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## Cervico-facial dystonia as depicted in sculpture before its scientific description.<sup>1</sup>

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**Abstract**

The authors describe a sculpture from Daumier, called “Le Hargneux” (The Peevish One), whose physiognomic study evokes hitherto unrecognized cranial-cervical dystonia. It is probably the first representation of dystonia in sculpture, before its scientific identification by Horatio Wood, in 1887.

**Keywords:** cervico-facial dystonia; Meige's syndrome; movement disorders; history of medicine; art.

We would like to draw attention to one of Daumier's sculptures, called "*Le Hargneux*" (The Peevish One) whose physiognomic study evokes hitherto unrecognized cranial-cervical dystonia.

Honoré-Victorin Daumier (1808–1879) was a French draftsman, printmaker, painter and sculptor, sometimes called "the Michelangelo of caricature" for his remarkable ability to satirize France's bourgeoisie, members of the government, lawyers, judges and doctors. His caricatures of King Louis-Philippe were so cruel and grotesque that they landed him in jail for 6 months.

Eventually Daumier produced 36 busts of French politicians, mainly members of Parliament, in unbaked clay. Some of these busts were reproduced first in plaster. Only after Daumier's death were bronze editions produced in different foundries. These bronze busts can be admired at the National Gallery of Art in Washington, while a series of the painted busts in clay is exhibited at the Musée d'Orsay in Paris.

One of the figurines, reported to represent the diplomat and senator Charles-Louis Huguet, marquis de Sémonville (1759–1839), shows him with grimaces that do not fit with a natural, physiological attitude (Figure 1). His eyes are shut tight, his head turned to the left with a discrete right laterocollis, the right side of his face is animated by tonic contractures and the tongue moderately protracted. Daumier masterfully stressed the grotesque posture of the senator, but could not have been aware that such movement disorders might reflect a neurological condition.

This combination of blepharospasm, spasms of the face, jaw muscles and sometimes the tongue with involvement of the neck muscles is characteristic of cranial-cervical dystonia (1,2). The first description of cranial dystonia is attributed to the American neurologist Horatio Wood, in 1887, 8 years after Daumier's death, and was completed on a series of patients by the French neurologist Henri Meige, under the term "*spasme facial médian*" (3,4). In its princeps description Wood noted that "the contraction is tonic, causing a complete closure of the eye, and consequent blindness. This is accompanied by innumerable bizarre grimaces." Meige observed that besides the blepharospasm, the nose muscles "as well those of the lips, especially the medial orbicularis bundles and (...) the chin muscles" were affected. He stressed that "the mild grimaces do not correspond to a known mimic" and that "patients' mental status was similar to the one observed in spasmodic torticollis."

Importantly, he wrote that one of his patients had an extension of his spasms "to the jaw, the floor of the mouth and tongue," as on Daumier's sculpture.

Whereas the grotesque dystonic movements hardly go unnoticed and the crude prevalence rate for focal dystonia has been estimated as 59 per million, literary reports on dystonia only date back to post-Medieval times (1) and their representation in art is particularly rare. Marsden (5) coined the eponym "Brueghel syndrome" to designate an oromandibular dystonia with blepharospasm, since he thought that Pieter Brueghel the elder (1526–1569) depicted dystonic movements in his painting *De Gaper* (the yawning man). However, this assumption was later challenged since the widely opened jaw with eye closure may correspond to physiological yawning. Recently, two Italian neurologists found a red-chalk drawing from the Renaissance painter da Lodi, called *A man with eyes shut tight*, which is more convincingly probably the first artistic description of cranial-cervical dystonia (6). We believe that the bust *Le Hargneux* is the second undisputable artistic representation of a dramatic cranial-cervical dystonia, far before the twisted and mannered postures observed on Egon Schiele's paintings, which raise the unsolved question of his dystonia (7).

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### **Disclosure of interest**

Both authors have nothing to disclose.

**Figure 1.** Left, bust in bronze *Le Hargneux* (with permission, National Gallery of Art, Washington). Right, bust in painted clay *Le Hargneux* (with permission, Musée d'Orsay, Paris).

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