

In reply — Toulouse-Lautrec manifested a number of the symptoms of pycnodysostosis, and at some time it may be ascertained that he did indeed suffer from that form of dwarfism. I have no vested interest in proving otherwise, but am merely trying to make a neutral assessment of the evidence we have on hand.

In Maroteaux and Lamy's original 1965 paper<sup>3</sup> that posthumously diagnosed Toulouse-Lautrec as having suffered from pycnodysostosis (a disease they had identified in 1962), they submitted the following items as proof that he had a receding chin, short hands with partial absence of the outer finger joints, and an open anterior fontanelle (soft spot): i) A profile photograph of the artist with a beard, in which his chin was partially obscured; ii) Self-caricatures drawn by Toulouse-Lautrec; iii) A report by a fellow artist that Toulouse-Lautrec had an unknitted anterior fontanelle; iv) A description by a cabaret singer of Toulouse-Lautrec's hand; and v) A photograph showing the artist's hands with closed fingers.

I submit that the available photographic evidence and the fact that such symptoms are never mentioned in any family letters, physician's reports or other contemporaneous documentation call into question these specific claims about Toulouse-Lautrec's symptoms. From other photographs (Fig. 2), it can be seen that the artist did not have the deformed skull which typically would have been present if his anterior fontanelle had not closed in a timely manner, nor does he have a receding chin (Fig. 2a). Furthermore, the artist's hands were indeed large with long fingers (Fig. 2b). The original photograph (Fig. 2c) from which Fig. 1b is taken shows Toulouse-Lautrec's hands to be large in comparison to his head and torso. (The fingers of his left hand are extended slightly backwards, which would account for their shorter appearance than the relaxed

fingers in Fig. 2b.)

I also question some other points raised by Dr Maroteaux: a) A caricature is just that: a likeness intentionally distorted for comic purposes - no one could seriously suggest that it be used as scientific evidence. b) Yvette Guilbert's description of Toulouse-Lautrec's hand, published in 1927, contradicts other accounts such as that of the novelist Jules Renard, who described his hands as "bony, [with] widely spaced fingers and semicircular thumbs". Toulouse-Lautrec himself referred to his hands as "grosses pattes" [fat paws]. c) Nowhere in the writings of Francis Jourdain does he mention that Toulouse-Lautrec had an open anterior fontanelle. Henri Perruchot does not mention this symptom in his 1958 biography of the artist. d) Sir Terrence Cawthorne's address<sup>5</sup> contains no notes identifying

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Fig. 2 a, Profile photo of a beardless Toulouse-Lautrec aged around 18, showing apparently normal forehead and chin. b, Toulouse-Lautrec in 1901: his hands appear to be large, with extremely long fingers. c, Toulouse-Lautrec on holiday in Arcachon, France, around 1898, pretending to be an Arab muezzin.

the sources of his claims about Toulouse-Lautrec, but does include many other unsubstantiated statements.

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*[Julia Frey is the author of  
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Weidenfeld & Nicolson 1994 and  
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