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## **Robert Saudek's Graphology in the Light of Fritz Mauthner's Critique of Language**

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### **Abstract**

Robert Saudek, a Czech graphologist, journalist, diplomat, playwright, and novelist, was heavily influenced in his youth by Fritz Mauthner's critique of language. Saudek later became a pioneer in the field of psychological graphology. In this article, I examine the impact of Mauthner's critique on Saudek's work and evaluate whether Saudek's approach to graphology aligns with Mauthner's ideas. I argue that, although Saudek's graphology is rooted in Mauthner's critique of experimental psychology, there remains scope for further development in the field of psychological graphology, centering on the analysis of language. With this in mind, I compare Saudek's method and contemporary conceptual metaphor theory. I further suggest that Saudek's extensive use of the autographs of well-known figures follows a method of working from examples, or specimens, that is not uncommon in the philosophy of science. Based on these findings, I propose a way of understanding Saudek's graphology that challenges its characterization as a pseudoscience.

**Keywords:** Robert Saudek, Fritz Mauthner, graphology, critique of language, conceptual metaphor, exemplar

Therefore, the *simple lines of the hand* along with the *tone* and *range* of the *voice* as the individual determinateness of *language*—these too again acquire through the hand a steadier existence than they do through the voice, specifically in *writing*, namely, in its particularity as *handwriting*—all of these are an *expression* of the inner, so that as *simple externality*, the expression again relates itself as an *inner vis-à-vis* the *diverse externality* of action and fate.

Hegel, *Phenomenology of Spirit*, §316 (Pinkard's trans., emphases original)

Graphology, the study of handwriting and its relation to personality, has long been dismissed as pseudoscience. However, thanks to endorsements from prominent figures such as Donald Trump, it has recently become the focus of renewed public attention.<sup>1</sup> This article aims to examine the historical status of graphology as a respectable scientific discipline and, in particular, to evaluate Robert Saudek's contributions to the field.

Robert Saudek (1880–1935) was a Czech graphologist, journalist, diplomat, playwright, and novelist. In his youth, he was heavily influenced by the works of Otto Weininger and the philosopher and author Fritz Mauthner, both of whom he discussed in his collection *Billige Weisheiten* ("Cheap Wisdoms") in 1907. Saudek's first meeting with Mauthner, which took place in Berlin in 1903, led to a period of extensive correspondence between the two authors.<sup>2</sup> From 1920 onward, Saudek's focus gradually shifted to graphology. His major graphological work, *The Psychology of Handwriting*, was published in

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<sup>1</sup> For an overview of the current state of graphology, see Trubek (2017).

<sup>2</sup> Topor (2011) provides an in-depth account of the relationship between Mauthner and Saudek.

1925, following which he pursued a successful academic career in the field that lasted until his untimely death in 1935.

In this article, I examine Saudek's reception of Mauthner's critique of language and evaluate the affinities between Saudek's later graphological project and Mauthner's ideas, as interpreted by Saudek. Rather than focus on the question of whether Saudek correctly understood these ideas, I shall supplement my discussion of Saudek's graphology by attending to those aspects of Mauthner's critique that Saudek does not discuss explicitly, particularly those pertaining to the metaphorical nature of language. To fully understand Saudek's graphological project, it is also crucial to note those instances in which he is aware that his interpretation of Mauthner's ideas differs from or deliberately alters the scope of the latter's critique. Saudek himself claims to take a more rigorous approach than Mauthner, stating that he is "more Catholic than the Pope"<sup>3</sup> in this respect.<sup>4</sup>

Mauthner does not address graphology directly in his major work *Beiträge zu einer Kritik der Sprache* (1901–1902). However, one of the central arguments in the first volume is for the impossibility of psychology. Given that graphology was understood as a branch of psychology, and was indeed often called "psychological graphology," it is reasonable to suppose that Mauthner would have understood graphology to be a similarly impossible pursuit. Moreover, Mauthner's long entry on graphology in his *Wörterbuch* (1910) is full of disdainful remarks (which I shall discuss below). Saudek's reception of Mauthner's works, meanwhile, is largely positive, although references to Mauthner become very scarce and tangential in Saudek's later graphological texts. While this might suggest that Saudek

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<sup>3</sup> "Als Leser der Sprachkritik bin ich päpstlicher geworden als der Kritikerpapst selbst" (Saudek 1907, p. 44). All translations from Saudek's essay "Die Sprachkritik" as well as from Mauthner's works are mine.

<sup>4</sup> Reflecting on the master–student relationship, Saudek (1907, p. 21) remarks that the student sees the world through the master's eyes, although he does not state explicitly that this applies to his reception of Mauthner.

abandoned the central arguments of Mauthner's critique in his later works, I wish to argue—contrary to this impression—that that critique remains fundamental to Saudek's graphology and that there is scope for a psychological graphology within Mauthner's critical project.

The discussion here is divided into two main parts. The first outlines Saudek's reception of Mauthner's critique, while the second is devoted to Saudek's graphological project. In the conclusion, I look beyond the specific claims of Mauthner's critique and instead focus on the more general question of the scientific status of Saudek's graphology.

### **I. Saudek's reception of Mauthner's critique of language**

In this section, I will lay out the fundamental tenets of Mauthner's critique of language that are relevant to Saudek's graphological project. These can be divided into three categories. First, I will concentrate on those of Mauthner's ideas that Saudek appropriated (1). I will consider these concepts through the lens of Saudek's understanding and reception of them. I claim, but cannot prove in detail here, that Saudek's appropriation of Mauthner's critique is mostly faithful but highly selective. I highlight where Saudek explicitly departs from Mauthner. The second and third categories comprise those of Mauthner's ideas that are not explicitly addressed by Saudek but respectively (2) support or (3) are in tension with his graphological project.

Saudek, following Mauthner, characterizes language in mostly negative terms as something that can deceive its users. Language is a veil (*Schleier*), a curse (*Fluche*), guilt (*Schuld*), a weakness (*Schwäche*), a delusion (*Wahn*), violence (*Gewalt*), and a narcotic (*Narkotikum*).<sup>5</sup> It creates confused ideas and representations. Language is impoverished but

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<sup>5</sup> See Saudek (1907, pp. 8ff).

cunning, and it tricks the people who use it and have grown to believe in it. Its grammar is the result of arbitrary evolutionary and historical processes, much like the fact that we possess the faculties of sight and hearing. Language imposes upon us its epistemic delusions. Saudek employs an unusual German term that does not appear in Mauthner: *aufoktroziert* (Saudek 1907, p. 9). Strictly speaking, this is ungrammatical: *oktrozieren* is an outdated term for *aufzwingen*, which means “impose”; the prefix *auf* in *aufoktrozieren* is therefore superfluous or pleonastic. This idiosyncrasy may be attributable to the fact that Saudek was not a native German speaker. Alternatively, he may have intended to emphasize the force with which language imposes its delusions: *aufoktrozieren* would, on this account, mean something like “im-impose” or “superimpose.”

The concern of both Mauthner and Saudek is that accidental grammatical categories suggest or impose necessary philosophical categories upon language users, and that this is unwarranted. Their critique of language is, therefore, a critique of the way in which language entails the tacit acceptance of these categories.

Following Kant, Mauthner argues that language expresses only subjective representations (*ibid.*, p. 24). Language can refer only to appearances and never to things as they are, that is, to nature. But if, as Kant also understood matters, “nature” means the existence of things determined by laws, then, of course, what language imposes is the form of such laws, or what Kant calls the “categories.” One can use language to explain appearances and their connections, but not to explain things as they are. To project such an explanation onto the thing itself is to produce a delusion. In this way, Mauthner’s critique remains within the Kantian framework, but it adds the insight that epistemological categories are based on linguistic ones.

However, Saudek, following Mauthner, also attributes a positive role to language that will prove central to his graphological project. This consists in his observation that language stores within itself historical information, so that language is the memory of mankind (ibid., p. 13). To explain how language stores historical information, Saudek (ibid., pp. 13–14) adapts Mauthner’s seminal “ladder analogy.” Many philosophers have employed the ladder analogy in various ways, most notably Kierkegaard and Wittgenstein, the latter of whom may have been influenced by Mauthner.<sup>6</sup> Mauthner’s description and use of the ladder analogy is as follows: with each new rung that is grasped as one climbs a ladder, the lowest rung is pushed underground, and so the height of the ladder remains constant. That which is pushed underground is seemingly forgotten, but is still preserved in language.<sup>7</sup>

Saudek’s reception of Mauthner’s ladder analogy is, however, one-sided. For Mauthner, the analogy also has a negative or destructive aspect.<sup>8</sup> This aspect is expressed in the following remark: “I must destroy the language behind me and in front of me and within me from step to step, so I must smash every rung of the ladder by stepping on it.”<sup>9</sup> This destructive aspect goes back to the analogy’s Pyrrhonian roots (see Sluga 2004). Moreover, it has received a lot of attention because it is closer to Wittgenstein’s famous employment of the ladder analogy. The issue is whether a past rung is actually destroyed, or instead pushed underground. If the ladder is destroyed, dismantled, or thrown away, then critique of language is essentially a self-critique. What is dismantled is language itself (Pisano 2016, p. 120); language is turned against itself, annihilated, in a process of self-undoing, self-negation

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<sup>6</sup> Weiler (1970, p. 299) argues that Wittgenstein must have read at least the opening pages of Mauthner’s *Beiträge*, where the ladder analogy is presented.

<sup>7</sup> The idea that knowledge is stored in language stems from Wilhelm von Humboldt; see Weiler (1970) for a detailed discussion of this. Saudek employs the “underground” metaphor, which recalls Freud’s subconscious, on several occasions.

<sup>8</sup> These two aspects of the ladder analogy express the double-faced character of language as discussed above.

<sup>9</sup> “So muss ich die Sprache hinter mir und vor mir und in mir vernichten von Schritt zu Schritt, so muss ich jede Sprosse der Leiter zertrümmern, indem ich sie betrete” (Mauthner 1901, I, p. 2).

(Weller 2018, pp. 26, 31). If a rung (a particular conception of language) is destroyed, it is forever gone and cannot be used again. In contrast, if a rung is only pushed underground, it can be brought back to light.<sup>10</sup>

I want to argue that this positive appropriation of Mauthner's ladder analogy has a crucial impact on Saudek's scientific method. In order to extract the knowledge stored in language, one must, of course, study that language. This kind of investigation of language can be contrasted with the methods of scientific experiment<sup>11</sup> (or, one might say, inductive methods in general). We can thus either study language itself or study what language is about, i.e., what it refers to. Both are forms of empirical investigation, because, as we shall shortly see, Saudek's account of apperception does not allow any other method. But within this empirical framework we can distinguish between linguistic investigations and scientific experiments. One does not set up experiments to investigate language, except in what we today call "thought experiments." Saudek would probably refuse contemporary experimental philosophy in favor of what its proponents call "armchair investigation." As we shall see, his graphological project is based on such a method.

Saudek prioritizes the method of language (or, we might say, of linguistic investigation)<sup>12</sup> over the method of (scientific) experiment on the grounds that nature is inherently deaf and mute; it does not reply to the scientist's questions (ibid., p. 20). Every

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<sup>10</sup> The question of what it means to throw away the ladder is one of the most discussed issues in Wittgenstein scholarship. Wittgenstein maintains that the ladder that was thrown away must be recognized as nonsensical. The "traditional" reading of Wittgenstein's *Tractatus* claims that it is illuminating nonsense. The "resolute" reading claims, by contrast, that the ladder consisting of the sentences of the *Tractatus* must be regarded as plain nonsense after it has been thrown away. (See Read and Lavery (2011) for an overview of this debate.) If the discarded ladder is illuminating, we can gain some insights from it. Plain nonsense is akin to complete destruction.

<sup>11</sup> See Saudek (1907, pp. 15ff).

<sup>12</sup> The term "linguistic investigation" is usually used in a broader sense than I intend here. I refer to Saudek's method of investigating language in order to reveal knowledge stored in it as the "method of language" or "linguistic investigations."

experiment ultimately reveals the inner nature of the scientist, and this nature is sedimented in the language they use. Hence, the method of experiment is a form of linguistic investigation in disguise.

Language is double-faced: it is a source of deception imposed (*aufoktroiert*) upon us, while also, at the same time, being the source of the knowledge that is buried in it. Saudek faces the task of extracting this buried knowledge without falling prey to language's deceptions.

With regard to the nature of the knowledge that is expressed *in* language, we may say that this is the knowledge that is supposed to be revealed by experiments—in contrast to the knowledge that is sedimented or buried *in* language, and which is to be revealed through linguistic investigation. Saudek is clear: language expresses only our sensory perceptions (*sinnliche Wahrnehmungen*) (ibid., p. 22).<sup>13</sup> That is, language consists of words that are memory signs referring to past sensory perceptions—for instance, the word “chair” refers to one's past sensory perceptions of chairs.

Only a very few words refer to single perceptions; most refer to many past perceptions (for instance, all the chairs that one has seen). Saudek's approach to this problem is to lump together similar perceptions. In general, this is the task of a synthetizing apperception: a perception of perceptions. However, Saudek conceives apperception empirically, as “the dumb comparative apperception” (ibid., p. 22), which merely compares new perceptions with the memory of past perceptions. In Kantian terms, such apperception is only reproductive, and not productive. As such, Saudek's critical project remains bound to

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<sup>13</sup> The term “perception” (*sinnliche Wahrnehmung*) is meant in its Kantian sense.

an empiricist epistemology, which he confirms with his slogan: “There is nothing in words that was not in the senses before.”<sup>14</sup>

Viewed through this lens, it becomes clear that linguistic investigation and scientific experiment (language and experiment, as Saudek puts it) are variants of the same comparative method. Both methods are based on the comparison of actual experiences with (one’s memory of) past experiences. In the case of a linguistic investigation, this comparison is made within the cognizing subject (who stays in their “armchair,” so to speak), whereas in the case of a scientific experiment, the subject (that is, the scientist) compares different outcomes. Both methods are therefore rooted in the subject’s apperception.

The ultimate dependence of all knowledge on the subject here is not surprising, given that Saudek’s epistemology is based on Kant’s transcendental framework, in which the ultimate synthesis is performed by the transcendental subject. For Saudek, the decisive advantage of the linguistic over the experimental method is that it has a far broader empirical basis. This is the crux of Saudek’s argument against the psychology and biology of his time, which, he claims, are based on “a few assorted biological observations” (ibid., p. 23).

To return to our central question, then: How can we extract knowledge from a language without being deceived by it? Mauthner’s critique, which Saudek accepts, holds for any philosophical project, and suggests the impossibility of any future philosophy. Saudek’s answer to this crucial question is to turn to psychology. However, a psychology based on the experimental method would be similarly doomed to fail, on account of its poor empirical

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<sup>14</sup> “Es ist nichts in den Worten, was nicht in den Sinnen war” (ibid., p. 24).

basis.<sup>15</sup> What remains is psychology based on the linguistic method, and it is this approach, broadly speaking, that Saudek develops in his graphological project.

Saudek maintains that Mauthner's critique does not apply to what he calls "future psychology" (ibid., p. 28), which, as we already know, is a psychology based on language—that is, on the method of linguistic investigation. The fundamental point of Mauthner's critique is that language imposes its contingent structures on its subject matter, and especially on metaphysics. If language investigates itself, however, no such fallacious transposition takes place. Furthermore, for this to be the case, it is not necessary to remain within linguistics, that is, knowledge *about* language; rather, we can turn to the knowledge stored *in* language (which goes beyond knowledge about language). In Saudek's theory, this stored knowledge is about our inner experiences, our inner world (and also about the ethical imperative, although that is not our present concern). This knowledge thus belongs to the domain of psychology.

In my reconstruction, Saudek is making two points: first, that the linguistic investigation of language itself does not impose any delusions upon us; and second, that linguistic investigation can yield knowledge about our inner experiences—in other words, psychological knowledge. Saudek's conclusion is that a future psychology based on linguistic investigation (as opposed to experimentation) will escape the terms of Mauthner's critique, and he bases his future graphological project on these considerations. Our task is now to evaluate whether his project meets this expectation.

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<sup>15</sup> Mauthner argues for the impossibility of psychology in the first volume of his *Beiträge*, in which he writes: "Es gibt keine Psychologie, weil wir für innere Vorgänge keine wissenschaftliche Terminologie besitzen" ("There is no psychology, because we have no scientific terminology for mental phenomena") (Mauthner 1901, I, p. 236). His target here is the Wundtian experimental psychology that was popular in Mauthner's time. The passage continues: "Erst aus einer Kritik der Sprache könnten vielleicht einige Anfangsgründe einer künftigen Psychologie entstehen" ("Only from a critique of language could there perhaps arise some initial grounds for a future psychology") (ibid.). My argument here is that Saudek's psychology of handwriting can be understood as a version of this future psychology.

### Mauthner's disdain for graphology

Before turning to Saudek's graphology, it is worth looking at Mauthner's disdainful dictionary entry on graphology from 1910. In this entry, Mauthner frames graphology in mocking terms, as "fraudulent business" (*schwindelhafter Erwerbszweig*), a "fraudulent method" (*schwindelhafte Methode*), a "ridiculous farce" (*lächerliche Farce*), and a "hoax of fortune-telling" (*Schwindel der Wahrsagekunst*). He sees only a "parody of graphology" (*Parodie der Graphologie*). Mauthner also points out similarities between graphology and several pseudosciences, including palmistry, ventriloquism, and phrenology. Moreover, making reference to Lichtenberg and Goethe, he recognizes the racist origins of these projects.

In an ironic turn, Mauthner acknowledges that if graphology *were* a science, it would be "the most valuable discipline," because "there we would finally possess the long-sought laws of influxus physicus[, which] could be proven in their direct effects by the strokes of the manuscript."<sup>16</sup> Graphology is situated in the Cartesian tradition (which Mauthner rejects); it seeks to uncover laws of causation between the mental and physical realms, between the mind and the body, *res cogitans* and *res extensa*.<sup>17</sup> Mauthner believes that the success of graphology would have implications for the success of the entire Cartesian project. However, he is skeptical that any such laws can be found. He refers to an example of one such supposed law, taken from Abbé Michon: someone who leaves the letter "o" open must have an open character (and, conversely, someone who closes the letter "o" must have a closed character). He insists that this is an example of the foolishness of graphology.

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<sup>16</sup> "Da besäßen wir endlich die lang gesuchten Gesetze des influxus physicus; [die] wären in ihren unmittelbaren Wirkungen an den Strichen der Handschrift nachzuweisen" (Mauthner 1910, p. 468).

<sup>17</sup> This idea is expressed in the epigraph from Hegel's *Phenomenology* at the start of this essay. Mauthner's project is openly anti-Hegelian, which means that he doubts the existence of any such connection between the inner and outer worlds.

As we shall now see, Saudek's project seeks to uncover the hidden laws of causation<sup>18</sup> between the mental realm and its manifestation in handwriting.

## II. Saudek's graphological project

For Saudek, graphology is akin to Freudian psychoanalysis, at least insofar as they share the same aim.<sup>19</sup> While psychoanalysis draws on the analysand's dreams, Saudek's graphological project aims to reveal the basic psychological character of the examined subject through handwriting. As will become clear in the following exploration of the connection between descriptions of handwriting and psychological descriptions, this project has a peculiar linguistic focus, on the basis of which graphology may be said to be a psychology based on language.

Two important considerations underpin the following investigation. The first is that Saudek uses examples or specimens of the handwriting of famous people not to *illustrate* his theory, but rather as exemplars on which to *base* his theory. As normative exemplars rather than mere illustrative examples, these specimens of handwriting are the only direct empirical material that Saudek employs in his main writings. The obvious advantage of relying on this material, rather than on random samples, is that the psychological characteristics of the person under investigation were known in advance (or were at least available to Saudek).

The second consideration, or observation, is that there is a recurring pattern in Saudek's inferences from his descriptions of handwriting to his descriptions of the

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<sup>18</sup> I employ the expressions "causation" or "psychophysical causation" as opposed to "causality" to make clear that what is meant here is not causality in a strict scientific sense.

<sup>19</sup> In a letter to A. A. Roback, dated January 16, 1930, Saudek writes: "Please, don't laugh, when I tell you that I would have doubted the whole freudian conception of repression, were it not that I have successfully deked it and traced its correctness in handwriting" (Senate House Library, University of London, Robert Saudek papers, MS1004/4/2).

psychology of the examined person. As we have seen, the underlying idea is that psychological traits reveal themselves in handwriting. To thus infer from handwriting the trait that it manifests is to perform a kind of reverse engineering, insofar as the graphologist is seeking a hidden cause of the handwriting that is being studied. A particular psychological trait  $p$  causes a certain characteristic of the person's handwriting  $h$ , as follows:

$p$  causes  $h$

$p$  is manifested by  $h$

The task of the graphologist is to infer from  $h$  back to its cause, that is, back to  $p$ . How, then, does Saudek (or another graphologist following his instructions) discover that  $h$  has been caused by  $p$ ? How can the connection between  $p$  and  $h$  be established? A short answer would be that  $p$  and  $h$  are closely connected expressions, and may even be identical. *Prima facie*, this may sound odd. To put matters more precisely: a figurative or *metaphorical* description of a specific characteristic of handwriting is the same as a *literal* description of the psychological trait that it manifests. Accordingly, if  $p$  and  $h$  are identical,  $p$  is meant in a literal sense, while  $h$  is, or at least can be, meant in a metaphorical sense. While the senses of  $p$  and  $h$  are usually not identical, there is nevertheless a specific connection between these senses, namely that  $h$  is a metaphorical transfiguration of  $p$  (or the other way around, as we shall see). Thus, for instance, Saudek makes the following backward inference (many more examples of which will be discussed below):

original handwriting → original personality (1)<sup>20</sup>

Here, *p* and *h* are identical in that both are “original.” However, a personality is original in a different sense from handwriting. The arrow must be read as “caused by” or “is a manifestation of.” The graphologist infers or deduces<sup>21</sup> from original handwriting that its author must have had an original personality. Or, to put it the other way around, an original personality can manifest in original handwriting.

In most cases, the predicate is not applied in the same straightforward way in both domains. Consider the following case:

amplification in signature → high degree of self-consciousness (2)<sup>22</sup>

This rule may be simplified as follows:

big signature → big self-consciousness (2')

The predicate “big” is not applied in the same way to self-consciousness as to the handwritten signature. A signature can be physically big, but self-consciousness does not inhere in any spatial object. If it is described as “big,” then it must be so in some figurative sense. Yet we cannot simply take the word “big” to be homonymous, because this would

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<sup>20</sup> Saudek employs this rule several times; see, for example, pp. 207, 212, 221, 227, 232. Unless stated otherwise, all page numbers refer to Saudek’s *The Psychology of Handwriting* (1925).

<sup>21</sup> Saudek calls this process “deduction” on many occasions; see, for example, pp. 11, 15, 36, 49, 66, 71. The task of the graphologist is “to deduce psychological conclusions” from handwriting (p. 156).

<sup>22</sup> See p. 247. However, “self-confidence” would be a more apt rendering of the German *Selbstbewußtsein* or the Czech *sebevědomí*.

amount to denying any connection between these two ascriptions at all.<sup>23</sup> If there is a connection, then it is a kind of metaphorical transfiguration. This, in short, is Lakoff and Johnson's famous argument for the existence of conceptual metaphors.<sup>24</sup> Indeed, one could borrow from the theory of conceptual metaphors here to say that both ascriptions are linguistic expressions of the same orientational metaphor.<sup>25</sup>

There are dozens of similar graphological rules in Saudek's *Psychology of Handwriting*, as well as in his other writings. But while no comprehensive summary of these rules is given in Saudek's published work, my colleagues have found a loose typewritten page in Saudek's archive that lists a number of rules in the form of a graphologist's guidebook.<sup>26</sup> A few examples are listed here, and the full page is reproduced in the appendix below:

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|--|-----|
| plain legibility → nothing to conceal, honesty | (3) |
| flowing rhythm → spontaneity                   | (4) |
| words and lines uphill → optimism              | (5) |
| words and lines downhill → depression          | (6) |

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<sup>23</sup> The idea of homonymy, i.e., an expression having two or more different meanings, implies that these meanings have nothing in common (for instance, "bank" as "financial institution" and as "riverbank"). True homonyms are rare and so encountering a pair of apparent homonyms will prompt us to seek an explanation that connects the two seemingly unrelated meanings.

<sup>24</sup> See Lakoff and Johnson (1980, pp. 107–115). I do not mean to say that Saudek predicted Lakoff's conceptual metaphor theory. My point is that Saudek's reasoning is based on implicit assumptions that Lakoff and his colleagues later explicitly thematized.

<sup>25</sup> Mauthner defends the metaphorical character of psychological concepts, arguing that metaphor connects linguistics and physiognomy: "Die Metapher als Grundquelle aller Sprachentwicklung führt wieder, da sie durchaus von der Sinnlichkeit ausgeht, zur Physiologie zurück und verbindet diese mit der Sprachwissenschaft" ("The metaphor as the basic source of all language development goes back to physiology, since it starts from sensuousness, and connects it to linguistics") (Mauthner 1901, I, p. 36). Arguing that linguistic concepts are metaphorically rooted in physiological perceptions, Mauthner then applies this idea to psychological terminology: "Man achte nur einmal darauf, wie die Bezeichnungen der Psychologie fast ausschließlich von Gesichtswahrnehmungen hergenommen sind, weil das Gesicht uns die reichsten Daten für eine Welterkenntnis bietet" ("Just notice how the psychological terms are almost exclusively taken from facial perceptions, because the face offers us the richest data for a knowledge of the world") (Mauthner 1901, I, p. 236). Psychological concepts are thus metaphorical transformations of concepts describing facial expressions.

<sup>26</sup> See Figure 1 below.

filled loops → sensuality (7)

solid connections → logic (8)

broken connections → intuition (9)

g's like 8 → understanding of human nature (10)

It is not immediately clear how these rules could be instances of the  $h \rightarrow p$  scheme outlined above. However, after a little rewording, their nature becomes more apparent. Rule (3), for example, can be rephrased as:

handwriting does not conceal anything → person does not conceal anything (3')

Other rules are similarly easy to accommodate within our scheme. Spontaneous handwriting is a manifestation of a spontaneous personality (4), and sensual handwriting is a manifestation of a sensual personality (7). Joined-up handwriting is an expression of logically connected thinking (8), while print (disconnected) handwriting expresses the opposite, namely logically disconnected, intuitive thinking (9). Rules (5) and (6) are expressions of the conceptual metaphors GOOD IS UP and BAD IS DOWN,<sup>27</sup> while in rules (8) and (9) logical (dis)connectedness of thinking is manifested in the physical (dis)connectedness of handwriting. In rules (5) and (6), the transformation of the psychological into the physical is

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<sup>27</sup> Orientational metaphors are introduced in Lakoff and Johnson's *Metaphors We Live By* (1980, p. 17 and passim). In subsequent works, Lakoff and Johnson have argued that such spatial metaphors are embodied, implying that there is a connection between a person's (typical) hand movements and their way of thinking. See Bardolph and Coulson (2014) for empirical corroboration of this idea. Saudek's graphology—that is, his psychology of handwriting—entails countless embodied physiological presuppositions. For instance, he writes (p. 41): "It is impossible to study the psychology of writing so long as we are not acquainted with the physiology of writing and have not made clear to ourselves the mechanical and physical premises upon which writing is produced." Although I do not pursue this promising line of inquiry in this paper, I take it as further evidence of the metaphorical character of graphological rules.

mediated by the conceptual metaphor. Some rules, however, are rather dubious. For instance, Saudek does not provide any explanation or confirmation of rule (10). It is difficult to imagine how it could be experimentally confirmed that writing the letter “g” in the shape of the numeral “8” has anything to do with understanding of human nature.

Finally, it is worth returning to the purported law that Mauthner takes as an example of the foolishness of graphology. According to our scheme, the law may be restated as the following rule:

letter “o” is open  $\rightarrow$  open character (11)

Curiously enough, the  $h \rightarrow p$  scheme accommodates this rule almost perfectly, because the same expression, “open,” appears on both sides. The letter “o” is said to be open in a literal sense, whereas an individual’s character can be open in a figurative sense. In this case, then, the rule is not nonsensical. Yet it remains to be shown that it is actually true, that is, an expression of an actual law. It is unlikely that any evidence would have been available to Mauthner to support this.

### **The experimental basis of Saudek’s method**

Thus far we have discussed two key features of Saudek’s graphological project: extensive use of the autographs of well-known figures, and a reliance on graphological rules that have a metaphorical character. I shall now consider the relationship between these features, as well as their basis in Saudek’s reception of Mauthner’s critique of language.

In his early work, Saudek criticizes the poor experimental basis of contemporary psychology and biology, and claims that his graphology, in contrast, has a solid empirical

foundation. It would be reasonable, then, to expect this to consist of robust empirical material, that is, observations and experiments that are generalizable using inductive statistical methods. However, Saudek's actual approach is anything but generalizable, because, as we have seen, his empirical data consist of several dozen autographs of famous people. Where, then, does the solid empirical basis lie, if not in a corpus of observable cases that can be generalized by induction? I want to argue that the answer to this crucial question is to be found in Saudek's reception of Mauthner's critique of language, introduced above. Put simply, the empirical basis is to be found in language, which, as Saudek makes clear, is opposed to experiment. This claim gives rise to two questions: (1) How is knowledge stored in language? (2) Does language provide us with true knowledge, or is there any danger of deception?

To address these questions, it is first necessary to consider how the connection between the characterization of personalities and the description of handwriting was established in the first place. After all, historically, people have characterized their personalities without any recourse to handwriting—(folk) psychology, we might say, is much older than graphology.<sup>28</sup> At a certain point, then, people began to characterize their handwriting in terms borrowed from the domain of psychology, and in this borrowing there lies what is often a complicated process of metaphorical transfer. People do not call a signature “big” *because* of its author's big personality. Rather, a signature is called “big” simply because it occupies a lot of space. This, in itself, is a banal truism. But it is nevertheless plausible to suppose that there might have been an explanatory link, namely that people began to explain big signatures (as opposed to, say, big hands) as expressions of

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<sup>28</sup> As we have seen, psychological concepts are metaphorical transformations of descriptions of facial expressions. See footnote 27 above.

big personalities. On what basis would they have done so? There must have been evidence supporting this inference. Moreover, this could not have consisted of just a few observations, but must have been recurrent and overwhelming (Saudek's "innumerable graphological experiences," p. 155): people must have encountered the connection again and again. Otherwise, this knowledge could not be pushed underground by the ladder; that is, it could not come to permeate language.

This past evidence is not lost, but rather is stored in language, and is indirectly accessible through Mauthner's critique of language. But why do we require a critique? Could we not simply "read off" the knowledge from language? The difficulty is that this knowledge lies underground and is therefore not open to plain view. It is not accessible in the form of simple factual statements, but rather tangled in a network of metaphorical and figurative connections that can easily mislead us.

Hence, using the ladder analogy, we are able to explain (1) how empirical evidence (of connections between personality and handwriting) could originally be stored in language; (2) how such connections might be retrieved, that is, brought back to the surface; and finally (3) how we can observe that this retrieval involves a risk of our being misled or confused by language.

We must keep in mind that, as previously argued, Saudek's use of the ladder analogy is selective and one-sided, and ignores its destructive aspect. Saudek's graphology, in general, can be seen as an extension of certain aspects of Mauthner's critique. This rootedness in Mauthner's critique, however, distinguishes Saudek's project from other graphological endeavors of his time, most notably Ludwig Klages's characterology.

### **Saudek's method of exemplars**

So far, the discussion has centered on a rational reconstruction of Mauthner's and Saudek's ideas, with supplementary references to later authors. In what follows, I will examine Saudek's method through the lens of contemporary philosophy of science.

It is possible to imagine several methods of retrieving the knowledge stored in language. One might consist in analyzing the metaphorical character of the discourse concerning the topic in question. This would amount to a direct method of uncovering the knowledge, in the spirit of Mauthner's critique of language. Saudek, however, advances a different method that I shall refer to here as the "method of exemplars" ("explained by our examples," p. 33). This method allows Saudek to focus primarily on specimens of the autographs of well-known individuals (see p. 42), which he uses to exemplify the connection between a person's character and their handwriting. The method of exemplars—sometimes referred to as the "method of types"—is well known in biology, and concerns types that are defined not by their essential properties but rather by reference to specific prototypes or exemplars.<sup>29</sup> The method of exemplars features prominently in Thomas Kuhn's *The Structure of Scientific Revolutions*, where he speaks about "knowledge embedded in shared exemplars" (1996, p. 192), and knowledge "tacitly embedded in shared examples" (*ibid.*, p. 175). Kuhn maintains that shared examples are the central elements of what he calls "paradigms" or "disciplinary matrices."

In Kuhn's description of the method, there is a terminological ambiguity between "examples" and "exemplars." Examples are illustrative or descriptive; they aim to illustrate a theory or general principle. By contrast, exemplars are normative models or paradigms that aim to *define* a general principle. Following Kuhn, but also Derrida and others, I have argued

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<sup>29</sup> For an overview and discussion of the method, see Winsor (2003).

elsewhere (Mácha 2023) that this distinction is untenable: every illustrative example has a normative force. In the remainder of this article, I shall argue that Saudek's use of examples (specifically, examples of the autographs of well-known figures) neatly supports this insight.

Looking at Saudek's formulations and choice of words can help us to understand the role of examples and exemplars in his graphology. Examples, he says, are "typical" (pp. 70, 75, 87, 108, 134, 135, 179, 200), "classical" (pp. 181, 203), "most ideal" (p. 192), and "striking" (p. 142); there are also "model" examples (pp. 92, 179). Specimens are likewise described as "typical" (p. 73), "most original" (p. 263), and the "best" (p. 276). Examples "illustrate" (pp. 33, 104, 142), "show" (pp. 130, 207), and "demonstrate" (p. 143), but they also "elucidate" (pp. 42, 207) and "explain" (p. 121). We find the same range of collocations for specimens: they "illustrate" (pp. 63, 130), "show" (pp. 169, 195, 199, 203), "demonstrate" (p. 217), and "display" (p. 85), but they also "elucidate" (p. 66) and "reveal" (p. 175). Saudek speaks of an "exemplary model" (p. 59) and of "absolutely exemplary" dispositions (p. 71). A specimen is an "example" (p. 204).

The point of this analysis of Saudek's phraseology is to show that, for him, an example or specimen is not always merely illustrative, but often has a normative dimension. A "typical" example reveals something essential about the whole *type*. A "most original" or "classical" example is prior to the type that it exemplifies: it is a model example that models the type. Elucidating and explaining is something more than *mere* illustrating.

Saudek, in fact, regularly claims that his graphology is based on experiments conducted with handwriting. However, given that graphologists may take historical knowledge—which, as we have already seen, is stored in language<sup>30</sup>—into consideration, the

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<sup>30</sup> Saudek writes (p. 281): "If this historical fact were unknown to the analysing graphologist, he would, without being able to supply a solution of the riddle, have to indicate this transitory change of character in his analysis."

actual experiments may have been conducted by experimental scientists, and not necessarily by Saudek himself. (Indeed, Saudek refers to these experiments in the “History of Graphology” chapter of his *Psychology of Handwriting*.<sup>31</sup>) The data resulting from these experiments are organized and generalized, by some kind of inductive method, into universally valid laws of graphology. Nothing guarantees that these laws will be stored in language; nonetheless, let us suppose that this graphological knowledge is thus stored, at least in part, as Mauthner’s ladder analogy suggests.

Saudek claims, again and again, that the specimens of autographs of well-known people merely illustrate the graphological knowledge that he already possesses. He writes, for instance: “All that remains for us to do is, by demonstrations on manuscripts accessible to the public, to confirm the correctness of our method” (p. 213). I would suggest that what he is in fact doing is using the specimen examples to retrieve this universal graphological knowledge from language. Saudek insists that his method is inductive, consisting of experiments,<sup>32</sup> inductive generalizations, and supplementary illustrations. In fact, it is a deductive method that deduces from exemplary cases the universal knowledge stored in language or, more specifically, stored in the discourse in which these cases are described.<sup>33</sup>

This *primary* deduction of graphological rules is different from the deduction of “psychological consequences” (pp. 85, 98, 158, 209) or “psychological conclusions” (pp. 55, 65, 136, 178, 227, 253, 263) from an individual’s handwriting. This *applied* deduction is a matter of applying the rules of graphology to particular cases. What interests us here,

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<sup>31</sup> See pp. v, vi, 1–4, 21–24.

<sup>32</sup> It is not quite clear what an experiment in graphology would be.

<sup>33</sup> The method of exemplars was already long established in graphology by Saudek’s time. Many nineteenth-century graphologists had focused, sometimes exclusively, on the handwriting of well-known people. Michon’s 1879 book *Histoire de Napoléon Ier d’après son écriture* (“The Story of Napoleon through the Lens of His Writing”), for instance, analyzes the handwriting of a single famous person: Napoleon Bonaparte.

however, is the question of how these rules are determined in the first place. And the answer is now clear: they are determined by the method of exemplars. This method rests neither on any graphological rules known in advance nor on experiments (and subsequent induction). We can thus confirm, following Mauthner's critique, that this method is based on language.

However, if normative examples are not entirely distinguishable from illustrative examples, then no sharp distinction can be drawn between the primary deduction of graphological rules and the applied deduction of psychological consequences. "Psychology of Writing," the central chapter of Saudek's book, is full of references to specimens of the autographs of well-known people. But in the later chapters, and particularly in the concluding one, "Specimens of Analyses," Saudek claims that these analyses merely confirm the correctness of his method. It is clear from Saudek's book, however, that these specimen analyses in fact serve to determine the rules of graphology as much as to illustrate them.

To be sure, there is a long way to go from Mauthner's and Saudek's empirical framework to achieving the goal of graphology, namely to discover the links between a person's personality and their handwriting. The method of exemplars can act as a bridge between these two realms. Although it is a deductive method, it does not depart significantly from empiricism. We can imagine the method of exemplars fitting within Saudek's empirical epistemology as outlined above.

### **Conclusion: Is Saudek's graphology a pseudoscience?**

Much like Hegel (as quoted in the epigraph above) and Mauthner before him, Saudek recognizes parallels between palmistry and graphology (p. 14). Currently, palmistry is widely considered a pseudoscience that relies on psychological manipulation. This raises the question of whether or not Saudek's graphology must likewise be classified as a

pseudoscience. To be sure, certain graphological rules proposed by Saudek, such as rule (10), give the impression that they are based on unscientific tricks: the assumption that the style in which an individual writes the letter “g” is indicative of their understanding of human nature is unjustified.

Furthermore, this rule can be seen as an instance of “warm reading,”<sup>34</sup> a pseudoscientific technique that makes use of preexisting knowledge about an individual in order to make broad, vague claims about their personality. (To a certain extent, everyone claims to understand human nature.) This suspicion is further reinforced by the fact that Saudek’s method relies on specimens of the autographs of well-known individuals, meaning that he is able to make use of preexisting knowledge about their personalities. More generally, then, can the entire method of exemplars be considered a form of warm reading?

To counter the accusation that Saudek’s graphology is a pseudoscience, it is important to note that a similar method is employed in Freud’s psychoanalysis. The dream theory presented in *The Interpretation of Dreams* is based on prominent examples from literature and, in one instance, on one of Freud’s own dreams (“Irma’s injection”). The numerous references to and comparisons with Freud’s psychoanalysis in Saudek’s work cannot be dismissed as mere coincidence. Rather, the methods used in both fields bear striking similarities. This, of course, is not sufficient to prove that Saudek’s graphology is not pseudoscientific, but it does suggest that, were it to be thus classified, then Freud’s psychoanalysis would also fall prey to the same charge. Induction is not the only scientific method, and there are various accounts of the scientific method that allow for deductive approaches, not least Kuhn’s theory of scientific revolutions. In light of this, I want to make

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<sup>34</sup> As opposed to a “cold reading,” in which no prior knowledge is employed.

the argument that Saudek's graphology cannot be dismissed as a pseudoscience merely because it extensively uses examples of famous people's autographs.

The method of exemplars is not an end in itself. While pseudoscientific warm reading aims to make seemingly novel or surprising claims about its examples, the method of exemplars is directed toward a different objective, namely to uncover the knowledge that is stored in language. In accordance with Mauthner's ladder analogy, this knowledge is buried in a network of metaphorical relationships. Although various pseudosciences, such as palmistry but also psychoanalysis, employ exemplars, they are not focused on language (or, more precisely, the method of linguistic investigation) and do not seek to unearth knowledge that has been sedimented in language.

Furthermore, it is important to note that the method of exemplars is based on deconstructing the distinction between illustrative examples and normative exemplars. This closely relates to Derrida's notion of the "supplement" or "parergon," according to which the frame—that which is external to the work or discourse—shapes the work itself. Saudek's specimens of analysis, in the final chapter of his book, have this parergonal structure; his photocopies of these autographs are even presented under the heading "Supplement." The numerous references that Saudek makes in the core of the work (ergon) to this supplementary chapter (parergon) reveal this, yet Saudek fails to acknowledge the supplement's importance. As a result, an in-depth deconstructive critique could be made of his work, which would be a fruitful avenue for further research.

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The authors declare no competing interests.

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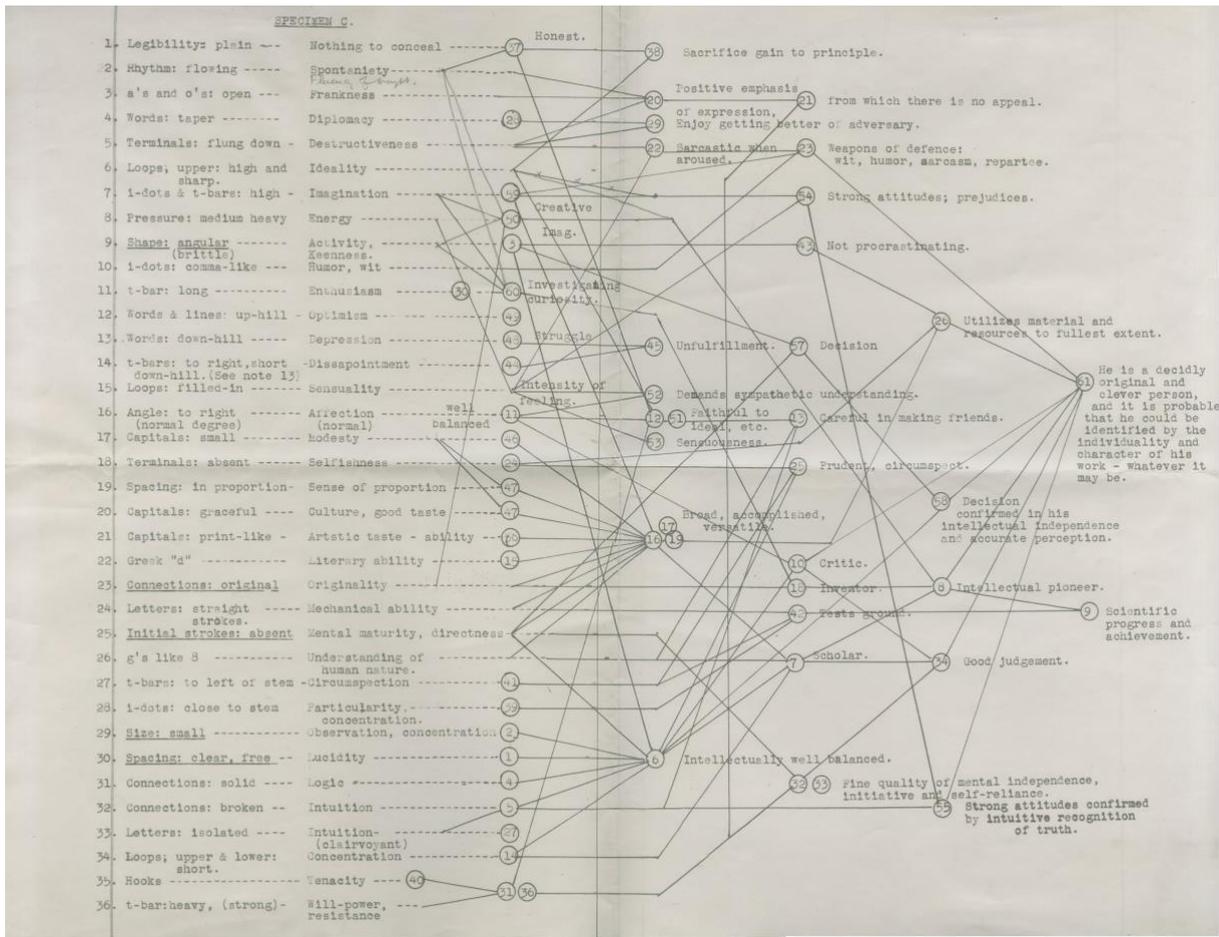


Figure 1. Specimen C, Senate House Library, University of London, Robert Saudek papers, MS1004/4/2