

MacDonald Critchley

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ABSTRACT

The authors presented a historical review on Professor MacDonald Critchley, 15 years after his death.

Key words: MacDonald Critchley, parietal lobes, neurology.

RESUMO

Os autores apresentaram uma revisão histórica sobre o professor MacDonald Critchley, no seu 15º ano de falecimento.

Palavras-Chave: MacDonald Critchley, lobos parietais, neurologia.

With the exponential growth of molecular biology, neurogenetics and neuroimaging, Neurology has made great advances in recent years. However, the clinical aspects of neurological practice continue to play a fundamental role in diagnostic reasoning, and complementary laboratory tests should, therefore, be used appropriately. The continued importance of clinical neurological practice reflects the influence of the great British tradition of Neurology, with its countless luminaries since the 19th century, including scholars such as Hughlings Jackson, Gowers, Holmes, Kinnier Wilson, Walshe, Critchley, Marsden, Harding and Andrew Lees.

Prof. MacDonald Critchley died 15 years ago, on the October, 15th, at the age of 97¹⁻⁷. There can be little doubt that he was the most striking example of a neurologist in the classic clinical neurological tradition. Endowed with a brilliant mind, highly erudite, always impeccably and elegantly dressed, charismatic in spite of his shyness, Critchley was a gifted lecturer with a great sense of humor and was also a captivating writer. (Figure)¹⁻⁷. Critchley was born on January 2nd, 1900, in Bristol, England. Son of a gas collector, from an early age displayed great intellectual ability and an interest in languages, including German, Russian, French, Greek and Latin¹⁻⁷. His biography is impressive: at the age of 15, he was accepted at the University of Bristol, from which he graduated with honors at the age of 21; he was appointed to the staff of the National Hospital for Nervous Diseases, Maida



Figure. MacDonald Critchley (1900–1997).

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Conflict of interest: There is no conflict of interest to declare.

Received 04 September 2012; Received in final form 10 September 2012; Accepted 17 September 2012

Vale, at the age of 27; and he became a Fellow of the Royal College of Physicians at the age of 30¹⁻⁷. During his 74 years at the National Hospital for Neurology and Neurosurgery, Queen Square, London, his scientific production was intense and included more than 300 papers. One of these was published in the *Arquivos de Neuro-Psiquiatria* in 1952 under the title “A phantom supernumerary limb after a cervical root lesion”¹⁻⁸. Critchley developed a great interest in various areas of Neurology, including movement disorders, but he became internationally renowned for his work in the field of cognitive functions. Among the essays, biographies and books he published, are “The Divine Banquet of the Brain”, “The Citadel of the Senses”, “The Ventricle of Memory” and, most famous of all, “The Parietal Lobes”, which was considered his masterpiece¹⁻⁹. He wrote two famous biographies. The first was about Sir William Gowers (1949) and the second, a joint publication with his wife, Eillen, was about Hughlings Jackson

(1998). Gowers and Jackson were major figures in the field of Neurology, both in England and internationally, and had the greatest influence on his academic career^{1-6,10}.

In addition to his scientific activities, Critchley was vice president of the Royal College of Physicians and president of the World Federation of Neurology and the International League against Epilepsy, as well as Dean of the Institute of Neurology, in Queen Square^{1-3,5-7}. In the obituary of MacDonald Critchley, published in the *Arquivos de Neuro-Psiquiatria* in 1998, professor Lees comments on the discrepancy between MacDonald Critchley’s international renown and the relatively few honors awarded to him (he was awarded a Commander of the British Empire, but his contemporaries at Queen Square, such as Walshe and Symonds, became knights)¹. When asked about this, Critchley is reported to have replied that it was because he had once driven the wrong way up a one-way street in Portugal¹.

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