moment of the test.

Rorschach noted that the *Erlebnistypus* changed with age, with events, with stages of development, and with the progress of psychiatric treatment.

A graph of the variations of the *Erlebnistypus* during a man's life would indicate his entire mental existence. Rorschach dreamed of a vast chronologic and cross-cultural study of the *Erlebnistypus*, and unsuccessfully asked Dr. Albert Schweitzer to administer his test to the natives of Lambaréné.

POST-RORSCHACH. After Rorschach's death the test lay largely forgotten for about 15 years. A few enthusiasts, mostly former friends and colleagues gradually elaborated the clinical aspects. Shading responses, they found, indicated anxiety or fear; color shock (i.e., any abnormal reaction when the patient sees a colored plate) generally indicated a neurosis.

The *Rorschach Research Exchange*, the first journal devoted to the test, appeared in 1936; its contributors three years later founded the International Rorschach Institute, later brought out the irregularly appearing *Rorschachiana*, and the monthly *Journal of Projective Techniques*.

During World War II, U.S. Army psychiatrists developed a Mass Rorschach Test that projected the ink blots on a screen, while the subjects recorded their responses on a chart. Much less sensitive than the normal test, the Mass Rorschach did weed out the majority of the unfit.

VALIDATIONS. One thousand Boston juvenile delinquents took Rorschach tests given by three different technicians, and were independently examined and diagnosed by a psychiatrist. The test results were sent to New York and evaluated by two Rorschach analysts; only six of the 1000 blind Rorschach-derived diagnoses were radically different from the diagnoses



Dr. Rorschach. At first ignored, his ink blot test is now a basic tool in psychiatry.

made by the psychiatrist, indicating the validity of the test in diagnosis.

Rorschachians stress that the test cannot be counterfeited: one experimenter gave the test to two classes of psychology students familiar with general testing procedure, though not with the Rorschach. Students in one class were told to "slant" their answers so that they would appear in a good light, those in the other class were told to try for a "bad" impression: neither group succeeded at all, and no "slanting" effect could be found.

No one today doubts the value of the Rorschach test for diagnostic and clinical work, and thousands of psychologists and psychiatrists use it routinely. Each month new uses or new interpretations are described, and old ones modified; no two experts agree on every point, especially about the deeper psychodynamic meaning of the various responses.

All experts stress that good use of the test requires extensive psychologic knowledge, deep insight, long practice.

Today, Rorschach tests are given for clinical purposes only. No one so far seems to have enough time or genius for Hermann Rorschach's grandiose plan to use the test as a tool for measuring the nature of man.

END