

Paul Bouts and the Short Life of Psychognomy in Brazil

Paul Bouts e a curta vida da psicognomia no Brasil

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Abstract

Paul Bouts (1900–1999) was a Belgian pedagogue, a Roman Catholic priest, and the founder of Psychognomy, which is a personality diagnostic system combining phrenology and several related practices – typology, craniofacial measurements, physiognomy, graphology etc. Bouts had a fragile health; therefore, it is unlikely that he travelled to Brazil. Despite this, his most famous book, rich in conservative and religious thoughts, was translated to Portuguese and published with ecclesiastic support in 1943, and the doctrine acquired good reputation among Brazilian members of the clergy, politicians, teachers, and military personnel. Lay scholars and medical doctors founded a Brazilian institute devoted to the study and diffusion of psychognomy in 1949. They published two volumes of a psychognomy treatise, and the institute was active until the early 1960s, when social interest in the subject rapidly vanished.

Keyword

- ▶ Anthropology
- ▶ Physical
- ▶ Craniology
- ▶ Stereotyping
- ▶ Personality
- ▶ Phrenology

Resumo

Paul Bouts (1900–1999) foi um pedagogo e padre católico belga que criou a psicognomia, um sistema de análise caracterológica que combinava elementos da frenologia, tipologia, medições craniofaciais, fisionomia, grafologia etc. Suas teorias influenciaram acadêmicos, religiosos, políticos e militares brasileiros. Bouts tinha uma saúde frágil, e não há evidências de que tenha estado no Brasil. Seu livro mais famoso, Psicognomia, foi publicado no país em 1943 com aval da censura eclesiástica e com apêndices especiais. A doutrina levou, ainda, à criação, em 1949, de um instituto privado de divulgação e estudos de psicognomia com sede no Rio de Janeiro, que publicou dois volumes de um tratado sobre o tema e permaneceu ativo até o início da década de 1960, quando o interesse pelo assunto rapidamente desapareceu na sociedade.

Palavras-chave

- ▶ Antropologia Física
- ▶ Craniologia
- ▶ Estereotipagem
- ▶ Personalidade
- ▶ Frenologia

PAUL BOUTS

Paul Bouts^{1–3} (Lanklaard, 27/02/1900–Rotselaar, 07/03/1999) (▶ **Figure 1**) was the eldest son of Victor Bouts

(1862–1927), a Belgian naturopath, educator, and minister of education. His only brother, Camille (1902–1993), was a philosopher and medical doctor. Paul weighed only 2.2 kg at birth and was considered a fragile child, receiving constant

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Figure 1 Paul Bouts pointing to a phrenological model head created by Lorenzo Niles Fowler (1811–1896). Bouts handles a measuring clamp, the Bertillon craniometer, used for craniofacial measurements (Alfonse Bertillon – 1853–1914).

care and naturopathic treatment by his father. His formal and religious education led him to be appointed in 1925 as a teacher at the archbishop's normal school of Tienen, and in 1926 he was ordained as a Roman Catholic priest. Working in Tienen until 1931, Bouts studied characterology and gradually developed a doctrine he called psychognomy, which was strongly based on phrenology. In 1931, Bouts was designated as curate of the Saint Julien parish, in Auderghem, where he stayed until 1947.

Bouts suffered a burnout episode in 1941. After the Second World War, his poor health led him to study disease prevention and healthy lifestyle, and to devote himself to children and adolescents' outdoor education. Throughout

the next several decades, he developed a juvenile camp school in Middleberg, Rotselaar, near Brussels. He also bought properties in Belgium (Leuven, Aische-en-Refail), and created two enterprises that are still active nowadays, the Saint Paul Center for Juvenile Education (<http://st-pauluscentrum.be/>) and Sol et Vita (<http://www.solevita.be/>), focused in creating and selling healthy food, antioxidants, herbal supplements and vitamins. Bouts also wrote religious texts and books on healthy life and preventive medicine (Appendix I).

Biographical texts emphasize Paul Bouts' influence in Brazil.^{1–3} However, there is no evidence of him or his brother ever lecturing at the Brazilian Academy of Medicine (ANM – e-mail communication by Mrs. Paula Padilha, ANM's archivist, on November 21, 2018), Brazilian medicine schools or the centenary teaching training school Escola Normal da Corte (1880; presently Instituto Superior de Educação do Rio de Janeiro). Bout's fragile health and his professional activities in Belgium also argue against the hypothesis of any trip to Brazil.⁴ Bouts referred to himself as the doctrinal founder of the Brazilian and Canadian psychognomic characterology institutes,⁵ or as the president of the Brazilian Institute of Psychognomy - IBP⁶ (► **Figure 2 A and B**). These qualifications only appear in the French editions of his books that appeared after the 1943 Brazilian translated version of *La Psychognomie*⁷ (► **Figure 2 C**), and most probably reflect the author's interests. In the Brazilian psychognomy treatise published in 1960, the founders of the IBP only refer collectively to the Bouts brothers and their father as masters and inspiring persons.⁸ The short comment appears in a long final section (pp. 517–588) detailing the constitution of the institute and its solemn inauguration ceremony, held in 1951. The authors

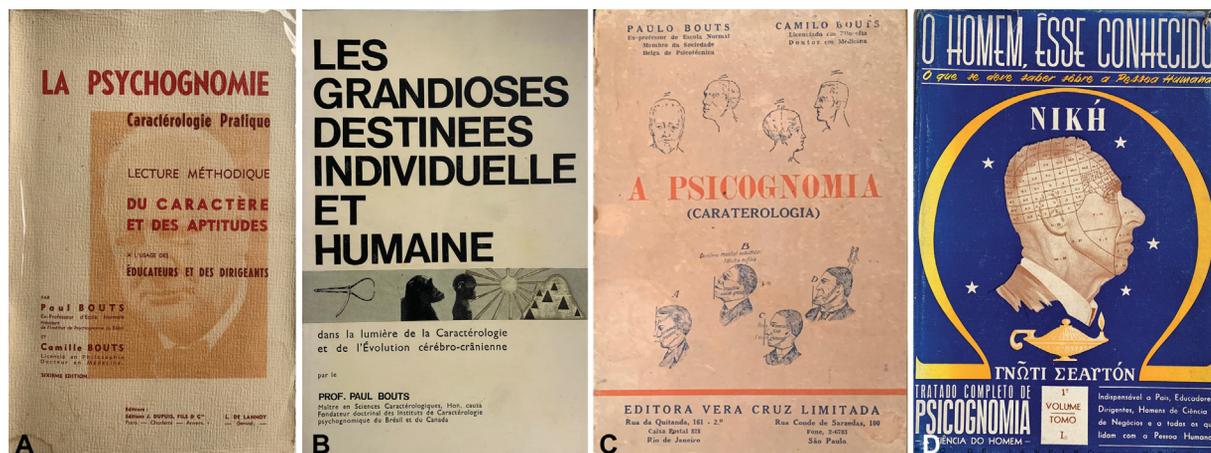


Figure 2 The cover of four seminal books on psychognomy. **A and B.** The two most famous books written by Paul Bouts. **A.** The sixth edition of *La Psychognomie – caractérologie pratique* – was published after the 1943 Brazilian version. Paul Bouts is said to be the president of the Brazilian Institute of Psychognomy, on unclear basis. **B.** *Les grandes destinées individuelle et humaine* is a later publication that mainly addresses teleanthropology (“the study of Human evolution through craniometry and comparative embryology”). Paul Bouts presents himself here as the doctrinal founder of the psychognomy institutes of Brazil and Canada. **C and D.** Main Brazilian publications on psychognomy-characterology. **C.** The Brazilian edition (1943) of *La Psychognomie – caractérologie pratique*, which was a translated version of the fifth French edition that also included six new additional chapters only present in the Brazilian edition. Paul Bouts is only presented as a training school ex-professor. **D.** Published in 1960, *O homem, esse conhecido*, (“The man, the Familiar: the complete treatise of psychognomy, the Science of the Man”) was authored by two Brazilian adepts and founders of the Brazilian Institute of Psychognomy, Alberto Ribeiro da Cunha, a graduate in philosophy and theology, and Luiz Pereira da Rocha, a medical doctor. Only two of the nine books originally planned were published.

never mentioned any personal contact with the Bouts brothers.

PSYCHOGNOMY PRINCIPLES

Psychognomy should be seen as a late effort to update phrenological principles, historically linked to early work on localization of function in the brain but already in obvious discredit between the two world wars. In Bouts' definition,⁵ Psychognomy (psuchê = soul, psychism; gnome = revealing sign) is the study of the soul, of the human character (*nature*), by its revealing physical signs. The diagnostic method of the personality includes:

- Typology – which determines the major personality traits by classifying the subject in specific and well-known categories;
- The encephalic-cranial diagnosis (Gall, Spurzheim, abbey Benny Bouts...) – which unveils the native richness of the subject, i.e., his basic psychological structure, which only suffers mild changes along the vital evolution;
- Physiognomy – also named facial diagnosis: the characterological resultant of the superimposed elements found in cranial measurements obtained by inspection and palpation;
- Graphology – concerning the individual intellectual, emotional (caractérielle) and moral evolution;
- And the temperaments and diatheses – which also tell about their normal or pathological physical structure.

Despite its noble objectives, however, a dangerous mixture of bad science, politics, religion, and racial prejudice is evident in every psychognomy book. For instance, the 1943 Brazilian edition, translated from the fifth French edition of *La Psychognomie*,⁷ was published during the dictatorship of Getúlio Vargas, after formal release by the ecclesiastic censorship. An appendix (pp. 403–432) with six new chapters was added. They addressed phrenological grouping, physiognomy and facial mimics, graphology, the inheritance of spiritual traits, and biotypology. This last chapter was written by the conservative lawyer and poet Tasso da Silveira (1895–1968).

THE BRAZILIAN INSTITUTE OF PSYCHOGNOMY (*Instituto Brasileiro de Psychognomia* – IBP)

Backed up by university professors, physicians, military senior officers and members of the high clergy, Alberto Ribeiro da Cunha (1920–2001), a highly motivated graduate in philosophy and theology, and a former catholic seminarist, created the IBP on November 15th, 1948.⁸ In the following years, he established the headquarters in downtown Rio de Janeiro (1951), obtained the certificate of public utility guaranteeing tax exemption (1952), taught courses on psychognomy, ancient idioms and human development, and opened a primary school in Rio de Janeiro (1957). Ribeiro da Cunha and another founder of the IBP, physician Luiz Pereira da Rocha (1924–2016), published in 1960 the first two massive volumes (out of nine originally planned) of a

treatise on psychognomy called “The Man, the Familiar” (*O homem, esse conhecido*)⁸ (– **Figure 2 D**).

News about the IBP sometimes appeared in the press between 1949 and 1961, especially following a crowded solemn opening ceremony chaired by a former army minister (May 3rd, 1951).^{9–11} Julienne Marie Catherine Hallawell Cardinals (1922–2016), Victor Bouts' great niece, was a guest at the ceremony,⁸ and this most probably means that the Bouts brothers were aware of the creation of the institute. Julienne was married to Francis C. Hallawell (1915–2004), a British-Brazilian citizen also known in Brazil as “Chico da BBC” for his work as a war correspondent alongside the Brazilian troops in Italy. The couple only moved to Brazil after the war.¹² Her presence at the ceremony stage has been figurative but conferred legitimacy to the ceremony and the institution itself.

The last appearance of IBP in the news was found in a text describing acts and resolutions of the new governor of Guanabara, Carlos Lacerda.¹³ The governor rejected the institute's demand to occupy a public building called *Casa da Guarda* in downtown Rio. The stated reason gives an idea of the society's loss of interest in psychognomy at that time: “The State is not in need of psychognomists but of schools.”

In conclusion, psychognomy, under the influence of the Belgian priest and pedagogue Paul Bouts and of his main oeuvre, translated and published in Brazil in 1943, enjoyed a certain prestige during the decades of 1940 and 1950. This led to the publication of the first two volumes of a Psychognomy treatise, and to the creation of an institute devoted to the study of the doctrine, which was still active in the early 1960s. Interest in psychognomy seemingly abated rapidly at that time.

Conflict of Interest

The author has no conflict of interests to declare.

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Appendix I. Paul Bouts' main publications (always first editions in French)

- . La psychognomie – Caractérologie pratique - Lecture méthodique et pratique du caractère et des aptitudes. (Paul and Camille Bouts; 1st edition 1931; at least 6 French editions; Dutch and Portuguese translations.)
 - . L'hygiène moderne des intellectuels (Dr. Robert Coessens and Abbot Paul Bouts. 1st edition 1954; at least 3 editions; Dutch translation.)
 - . Séance de culture physique et respiratoire de l'intellectuel (available in a reprint edition [2018] by Forgotten Books - ISBN-10: 1527624803; ISBN-13: 978-1527624801 [www.forgottenbooks.com].)
 - . Les phénomènes de la vie mentale. Psychologie et métaphysique (Camille and Paul Bouts.)
 - . Cours de pédagogie existentielle
 - . Les destinées grandioses de l'humanité individuelle et humaine dans la lumière de la caractérologie et de l'évolution cérébro-crânienne
- The Sol et Vita site (http://www.soletvita.be/images/doc/info/paul_bouts_boeken.pdf) also lists additional works by Paul Bouts, mainly addressing Health and Spirituality (all but one are Dutch editions):
- . Vademecum Natuugeneeswijze (Vademecum of natural medicine.)
 - . Ik Ben Nooit Moe (I am never tired – 10 Dutch editions.)
 - . Verhoog Uw Ademhalingscapaciteit (Increase your breathing capacity.)
 - . Hoe Kan Ik Mijn Gezondheidskapitaal Tijdig Tegen Aderverkalking en Infarctus Vrijwaren? (How can I protect my health capital in a timely manner against calcification of the arteries and heart attacks?)
 - . De Reddende Rauwkost - Wie mag ervan genieten en op welke wijze? (The saving raw cost – who can enjoy it and now?)
 - . Satan, de Onzichtbare Heerser der Wereld (Satan, the invisible ruler of the world)
 - . Onze Overheerlijke Lotsbestemming - Het Hemels Paradijs (Our delicious fate destination – Heavenly paradise)
 - . De Schoonheid, Bron van Onvergankelijke LEVENSVREUGD (The beauty, source of unperishable joy of life)
 - . Une philosophie et une théologie de l'évolution créatrice (A philosophy and theology of the creative evolution, French edition.)