

# Critchley Revisited: Personification of a Neurologically Dysfunctional Limb



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Macdonald Critchley described personification of paralysed limbs in hemiplegics following an initial anosognosia over 50 years ago. He reported personal knowledge of patients who called their hemiplegic limbs “George”, “Toby”, “silly billy”, “floppy Joe”, “baby”, “gammy”, “the immovable one”, “the curse”, “lazy bones”, and “the nuisance”. He found it strange that this phenomenon had not been previously described in the literature.<sup>1</sup> A case of personification of a presumed functional neurological disability is presented.

A 30-year-old right-handed man was referred to the neurology clinic following attendance at A&E with an abrupt onset movement disorder affecting the right arm and leg. Asked what the problem was, he held up his shaking right hand and laughed, saying “This is Trevor”. Present for about a month, the shaking had become less noticeable in the leg, varied from time to time, and was worse with reaching for, rather than holding on to, objects. It had occasioned the loss of his job as a graphic designer. There was no prior or family history of movement disorder, but the patient was treated for depression with paroxetine and had been investigated for joint pains with no explanation found. His examination showed no abnormalities, specifically no neglect, aside from a tremor of the right hand and arm which was reduced with distraction and could be entrained with contralateral fast finger movements. The patient’s affect was ostensibly cheerful, jokey, and lacking in concern. A provisional diagnosis of

psychogenic tremor was made based on the history of abrupt onset, positive entrainment, absence of finger tremor, and the history of depression and probable somatoform disorder.<sup>2</sup> Standard brain magnetic resonance imaging was normal and EEG showed no correlate with the shaking movement which was present throughout the recording.

Although most of the cases reported by Critchley occurred in the context of left hemiplegia, he noted at least one such case in a right-handed man with a right-sided paralysis. A number of other common features were also noted, particularly a detached attitude towards the deficit which was treated with insouciance and cheerful acceptance, reminiscent of the anosodiaphoria characterised by Babinski.<sup>3</sup> These features were shared by this patient, although since there was no history of prior anosognosia it may be a false generalisation to compare this case with personification of hemiplegia.

Critchley mentioned that personification might also occur in amputees with phantom limbs, as well as in hemiplegics,<sup>1</sup> but no previous accounts of personification of neurological deficits of presumed functional origin have been identified. Apparent anosognosia for a movement disorder (hemiballismus) was mentioned by Weinstein & Kahn.<sup>4</sup>

The neurobiological mechanisms in the current case are unknown, but presumably involve some form of dissociation or alteration of body image or schema. It might also fall under the rubric of motor conversion disorder. ♦

## REFERENCES

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