

LETTER TO THE EDITOR

# Some remarks on the revival of rhinoplasty in Europe in the early nineteenth century

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Dear Editor,

In his interesting article entitled: 'Amputation of the nose throughout history'<sup>1</sup>, Professor Giorgio Sperati, unfortunately, perpetuates the classic error that the so-called 'B.L. letter' in *The Gentleman's Magazine* of 1794 was written by 'Colley Lucas'<sup>1</sup>. However, the actual author of the letter was the engraver Barak Longmate II (1768-1836)<sup>2,3</sup>, whose surname is visible underneath the engraving (see Figure 9 in Sperati's article<sup>1</sup>).

B(arak) L(ongmate's) letter appears to have fired the imagination of the English surgeon Joseph Constantine (not John<sup>1</sup>) Carpue (1764-1846) who initially practiced the Indian method of rhinoplasty on cadavers<sup>4</sup>, and waited until a suitable patient presented himself. Carpue performed his first two rhinoplasties in 1814 and 1815<sup>4</sup> (not in 1816<sup>1</sup>). In 1816, Carpue published the results of these attempts in his landmark work: 'An account of two successful opera-

tions for restoring a lost nose from the integuments of the forehead'<sup>4</sup>.

Carl Ferdinand von Graefe (1787-1840) had Carpue's work translated into German in 1817<sup>5</sup>, and subsequently wrote his own book on nasal reconstruction entitled: 'Rhinoplastik, oder die Kunst den Verlust der Nase organisch zu ersetzen' (1818)<sup>6</sup>. The term 'plastic' appears to have been applied to surgery for the first time in history in this publication<sup>5</sup>.

Although the 'B.L. letter' and the works by Carpue and Von Graefe revived the interest in rhinoplasty in the Western world, it would not have been undertaken lightly by surgeons or their patients in the early nineteenth century. The non-life-saving nasal reconstructions had to be done in those days without the benefits of general anaesthesia, asepsis and antisepsis, which had not yet been introduced into surgery.

## References

- <sup>1</sup> Sperati G. *Amputation of the nose throughout history*. *Acta Otorhinolaryngol Ital* 2009;29:44-50.
- <sup>2</sup> Symons J. "A Most Hideous Object": *John Davies (1796-1872) and Plastic Surgery*. *Med Hist* 2001;45:395-402.
- <sup>3</sup> Freshwater MF. *Discussion of: Nicolò Manuzzi (1639-1717) and the first report of the Indian Rhinoplasty*. *J Plast Reconstr Aesthet Surg* 2009 Feb 20. [Epub ahead of print].
- <sup>4</sup> Carpue JC. *An account of two successful operations for restoring a lost nose from the integuments of the forehead, in the cases of two officers of his majesty's army: to which are prefixed, historical and physiological remarks on the nasal operation; including descriptions of the Indian and Italian methods*. London: Longman, Hurst, Rees, Orme and Brown 1816.
- <sup>5</sup> Gnudi MT, Webster JP. *The life and times of Gaspare Tagliacozzi, surgeon of Bologna, 1545-1599*. Los Angeles: Zeitlin & Ver Brugge 1976.
- <sup>6</sup> Von Graefe CF. *Rhinoplastik; oder die Kunst den Verlust der Nase organisch zu ersetzen, in ihren früheren Verhältnissen erforscht und durch neue Verfahrungsweisen zur höheren Vollkommenheit gefördert*. Berlin: Reimer 1818.

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**LETTER TO THE EDITOR**

Dear Professor Chiesa,

I have read colleague Robert C. van de Graaf's remarks following the publication of my article on "Amputation of the nose throughout history" and am pleased that they were not directly related to the contents of the article but to two errors in preparing the text: John Carpue instead of Joseph Carpue and to having quoted 1816 when referring to the year when Carpue performed these operations rather than to the year in which the news regarding the operations appeared.

As far as concerns the famous letter that appeared in Gentleman's Magazine, in 1794, I based my text, having attributed it to Colley Lucas, on the information written by

the authors of some of the most well-known volumes on the History of ORL, from Willemot to Weir, from Guerrier to Feldmann. I have, therefore, now taken note of this new interpretation, no longer attributing the letter in question to Lucas the doctor, who was actually a witness to this, but to the engraver of the Longmate figures. I now intend, therefore, for the sake of curiosity, to look deeper into the question, even if, in fact, I don't think that the person responsible for writing the letter has any influence on the contents or on the points raised in it.

Regards,  
Giorgio Sperati

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