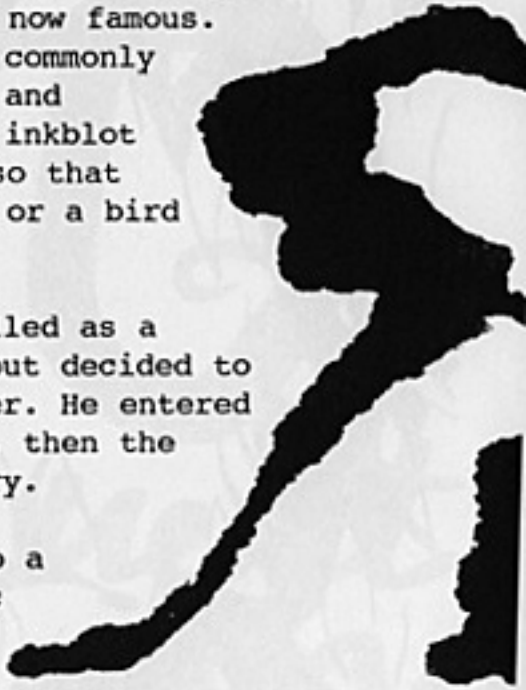
Hermann Rorschach

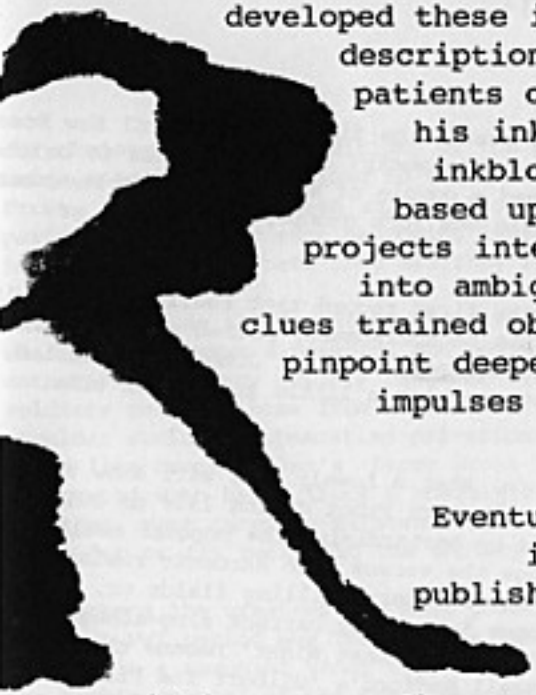
Rorschach's nickname at school was Klex, meaning "inkblot". There has been much speculation on the extraordinary coincidence of his nickname and the test for which he is now famous. Klecksography was a game commonly played by Swiss children and consisted of spotting an inkblot on paper and folding it so that the forms of a butterfly or a bird would be obtained.



At school Rorschach excelled as a draughtsman and artist, but decided to pursue a scientific career. He entered medical school in Zurich, then the world centre of psychiatry.

On graduating, he took up a position in a psychiatric hospital, becoming very popular with the patients. At one time he bought a monkey and kept it to observe the patients' reactions to it, and also to entertain them. He also became interested in the interpretation of art works by psychotics and neurotics and their own abilities to paint.

Swiss Psychiatrist, 1884-1922



From 1911, Rorschach started working on using inkblots and word association tests, and in 1918 developed these into a system, collecting descriptions from patients and non-patients of what they could see in his inkblots. He considered the inkblot test a kind of mirror, based upon the human tendency to projects interpretations and emotions into ambiguous stimuli. From these clues trained observers might be able to pinpoint deeper personality traits and impulses in the person taking the test.

Eventually, with the number of inkblots reduced to 10, a publisher was finally found for his 'Psychodiagnostik' in 1921. The first printing was a disaster, with not a single copy sold, and the publisher becoming bankrupt shortly afterwards. Rorschach himself died suddenly the following year, at the age of only 37. However, the rights to the book were bought, and the 10 inkblots that continue to be used in testing are printed from the original plates, using specially maintained ancient equipment.

Mimei Thompson