



DENYS MONTANDON, MD - SWITZERLAND

THE HERITAGE OF HIPPOLYTE MORESTIN (1869-1919)

The history of surgery, and in particular plastic surgery, has been marked by pioneers who have passed on their knowledge and, above all, their skills to succeeding generations. Prior to the 19th century, some of these pioneers did not bear the title of doctor, as they had not studied at a university and did not speak Latin; some of them, however, were given the title of master surgeon. Surgery was learned from a renowned master in small establishments where barbers and therapists rubbed shoulders.

However, for the past two centuries, all surgeons have been university-educated physicians. Learning the practice of surgery requires a personal relationship between master and pupil, which may last several years. Every trained surgeon learned their trade from tutors. Looking back, we can all remember the men and women who taught us not only surgical techniques but also how to deal with patients and the ethics of the profession. Sometimes, this tutorial goes against our own convictions, but that's part of the training, too, "I won't do it like this one!"

Among the pioneers of plastic, reconstructive, and aesthetic surgery, one of them played a very special role, not only for his commitment to the treatment of the severely mutilated during the First World War but also for his work in the field of aesthetic surgery. How did a peculiar, unruly Creole child born in Martinique, become the most respected surgeon in Paris, admired by his peers and the public alike? How can we explain the fact that this difficult, uncompromising man, who was sometimes contemptuous of his colleagues, became the inspiration for many of the greatest names in plastic surgery, neurosurgery, and even French literature (**Figure 1**)?

Hippolyte Morestin was no ordinary man^{1,2}. He had no wife and few friends. The tragedy of the eruption of the Mont Pelé

Volcano in 1902, in which he lost 21 members of his family, had affected him greatly. He was in frail health, and suffering from tuberculosis, but this did not prevent him from being a hard worker. At 28, he passed the competitive examination to become a surgeon at Paris hospitals, making him the youngest surgeon in France. At 34, he passed the aggregation in surgery and became a professor at the Paris Faculty of Medicine. He had a keen interest in anatomy, but his real passion was operating and caring for the sick, sometimes to the detriment of his own health, which he neglected.

As soon as the Great War broke out, Morestin volunteered for the French Army (**Figure 2**). A few months later, he was called upon to work at the refurbished and enlarged military hospital, Val-de-Grâce. As early as 1915, he organized the center for reconstructive surgery for facial injuries, where he obtained several hundred beds (480 in August 1919). During the four years of the war, he, and his colleagues, in collaboration with dentists, operated on hundreds of mutilated soldiers known as the "Gueules cassées" (Broken Faces). Morestin died following pulmonary complications caused by the Spanish flu on February 11, 1919, three months after the signing of the war Armistice. At his funeral, he received a vibrant tribute from the people of Paris.

During his whole career, Morestin published more than 600 articles on surgical anatomy, abdominal and head and neck surgery, and plastic surgery, such as skin expansion³ to correct extended facial naevi, application of Z-plasty for the treatment of contractures, and the use of costal cartilage grafts for the restoration of the skeletal support of the nose. He was also known among the upper-class Parisians for his successful cosmetic operations, as it was reflected in a few caricatures (**Figure 3**).



MORESTIN'S INFLUENCE AND HEIRS

GILLIES, THE FATHER OF MODERN PLASTIC SURGERY

Before settling in England, Harold D. Gillies, while in Paris in June 1915, visited the Master. As he recalled, this visit probably triggered his future specialty, "I found him (Morestin) at the huge rambling Val-de-Grâce Hospital. He was a strange and moody octoroon, whose dagger-like sharpness was accentuated by his pointed mustache and tapering beard. In the space of a single moment, he could reveal the gentleness of a kitten and the savagery of a tiger. He received me kindly, and I stood spellbound as he removed half of the face distorted with horrible cancer and deftly turned a neck flap to restore not only the cheek but the side of the nose and lip in one shot. Although in the light of present-day knowledge, it seems unlikely this repair could be wholly successful, it was the most thrilling thing I had ever seen. I fell in love with the work on the spot". Asking for a second visit with Morestin, Gillies was not accepted in the operating room (*Figure 4*)!

ESSER (1877-1946), THE POLYVALENT PLASTIC SURGEON

Born in the Netherlands, Johannes Frederik Esser started his medical career as a ship's doctor and then as a general practitioner with a special interest in dentistry. Being dissatisfied professionally, he began to collect art and cultivate relationships with artists. He was also a keen chess player, becoming the Dutch chess champion. At 37, he decided to move to Paris to follow the operations of the head and neck surgeons Pierre Sebileau and Fernand Lemaître, but mainly to work with Hippolyte Morestin, with whom he remained six months during the war. Upon his return to Rotterdam, he became a very talented plastic surgeon and worked also as a military surgeon in different cities, like Brno, Budapest, Vienna, and Berlin.

MADAME NOËL (1878-1954), THE FEMINIST AESTHETIC SURGEON

Suzanne Marguerite Gros, known as Suzanne Noël (from the name of her second husband), started her training in 1908 in the service of Hippolyte Morestin and then in dermatology with Professor Brocq at Saint Louis Hospital. During the First World War, she collaborated with de Martel and Morestin to treat wounded soldiers. After having lost her daughter from the flu and her husband from suicide, she finally wrote her thesis in 1925 and started a successful career as a cosmetic surgeon. With her book published in 1926, "La Chirurgie Esthétique: Son Rôle Social" (Aesthetic Surgery, its Social Role), immediately

translated into German, she pioneered this field, describing her own methods. In 1924, she was one of the founding members of the French section of the Soroptimist Club and started to make numerous trips and conferences to promote aesthetic surgery and feminism⁴ (*Figure 5*).

During World War II, she was known to have modified the faces of opponents and Jews searched by the Gestapo. In 2018, the French Post issued a stamp for her 150th birthday to honor her memory (*Figure 6*).

DE MARTEL (1875-1940), THE PATRIOTIC PIONEER FRENCH NEUROSURGEON

Following France's entry into World War I in 1914, Thierry de Martel served on the front line and was wounded on October 3, 1914; he was then assigned as a surgeon in Val-de-Grâce Hospital, where he worked with Morestin. A year later, de Martel met Harvey Cushing at the American Hospital in Neuilly, where he was appointed Chief Surgeon in 1916. In 1917, he published a book, "Wounds of the Skull and Brain: Their Clinical Forms and Medical and Surgical Treatment," based on his experience with 5,000 soldiers with head injuries.

During the interwar period, de Martel played a central role in establishing modern neurosurgery in France and improving the management of wartime cranioencephalic injuries using his own experience. Following France's entry into World War II on September 3, 1939, de Martel took over as head of the services of the American Hospital of Paris in Neuilly and published another book, "The Treatment of Skull Injuries During Military Operations." But in June 1940, De Martel, in despair over the entry of German troops into Paris, committed suicide by ingesting strychnine.

DUFOURMENTEL (1884-1957), THE DUFOURMENTEL SCALP FLAP

Léon Dufourmentel's medical career started as an internship in the Paris hospitals, working with Morestin. During the war, he followed his master to treat the "Gueules cassées" in Val-de-Grâce Hospital and developed a method for repairing facial wounds, describing a hair-bearing pedicled flap from the temporal scalp to reconstruct the lower part of the face. He also proposed the use of ivory grafts for nasal reconstruction. His main book was published in 1939, "Chirurgie réparatrice et correctrice des téguments et des forms" (Reparative and Corrective Surgery of the Skin and Contour Defects). He also published in 1946 an essay on art and plastic surgery.



Léon was the father of Claude Dufourmentel (1915-2012), one of the leading French plastic surgeons of the 20th century.

DUHAMEL (1884-1966), WAR SURGEON, WRITER, AND PACIFIST

In the early days of WWI, Georges Duhamel decided to enlist for active service in the French Army. He wanted to give of himself and share the hardships of the men of his generation. From 1914 onwards, he spent four years as a medical officer under the supervision of Morestin, often in highly exposed situations. While practicing near the Champagne front in 1915, he decided to tell the story of the ordeals suffered by the wounded. This experience gave rise to two novels, "Vie des martyrs" (The Life of the Martyrs), published in 1917, and "Civilisation", a testimony to the ravages of war, for which he received the Prix Goncourt 1918. Once he returned to civilian life, Duhamel dedicated himself to literature and defending humanitarian civilization. In 1935, he was elected to the chair of the Académie Française. Writing numerous novels between 1930 and 1940, he traveled to conferences in France and abroad, promoting the idea of a civilization built on the human heart rather than technological progress. At the outbreak of hostilities in the Second World War, Georges Duhamel once again became a military surgeon, operating on wounded civilians in Rennes during the 1940 exodus. In 1942, his entire literary work was banned from publication by the Gestapo. After the war, his peers elected him as perpetual Secretary of the Académie Française.

PASSOT (1866-1933), THE PURE AESTHETIC SURGERY

Raymond Passot worked as an intern since 1910 in the service of Morestin. After his training, he became mainly involved in the practice of cosmetic surgery, and already in 1919, he presented to the Academy of Medicine his work on face lift. His book, "Chirurgie esthétique pure: technique et résultats" (Pure Aesthetic Surgery), published in 1931, makes a clear distinction between repair and aesthetic surgery, with new and well-illustrated methods proposed. In another book, "Sculpteurs du visage" (1933) (Face Sculptors), he justifies aesthetic surgery on a healthy body as a therapy for neuroses and prevention of suicides.

CONCLUSION

Directly or indirectly, Hippolyte Morestin had an immense influence on the surgeons who worked with him or had seen him operating. We can attribute this heritage to his dedication to the profession, tireless activity, patriotic engagement, and

multiple publications. Undoubtedly, the tragic circumstances of WWI, with its numerous wounded soldiers requiring surgical repair, played a role in the surge of vocations for reconstructive surgery. Interestingly, unlike Harold Gillies later, Morestin did not hesitate to publish several articles on aesthetic surgery, showing clearly that the two sides of our specialty are intimately linked, and encouraging Suzanne Noël and Raymond Passot to develop this field⁵.

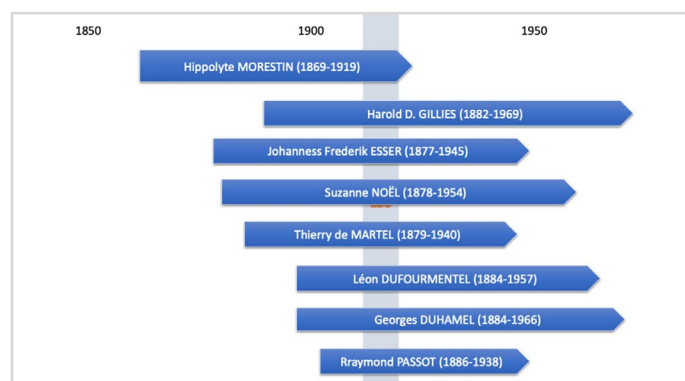


Figure 1: Chronology of the life of the surgeons in relation to WWI.

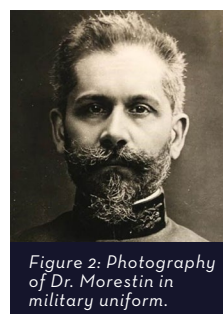


Figure 2: Photograph of Dr. Morestin in military uniform.

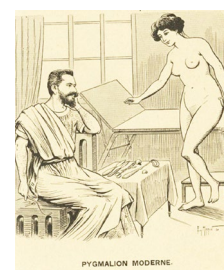


Figure 3: Dr. Morestin: "The Modern Pygmalion."

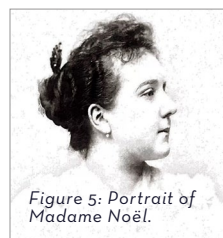


Figure 5: Portrait of Madame Noël.



Figure 4: "Restoration of the Face, Dr. Morestin (Entry Forbidden!)."

Figure 6: 2018 post-stamp.

REFERENCES:

1. Lalardrie JP. Hippolyte Morestin 1869-1919. *Journal of Plastic, Reconstructive and Aesthetic Surgery* 1972; 25: 39-41
2. Roger BO. Hippolyte Morestin (1869-1919). Part I: A brief biography. *Aest Plast Surg* 1982; 5:141-147
3. Montandon D. Surgical expansion and elongation since Antiquity. Part 1: Skin expansion and elongation. *ISAPS News* . 2022; 16: 29-31
4. Mazzola RF. Suzanne Noël: Pioneer in aesthetic surgery and founder of the Soroptimist Europe. *ISAPS News*. 2009; 3:18-9
5. Guirimand N. De la réparation des « Gueules cassées » à la « sculpture du visage ». La naissance de la chirurgie esthétique en France pendant l'entre-deux-guerres. *Actes de la recherche en sciences sociales*. 2005; 156-157:72-87

