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Samuel Johnson: victim of Gilles de la Tourette syndrome

The well known tics, mannerisms, postures and verbal repetitions displayed by Samuel Johnson the great scholar-lexicographer suggest that he was a victim of Gilles de la Tourette syndrome.¹⁻³

Thomas Tyers⁴ commenting on Johnson said "he was to the last a convulsionary . . . His gestures, which were a degree of St Vitus' Dance, in the street attracted the notice of many".

Boswell⁵ observed "Dr Johnson is often muttering pious ejaculations, when he appears to be talking to himself."

"He commonly held his head on one side towards his right shoulder, and shook it in a tremulous manner, moving his body backwards and forwards, and rubbing his left knee in the same direction, with the palm of his hand. In the intervals of articulating he made various sounds with his mouth, sometimes as if ruminating, sometimes giving a half-whistle, sometimes making his tongue play backwards from the roof of his mouth, as if clucking like a hen, and sometimes . . . pronouncing quickly under his breath, 'too, too, too'."

" . . . he had another particularity . . . his anxious care to go in and out at a door or passage, by a certain number of steps from a certain point . . . I have on innumerable occasions, observed him suddenly stop, and then seem to count his steps with a deep earnestness; . . ."

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