

Catherine Bouchara

**Charcot, une vie avec l'image**Editions Philippe Rey, Paris 2013  
240 pp.; EUR 39.00  
ISBN 978–2–84876–373–6

'Charcot knew how to inspire devotion in those who, like me, worked closely with him; his genius alone accounts for the high esteem with which he was viewed by all', said Joseph Babinski (1857–1932) at the event celebrating the 100-year anniversary of Charcot's birth (Charcot lived from 1825 to 1893 and is considered the founder of neurology [1]). To be called a genius ensures one's place at the pinnacle of historic glory, which explains why nearly every year since Charcot's death, his life or his work has been the subject of a new book. The seminal biographical work remains *Charcot: Constructing Neurology* by Goetz et al. [2], published in 1995. Bogousslavsky [3] focused on his school in 2011: *Following Charcot: A Forgotten History of Neurology and Psychiatry*. Recently, Bogousslavsky and Boller [4] examined Charcot's relations with the arts.

Despite the abundance of publications on Charcot, a novel perspective can still surprise and impress us, as Catherine Bouchara does in *Charcot, une vie avec l'image* (currently available only in French), a significant work with magnificent colour illustrations. Bouchara, who uses hypnosis in her practice at La Salpêtrière Hospital, came to psychiatry after working as a sociologist. Both her new location and her techniques placed her in close proximity to the Charcot Library [5], now unfortunately closed. Bouchara was literally just a few steps from the origins of hypnosis. She did not know, of course, that taking these steps would entail 10 years of research to sift through the library's archives. Donated by the neurologist's son Jean-Baptiste, this collection was refused by the Paris Medical School Library due to obscure grudges held by the school's dean at the time, Georges Debove (1845–1920), who had nonetheless been one of Charcot's house officers. Bouchara also examined several unpublished private sources. 'My research on the great master of La Salpêtrière, Jean-Martin Charcot, brings together two shared passions: art and medicine', she explained to me. The friendship she cultivated with Anne-Marie Vallin-Charcot, the neurologist's great-granddaughter, opened doors to the family archives and its treasures, unknown to historians.

Drawing was a long-standing tradition in the Charcot family. Jean-Martin's father Simon-Pierre, who was a saddler and carriage-builder, drew carriages and their interiors. In an undated letter discovered by Bouchara, Jean-Martin wrote to his son: 'My dear son, I advise you to continue sketching, which is a good leisure activity;

science and art are allies. Both are children of Apollo.' All of Charcot's great discoveries were the result of his anatomical-clinical method, which would not have been as demonstrative without its use of drawing. Charcot liked to cite Cruveilhier: 'The anatomical pathologist must himself be an artist, as there are subtleties and contrasts that even the most descriptive language can only evoke with difficulty' [6]. Bouchara offers us sketches (fig. 1), and even water colours, illustrating Charcot's bedside observations and revealing an artistic style very close to that of his student Paul Richer, with whom he enjoyed visiting museums. Charcot's handwritten, colour-coded notes for his classes are proof of his conscientious approach to teaching. One of his notes contains this sentence: 'The greatest portion of our mental treasures lies outside the sphere of consciousness', which, with its corresponding figure, confirms that Sigmund Freud was inspired by his time at La Salpêtrière!

Establishing a school means surrounding oneself with talented partners. Désiré-Magloire Bourneville published Charcot's works, Paul Richer became his illustrator after completing a thesis on *la grande hystérie* including numerous sketches, and Paul Regnard served as his photographer. Bouchara has skilfully arranged their work, which Charcot supervised, and offers us accounts of their close ties; they shared travel adventures and museum finds as well as their experiences at La Salpêtrière. Because his wife detested travel, Charcot punctually wrote to her at every stage of his journeys, embellishing his letters with fascinating sketches, often in colour, such as those he drew during his trip to Morocco during the summer of 1887 [7].

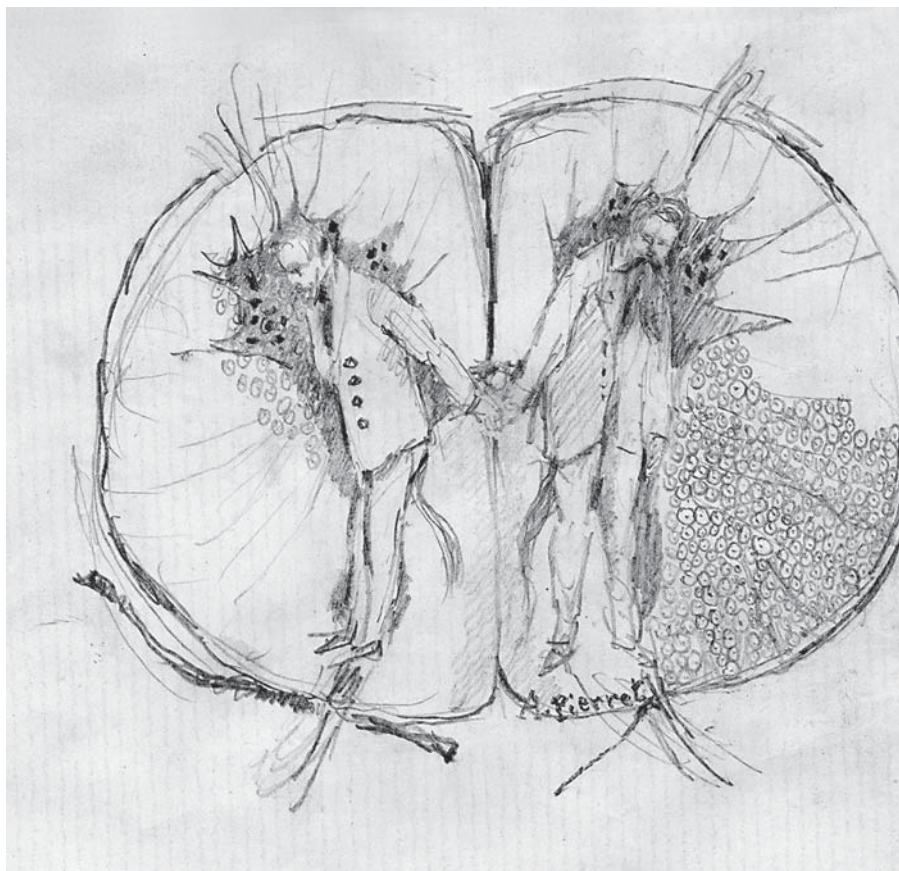
While the caricatures of his medical school colleagues are well known, Bouchara's research in private collections brought other drawings to light, the sort one would expect to find in the press. Their humour captures the patriotic anti-German sentiments which Charcot reserved for his private circles. In addition to photos of Charcot's family life, Bouchara offers readers another surprise by allowing us to visually tour the Charcot home in Neuilly. These photos, although recent, give the impression that Charcot might enter at any moment and sit down at his desk, which has been magnificently preserved – the furniture, decorations and stained glass are still true to his tastes.

Sharing her passion, Bouchara leads her readers – experts and newcomers alike – through Charcot's *oeuvre*. Her overview skilfully covers all the facets of Charcot's output and even includes links to contemporary work by Milton Erickson, for example, or Giacomo Rizzolatti and Vittorio Gallese.

However, a few minor criticisms should be made; the following list is not exhaustive. The names cited do not appear to follow any consistent rules. For example, simply 'Londe' is mentioned on page 67, whereas 'Albert Londe (1858–1917)' appears on page 70.

**Fig. 1.** Pencil drawing 12.5 × 13.4 cm by Jean-Martin Charcot. Untitled 1875. Private collection with kind permission.

Charcot caricatured his 1874 house officer Antoine-Auguste Pierret (1845–1920). Based on the training Pierret received in anatomy and pathological anatomy by his former teachers, Marie-Philibert Sappey (1810–1896) and Louis Ranvier (1835–1922), Charcot placed him in the Salpêtrière laboratory which he shared with Alfred Vulpian (1826–1887). In 1872, Pierret published his first work ‘Note on sclerosis of the posterior columns in progressive locomotor ataxia’ in *Les Archives de physiologie normale et pathologique*, followed in 1873 by ‘Anatomical and pathological considerations on the posterior corticospinal tract’. Probably as a result of these publications, Charcot’s caricature showed Pierret with a long beard occupying the gray matter of the spinal cord, as if Pierret were watching the posterior columns! Shortly afterwards, he became a professor of anatomical pathology when the new medical school in Lyon opened in 1877.



On page 85, ‘Puysegur’ should have been ‘Armand Marie Chastenet (known as the Marquis of Puysegur)’ in order to avoid confusion with any number of homonyms. Furthermore, the dates are wrong: (1753–1835) should be (1751–1825). Robert-Fleury is credited with the painting *Philippe Pinel délivrant les aliénés à la Salpêtrière en 1795*. It would have been better to indicate ‘Tony Robert-Fleury (1837–1911)’, to distinguish him from his father Joseph-Nicolas (1797–1890), also a painter. In the identification of figures in André Brouillet’s painting *Une leçon clinique à La Salpêtrière*, there is a regrettable inversion; Georges Gilles de la Tourette in the foreground is identified as Charles Féré, who is ac-

tually next to Paul Richer and is identified as Gilles de la Tourette! As a final critical remark, I would point out ‘La Tourette, G de’ in the bibliography, which is a common error in English-language publications; the first name is actually Georges and the family name, Gilles de la Tourette.

In addition to praising Bouchara for completing such a superb and important work, I commend her editor Philippe Rey who, with support from the Université Pierre-et-Marie-Curie, brings us this exceptional and beautiful collection of unpublished material.

Olivier Walusinski, Brou

## References

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- 2 Goetz CG, Bonduelle M, Gelfand T: *Charcot: Constructing Neurology*. New York, Oxford University Press, 1995.
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- 4 Bogousslavsky J, Boller F: Jean-Martin Charcot and art: relationship of the ‘founder of neurology’ with various aspects of art. *Prog Brain Res* 2013;203:185–199.
- 5 Ricou P, Leroux-Hugon V, Poirier J: *La bibliothèque Charcot à la Salpêtrière*. Paris, Pradel, 1993.
- 6 Charcot JM: *La médecine empirique et la médecine scientifique, parallèle entre les anciens et les modernes; in Leçons cliniques sur les maladies des vieillards et les maladies chroniques*. Paris, Adrien Delahaye, 1868.
- 7 Gelfand T: *Charcot in Morocco. Introduction, Notes and Translation*. Ottawa, University of Ottawa Press, 2012.