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NEUROLOGY IN LITERATURE

More movements

Descriptions of parkinsonian patients are surprisingly infrequent in literature. Dickens' character, in *The Pickwick papers*, exhibits immobility with tremor, and is probably parkinsonian rather than depressed. Some of the Witches of Salem seem to have had oculogyric crises, raising the question of an encephalitic basis for their illness. Constance, in the *Old wives' tale*, appears to have developed late-onset chorea as does Dick, in *The Heart of Midlothian*. Uriah Heep's serpiginous movements are not, I suspect, the result of Dickens observing athetosis, but his attempt to portray the evil, serpent-like, characteristics of that individual. Claudius, one of Suetonius' twelve Caesars, probably had multiple tics, but without the vocal utterances that would establish a diagnosis of Gilles de la Tourette's syndrome.

Sir Walter Scott, 1830, The Heart of Midlothian
When Dick had looked at the paper, he winked with one eye, extended his grotesque mouth from ear to ear, like a navigable canal, scratched his head powerfully . . . He ducked with his head and shoulders, scraped with his more advanced hoof, bolted the alcohol, to use the learned phrase, and withdrew to his own domains.

Charles Dickens, 1836–7, The Pickwick papers
On the opposite side of the room an old man was seated on a small wooden box, with his eyes rivetted on the floor, and his face settled into an expression of the deepest and most hopeless despair. A young girl—his little grand-daughter—was hanging about him: endeavouring, with a thousand childish devices, to engage his attention; but the old man neither saw nor heard her. The voice that had been music to him, and the eyes that had been light, fell coldly on his senses. His limbs were shaking with disease, and the palsy had fastened on his mind.

Charles Dickens, 1849–50, David Copperfield
He had a way of writhing when he wanted to express enthusiasm, which was very ugly; and which diverted my attention from the compliment he had paid my relation, to the snaky twistings of his throat and body . . . Uriah, with his long hands slowly twining over one another, made a ghastly writhe from the waist upwards, to express his concurrence in this estimation of me . . . He jerked himself about, after this compliment, in such an intolerable manner, that my aunt, who had sat looking straight at him, lost all patience. "Deuce take the man!" said my aunt, sternly, "What's he about? Don't be galvanic, sir!"

Arnold Bennett, 1908, The old wives' tale
Constance, for all her vast bulk, continually made little nervous movements. Occasionally she would sniff and occasionally a mysterious noise would occur in her chest; she always pretended that this noise was a cough, and would support the pretence by emitting a real cough immediately after it.

Gaius Suetonius, The twelve Caesars; Tranquillus (translated by Robert Graves, 1957)
These included an uncontrolled laugh, a horrible habit, under the stress of anger, of slobbering at the mouth and running at the nose, a stammer, and a persistent nervous tic—which grew so bad under emotional stress that his head would toss from side to side.

Folio Society, 1982, The witches of Salem
. . . and then her eyes were presently pulled into her head, so farr, that one might, have fear'd she should never have us'd them more.

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