In memoriam

Jean-Michel Thomine has left us

As President of the French Orthopaedic and Trauma Society (SoFCOT), President of the French College of Orthopaedic and Trauma Surgeons (CFCOT), and Editor-in-Chief of the Revue de chirurgie orthopédique, he was one of the major leaders and, in many respects, a pioneer of the French orthopaedics community.

He described his vision in these words in 1998 when he became president of the SoFCOT:

‘For this scientific society to fulfil its chosen duty as the custodian of an ethical use of knowledge, it must acquire the means to evaluate and validate the work done by others… By thus becoming the trustees of the ethics of knowledge, scientific societies will be among the interfaces of choice that connect physicians to the civil society, media, and authorities, thereby acquiring a legitimacy that can be qualified as external…’

As early as 1998, he raised issues that remain at the forefront of our concerns today: ethical behaviour, patient rapport, and relationships with regulatory agencies and the media. In this way, scientific societies can become “professional” societies.

These few sentences provide an illustration — should any be required — of his clarity of vision and predilection for the mot juste that constantly enlivened his words and actions. These features were particularly apparent at the Revue de chirurgie orthopédique, of which he was Editor-in-Chief from 1995 to 2009, after Jean Zucman. He gave our journal the drive that characterises a major publication. Under his gracious but efficient leadership, he steered the RCO towards modernity and professionalism, with the support provided by its partnership with a strong publisher, Elsevier.

The emphasis on professionalism manifested chiefly as an unwavering determination to lift the quality of RCO publications up to international standards. It is an understatement to say that Jean-Michel Thomine was impregnated with this objective, which energised all his actions. He was aware that the editorial board had to comply with stringent rules. He also knew that the Latin mentality was not always willing to bend to the rules. He was convinced, nevertheless, that rules were the only guide to the objective. He did not use rules as a tool for censuring. Quite the contrary, his quest for quality and discipline went hand in hand with a dedication to teaching. A manuscript submitted in less than ideal form was not routinely rejected, but instead could be an opportunity for multiple communications with the author, provided the contents were deserving, until a high-quality manuscript was produced… by the author. “Give a man a fish and you feed him for a day; teach him how to catch fish and you feed him for a lifetime.”

The leadership of Jean-Michel Thomine thus naturally produced major innovations in RCO policies: the contribution of a broad base of reviewers was obtained, precise and detailed instructions for authors were issued, and an electronic system was established to manage the manuscripts. Other important features were continuation of the close partnership with the parent organisation, the SoFCOT, and the creation of new collaborations with other societies (the Société française d’arthroscopie [SFA] in 2004 and subsequently, the Société orthopédique de l’Ouest [SOO]) via the publication of theme issues under the direction of an independent editorial board. All these changes occurred, of course, in close cooperation with the successive presidents of the APCORT (Association des publications de chirurgie orthopédique réparatrice et traumatologique): J. Duparc, I. Kempf, J.Y. Nordin and B. Augereau.

Thus, our Revue de chirurgie orthopédique, a grande dame whose 100th issue is being commemorated this year, underwent a metamorphosis. The foundation for the great adventure of the new OTSR-RCOT was laid.

I had the good fortune to work with J.Y. Nordin and J.M. Thomine on the development of this project, whose considerable impact on the French-speaking orthopaedics community is becoming clear today. This is what they wrote in the editorial for the 8th issue of 2008 (the last issue of the RCO): ‘Being printed does not guarantee visibility, visibility does not guarantee a readership and, of course, if we are not at least read we cannot be cited. Increasingly, the English language is used to disseminate scientific information.’ These words gave birth to the OTSR-RCOT with its indexed version in English. Jean-Michel Thomine, as the Emeritus Editor-in-Chief since 2005, directed careful attention to the progress of this new journal and was happy to see it bear out our expectations: it is now an international journal that actively participates in disseminating the work of French-speaking orthopaedic surgeons throughout the English-speaking community.

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Jean-Michel Thomine disliked the spotlight. Might this be viewed as a positive quality, or perhaps as a state inherent in the function of Editor-in-Chief? The effect is seen clearly in the small number of editorials he wrote for our journal. He preferred to work quietly, moving forward little by little, listening to all sides, deriving enjoyment from persuading before deciding and making his mark. This time of sharing was invaluable to me and our Monday afternoon meetings remain permanently etched in my memory. I was never his student, but I know how fortunate I was to work at his side and to share his concerns. He was thus my mentor, to the same extent as were those who taught me how to operate. There is indeed no doubt that medical writing is a skill that must be learned then transmitted in the same way as orthopaedic surgery.

The French orthopaedic community, the SoFCOT, and the Revue de chirurgie orthopédique owe an enormous debt to Jean-Michel Thomine.

Issues pertaining to orthopaedics and the preparation of medical articles were not sufficient to satisfy his open and inquiring mind. His family, vineyards, the Isle of Ré, travelling... and poetry also took up a good portion of his time. It may seem odd to place the strict discipline underlying medical writing side by side with the whimsy of poetry. Perhaps the shaping of words requires a touch of surgery? In any case, he enjoyed writing verses, and those lucky enough to read them derived considerable pleasure from the experience.

The SoFCOT, the editorial board of the OTSR-RCOT, Bernard Augereau and the APCORT, Elsevier, and the many others who enjoyed working with him express their deepest condolences to Ms. Thomine and their children in these difficult times.

Un dîner de mots ou Si vous aimez les mots
Si vous aimez les mots
Dégustez-les un à un et tissés
Redites-les ou bien les chantez
Vous aurez à la bouche leur saveur et leur son
Leurs murmures ou leurs cris réveilleront
L’écho brumeux des rêves
Et la tristesse au cœur serré
Et la chaleur exultante du plaisir soudain revécu
Nuages au ciel des idées, fumées planant sur la raison
Libérés du sens, devenus couleur ou chanson
Dévoysés et retrouvés neufs en vous disant
Ils sont à tous et à chacun
Le voile du retour ou du voyage
Jean-Michel Thomine
In L’Oupopo
Les Éditions Pamyennes

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