

Where is Gilles? Or, the little mistake in a copy of Brouillet's painting: "A clinical lesson at the Salpêtrière"

Onde está Gilles? Ou, o pequeno engano em uma cópia da pintura de Brouillet: "Uma lição clínica na Salpêtrière"

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ABSTRACT

Professor Jean-Martin Charcot is considered the most important professor of Neurology and also the head of the Salpêtrière School of Neurology. In a famous picture painted by André Brouillet and presented at the Salon of 1887, under the title "A clinical lesson at the Salpêtrière", Professor Charcot presents a case of hysteria to a large audience of physicians and renowned intellectuals. Copies of this guided picture are also available for sale at the shop of the Museum of the School of Medicine of Paris and are frequently used in lectures by neurologists worldwide. However, in these reproductions, Gilles de la Tourette's and Charles Féré's positions are inverted. This historical note sheds some light on this little mistake in some of the reproductions of Brouillet's famous painting, so that further confusion can be avoided.

Key words: Salpêtrière, Charcot, Brouillet, Gilles de la Tourette, Féré.

RESUMO

O professor Jean-Martin Charcot é considerado o professor mais importante da Neurologia e também o chefe da Escola de Neurologia de Salpêtrière. Em um quadro célebre pintado por André Brouillet e apresentado no Salão de 1887, sob o título "Uma Lição Clínica na Salpêtrière", o professor Charcot apresenta um caso de histeria a um grande público composto de médicos e intelectuais de renome. Cópias desse quadro também estão disponíveis para venda na loja do Museu da Escola de Medicina de Paris e são frequentemente utilizadas em palestras ministradas por neurologistas em todo o mundo. No entanto, nessas reproduções, Gilles de la Tourette e Charles Féré estão em posições invertidas. Esta nota histórica alerta sobre esse pequeno engano em algumas das reproduções da famosa pintura de Brouillet, a fim de que mais confusão seja evitada.

Palavras-Chave: Salpêtrière, Charcot, Brouillet, Gilles de la Tourette, Féré.

Professor Jean-Martin Charcot is considered the founder of clinical Neurology. In 1882, he was the first professor of Diseases of the Nervous System and would eventually become not only the most important professor of Neurology but also the head of the Salpêtrière School of Neurology¹⁻⁴.

At that time, the French School of Neurology was known and respected worldwide as a reference centre for many physicians, who had the opportunity of acting as visiting physicians under the guidance of Charcot and his service at the Salpêtrière's Hospital: Bechterew, Darkschewitch, Kojewnikow, Marinesco, Sachs and Sigmund Freud were among them^{3,5}.

During Charcot's tenure at La Salpêtrière, from 1862 to his death in 1893, he was responsible for overseeing 32 house

officers; most of them became neurologists and some professors at the Medical School in Paris^{3,5,6}.

Several of Charcot's disciples would themselves become famous, including Bouchard, Joffroy, Debove, Raymond, Brissaud, Pierre Marie, Pitre, Bourneville, Gilles de la Tourette, Babinski, Guinon, Souques and Meige^{3,5-10}.

The *Leçons du mardi à la Salpêtrière* ("Clinical lessons at the Salpêtrière") were weekly case discussions conducted every Tuesday by Charcot. As these were open events, not only Charcot's students and disciples would attend these meetings but also some Parisian important figures, including writers, like Guy de Maupassant, socialites and political figures, such as Dom Pedro II, Emperor of Brazil^{3,4,6-10}.

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“A CLINICAL LESSON AT THE SALPÊTRIÈRE”

“A clinical lesson at the Salpêtrière” is an oil on canvas collective portrait, painted by André Brouillet (1857–1914). It was first exhibited at the salon of 1887 and afterwards became a very famous and iconic picture. The painting depicts Charcot examining his famous hysterical patient, Ms. Blanche Witmann, which is held up by his assistant Joseph Babinski. Several of Charcot’s disciples, students, nurses and members of the Paris smart set are also depicted, including: Ms. Bottard, Gilles de la Tourette, Vigouroux, Parinaud, H. Berbez, Londe, Guinon, le Bas, Gombault, Arène, Claretie, Naquet, Bourneville, Ballet, Cornil, Burty, Debove, Duval, J. B. Charcot, P. Berbez, Brissaud, Joffroy, Pierre Marie, Charles Féré and Richer^{3,6,9,10}.

The classical painting of Brouillet is located at the Museum of the History of Medicine, in Paris (Fig 1A).

THE MISTAKEN COPY OF THE “A CLINICAL LESSON AT THE SALPÊTRIÈRE”

Nowadays, a copy of Brouillet’s classical “A clinical lesson at the Salpêtrière” with all the characters labeled is depicted right opposite the original painting at the Museum of the History of Medicine, in Paris. Copies of this guided picture are also available for sale at the Museum’s shop and are frequently used in lectures by neurologists worldwide. In the poster copy, Charcot’s students, disciples, nurses, doctors and non-medical luminaries of Paris are identified with numbered figures and a labeled key that has all the characters outlined. However, in these reproductions, Gilles de la Tourette’s and Charles Féré’s positions are inverted. Gilles de la Tourette,

a very famous disciple of Charcot, is labeled as number 27, whereas Charles Féré, a psychiatrist and Charcot’s private secretary, is shown as number 5. According to Brouillet’s original picture, the correct labeling would have Gilles de la Tourette as number 5 and Charles Féré as number 27. The same happens with the labeled, but not numbered, reproduction at display at the Museum of the History of Medicine in Paris, right across the original painting^{3,6,9,10} (Fig 1B).

DISCUSSION

Georges Édouard Brutus Gilles de la Tourette (1857–1904), one of Charcot’s favorites disciples, is better known for describing the complex tic disorder that would later carry his name (Fig 2A), and Charles Féré (1852–1907) was a psychiatrist and



Fig 2. (A) Georges E. B. Gilles de la Tourette (1857–1904) (extracted from Google Images - Gacougnolle.com) and (B) Charles Féré (1852-1907) (extracted from Google Images - Baillement.com).

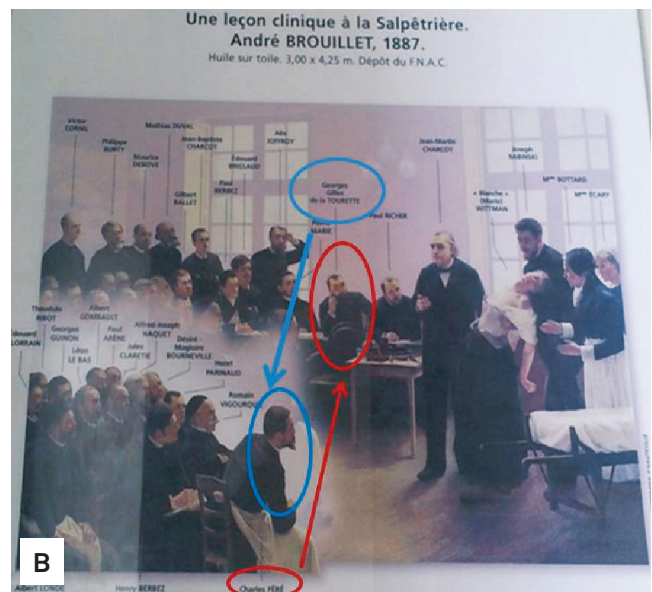


Fig 1. (A) “A clinical lesson at the Salpêtrière”, the original painting exhibited at the Musée de l’Histoire de la Médecine and (B) labeled copy of the painting, right opposite the original picture. Notice that Tourette and Féré are mislabeled. Both pictures were taken by one of the authors, Francisco M. B. Germiniani, at the Museum, on 18th May 2012.

acted as Charcot's private secretary early in his career (Fig 2B). Both Tourette and Féré shared some similar physical features, including a full-grown beard and a receding hairline, but Féré's beard was far longer and unkempt and his receding hairline was more prominent. These similarities could lead the inattentive viewer to easily mistake them.

Such is the case in the labeled copy of "A clinical lesson at the Salpêtrière" displayed at the Museum, as their positions are inverted.

This historical note sheds some light on this little mistake in some of the reproductions of Brouillet's famous painting, so that further confusion can be avoided.

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