

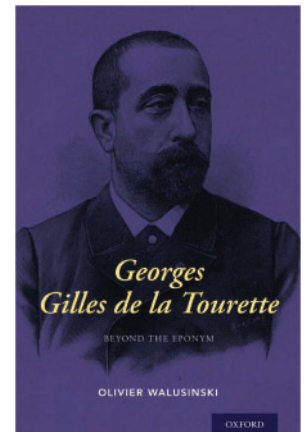
## BOOK REVIEW

### Charcot's capricious scribe

In 1881, not long after he had arrived in Paris to work as an externe in the Public Hospitals system, Georges Albert Edouard Brutus Gilles de la Tourette—the subject of this new work by Olivier Walusinski—translated an article entitled *Experiments with the 'Jumpers' of Maine* into French. The paper, written by George Beard, a New York neuropsychiatrist described a number of individuals who jumped and cursed when startled. Some also displayed automatic obedience and repeated whatever was said to them. Most of them lived in small isolated communities around Moosehead Lake, and Beard considered the condition to be an unusual form of hysteria.

In 1884 when Gilles de la Tourette arrived at l'Hôpital Pitié-Salpêtrière he was given the difficult task by Charcot of sorting out 'the chaos of the choreas'. The term had no structural basis at that time, lacked solidity and was frequently used as a repository for a hotchpotch of miscellaneous jerks and twitches. Reasoning that if 'Jumping Frenchmen' existed then cases should be seen in Paris, he started to search for cases on the wards of the hospital and in the streets and to scour newspapers and magazines for comparable descriptions. His search failed to locate a single case but in the course of his investigation he identified six individuals with multiple tics, abnormal vocalizations, copromimia and echophenomena. During a visit to London Gilles de la Tourette discussed these cases with Hughlings Jackson who in the same year reported a similar patient in *Clinical Lectures and Reports to the London Hospital*. Gilles de la Tourette went on to publish his own findings the following year in *Les Archives de Neurologie* in two companion articles linked by the same title of *Étude sur une affection nerveuse caractérisée par de l'incoordination motrice accompagnée d'écholalie et de coprolalie*. The case of the Marquise de Dampierre reported by Itard in 1825 and two additional patients drawn to his attention by colleagues were added to his own observations. He considered *la maladie des tics convulsifs* to have some similarities to the culturally specific startle syndromes Latah, Miryachit and Jumping Frenchmen of Maine and to have hereditary antecedents. Charcot considered his young intern's report to be insubstantial and

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incomplete and no doubt as a consequence the publication passed largely unnoticed.

My first encounter with Gilles de la Tourette syndrome came from a little book entitled *Uncommon Psychiatric Syndromes* where it was covered along with other exotica including Cotard's, Capgras and Ganser's syndromes, a series of fascinating descriptions that provided light relief from the hard slog of revising for finals. Fourteen years later I embarked on a research project considered of dubious relevance by most of my teachers at the National Hospital Queen Square. Within a relatively short period of time I had collected and investigated 54 British born cases of Gilles de la Tourette syndrome and defied Enoch and Trethowan's statement that I would be very unlikely to see a single case of coprolalia during my entire clinical career (Lees *et al.*, 1984). Gilles de la Tourette syndrome was in fact a relatively common condition that had largely been ignored by the medical profession and considered resistant to psychoanalysis, and misinterpreted by the public as an external sign of madness. Through my involvement with the fledgling Gilles de la Tourette support group I also came to appreciate the devastating effect the disorder had on sufferer's lives.

After publishing my first research papers on tics I started to take an interest in the man on whom Charcot, despite

his earlier reservations about the description later bestowed eponymous fame (Lees, 1985). Georges Gilles de la Tourette was born on 30 October 1857 in the village of St Gervais-les-Trois-Clochers in the Poitou-Charentes region of France. His father owned a shop in Châtellerault and he had three younger sisters. The family, which included a number of doctors, claimed a lineage back to an Armenian who had fled the Shah's court in Persia in 1200. His teachers considered him to be bright but unruly and impulsive. Fearing that the bright lights of Paris would pose a distraction for their intellectually precocious son, his parents enrolled him at 16 in the local medical school at Poitiers. After graduating with distinction, he then moved to the capital to pursue his medical career.

After I had written my article *Georges Gilles de la Tourette, the man and his times* (Lees, 1986) I often used a photograph I had been given by the archivist Gerard Jubert of his regal 'cabinet' at his home at 39 rue de l'Université (Fig. 1) as an example of how the financial standing of doctors had steadily fallen over the ensuing years. This picture is reproduced in Olivier Walusinski's book along with other evocative *fin de siècle* illustrations.

Gilles de la Tourette was a prolific writer who drew inspiration for his work from newspaper reports, works of art in the Louvre, history books and Paris's literary cafes. From the outset he was attracted to the paranormal and bizarre; his very first published article analysed the trance-like immobile state practised by fakirs. A number of his publications described cases he had encountered outside the confines of the hospital. In his 1893 presentation to the Faculty of Legal Medicine and in two accompanying articles published in *Le Progrès Médical* and *Annales d'Hygiène Publique et de Médecine Légale* he described a character known as 'Le Danseur' or 'Le Fou' who frequented *Le Moulin Rouge* and *Le Casino de Paris*. The



**Figure 1** Gilles de la Tourette's consulting room at his home 39 rue de l'Université ca. 1900. Image courtesy of Gerard Jubert and Olivier Walusinski.

newspapers had reported that this extraordinary personage when out on the floor would sometimes kick one of his legs high in the air and then juggle his hat on the end of his cane to attract attention. Spurred on by the applause of the demi-mondaines he would then run ecstatically from one end of the dance hall to the other before jumping onto the stage. Immediately the music ceased he would melt into the crowd until the next dance.

In what would better be classed an example of investigative journalism than an attempt at bystander diagnosis, Gilles de la Tourette sought *Monsieur X* out and interviewed him. He learned that he was aged 26 and one of nine children born in Paris of German Jewish parents. In his early 20s he had spent 2 years working in an import business in Costa Rica but he had been unemployed since he had returned to Paris the previous year. He explained that since early childhood loud infernal pieces of music like Orpheus in the Underworld triggered an irresistible urge within him to dance. Habitué at *Le Moulin Rouge* reported that *Monsieur X* was always impeccably attired and wore a flower in his buttonhole and was considered harmless but deranged. Gilles de la Tourette considered the man to have a monosymptomatic compulsion and raised concerns that there could be medico-legal complications if his uncontrollable intoxication led to him entering private establishments where music was playing. Gilles de la Tourette's interest in this man may have first been aroused by his investigations into the cause of the epidemics of dancing mania in mediaeval Europe.

I pictured *Monsieur X* like the top-hatted, gloved dancer with the pointed chin and trimmed beard in John Huston's 1952 film *Moulin Rouge* and drew parallels between him and some of the weekend stompers at the all-nighters at Wigan Casino. Chorea became soulful for me as well as serious as a result of Gilles de la Tourette's flights of lyricism. *Le Danseur Monomane* would eventually lead me to fascinating articles on dance addiction, choreophilia where individuals achieve orgasm by dancing and the psychological consequences of loneliness on the dance floor.

A few weeks after Gilles de la Tourette had published these reports he was almost shot dead in his consulting room by a deluded woman named Rose Kamper-Lecoq, who after her arrest claimed that she had been hypnotized by the doctor against her will. The subsequent celebrated court case led to an acrimonious debate between the Paris and Nancy schools of medico-legal jurisprudence and as a result of the extensive newspaper coverage Gilles de la Tourette ironically achieved the celebrity status he had craved throughout his career.

Rose Kamper's accusations that Gilles de la Tourette had caused her madness bore a macabre resemblance to those of Soeur Jeanne des Anges, which led to the Loudun priest Urbain Grandier being burned at the stake in 1634. After her possession by the devil, mass psychogenic illness had broken out in the convent. In 1886 Gilles de la Tourette, in collaboration with Gabriel Legué, had re-examined the Ursuline superior's narrative and concluded that she was

a ‘grande hysterique’ with a wide repertoire of conversion symptoms including pseudoseizures, visual and auditory pseudo-hallucinations, religious stigmata and pseudocyesis. He concluded she was a victim of erotomania, another of Enoch and Trethowan’s uncommon psychiatric syndromes I had read about in my student days.

Charcot came to admire Gilles de la Tourette’s industry and passion and appointed him his *chef de clinique*. There he served as his unpaid amanuensis recording the *Leçons du mardi* verbatim and in 1888 under his chief’s direction he founded *La Nouvelle Iconographie de la Salpêtrière* along with the artist Paul Richer and photographer Albert Londe. He also took a special interest in therapeutics including the use of suspension therapy for tabes dorsalis and the vibrating helmet for paralysis agitans.

Gilles de la Tourette was outspoken, impatient and exuberant and held staunch Republican and anti-clerical views. At a dinner party hosted by Charcot he informed Sigmund Freud with his customary emotional incontinence that war with Germany was imminent and inevitable. One of his papers about hysteria in the German army angered Bismarck.

Léon Daudet, the author of *Devant la Douleur*, a book rich in anecdotes and memories of his times as a medical student described his teacher in a pungent vignette:

Gilles de la Tourette was ugly like a Papuan doll with bundles of hair stuck on it. He was neither good nor bad, neither studious nor lazy, neither intelligent nor foolish, and he vacillated with his confused and malicious mind between a multitude of faults without lingering. He had a husky and worn out voice, abrupt gestures, a strange gait. He passed for an eccentric starting an interesting subject but leaving it for another, disconcerting his masters by his queer ways, which got worse and worse and became less and less amusing.

When Gilles de la Tourette’s personality began to disintegrate, Charcot’s son Jean-Baptiste, the neurologist and polar explorer accompanied his friend to Switzerland on the pretence of a holiday and made sure he was well looked after and could not return to Paris to suffer further professional embarrassment. At the age of 47 Gilles de la

Tourette died of general paralysis of the insane (neurosyphilis) in an asylum in Lausanne. His body was brought back to his beloved Loudun, the place he had always considered his true home and where he is buried.

Olivier Walusinski, who has worked as *médecin de ville* in the small community of Brou for 40 years, is one of the world’s foremost authorities on Charcot and his school of neurology. His book provides testimony to the affection in which Gilles de la Tourette was held not only by Charcot but also by Charcot’s family. Gilles de la Tourette was a regular at his master’s dinner parties and accompanied him to Les Folies Bergère where it has been claimed *Le Patron* would always discretely slip away before the arrival of the dancing girls. As Charcot entered the twilight of his career he came to depend more and more on his devoted disciple to protect and promote his ideas on hysteria and hypnotism. Walusinski’s scholarly and thorough account is destined to become the definitive text on the life and times of a man whose colourful personality more than made up for his less than brilliant academic achievement. More than half a century after his premature death he would achieve the public stardom he aspired to in life, albeit in the form of an inviolable and frequently desecrated eponym.

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