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Journal of Clinical Surgery and Research

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Editorial

An era, by chance

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Received Date: 05 April, 2024 | **Accepted Date:** 15 April, 2024 | **Published Date:** 23 April, 2024

Citation: Jaime Hinzpeter C (2024), An era, by chance, *Journal of Clinical Surgery and Research*, 5(3); **DOI:**10.31579/2768-2757/124

Summary

The Belle Époque, a period in European history from 1871 to 1914, was characterized by progress, optimism, and scientific development. Julian Barnes' book "The Man in the Red Coat" explores this era, with inspiration drawn from the famous Italian gynecologist

Samuel Jean Pozzi. One significant medical advancement during this time was the discovery of X-rays by Wilhelm Conrad Röntgen in 1895. Initially used for examining

bones, X-rays soon found applications in various medical fields. The Belle Époque saw numerous achievements in medicine, including the works of Robert Koch and Louis Pasteur, the introduction of asepsis by Dr. Lister, and the establishment of the Johns

Hopkins School of Medicine in the United States. These developments resulted in the exchange of knowledge and parallel progress between Europe and North America. The butterfly effect, a concept from chaos theory, may have influenced these advances, as

chance encounters and individual imaginations played a role in scientific breakthroughs. Quantum physics further supports the idea that events can have interconnected effects and that subatomic particle can communicate with each other regardless of distance.

Reading books, like Barnes', can stimulate active imagination and lead to new perspectives and questions. The non-linear nature of these intellectual journeys often leaves readers with more questions than answers, creating a zig-zag path of exploration.

The editorial hints at another surprising paragraph from a different book, suggesting there may be more to uncover in future discussions.

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La Belle Époque, or belle epoque, is an expression for a particular time in European history, the period between the end of the Franco-Prussian War in 1871 and the start of the First World War in 1914; a time marked by progress,material, optimism and the development of science(1).The belle époque lasted a little more than 40 years, with great progress for humanity in many areas, including, naturally, medicine. Maybe chance led me to her. A book, in fact. The Man in the Red Coat, written by the British novelist Julian Barnes (2). Its pages recreate that time for us, and although its imprint is certainly literary, the idea of the text came to its famous author...from medicine; and particularly, after contemplating the portrait of a famous and aristocratic Italian gynecologist called Samuel Jean Pozzi. In the book, Barnes reflects and tells us that no one takes eras into consideration until they have already passed. Doctors, in essence, are not historians, but we do read a lot and write articles or studies that gather the discoveries or knowledge of yesteryears, and come up with a new or broader point of view. An advance during the belle époque, firmly related to my traumatology specialty, was the appearance of X-rays. These were discovered in 1895 by the German-born Dutch scientist Wilhelm Conrad Röntgen after incidentally experimenting with a cathode ray tube (3). The chance that fluttered in his laboratory (I will return to this chance later) gave him the idea to take the first known X-ray. This was done with the help of his wife, who he asked to place her left hand on a metal plate so he could “photograph” it. News of the discovery (which they named X because they were unaware of its nature) revolutionized Medicine and allowed Röntgen to be the first winner of the Nobel Prize in Physics in 1901 (4). At first, X-rays were used to examine bones, but then the search broadened to gallstones, gunshot wounds, and many other uses... (and today, they are even used to check luggage at customs and airports). The specialty has incorporated all the knowledge and research done for over 100 years (and that includes the interesting development of prostheses at the turn of the

century). Listing the achievements of medical science in the BE would fill several pages and bytes. Here are a few: The works of Robert Koch, the vaccines of Pasteur, and immunity against tetanus, discovered by Emil von Behring in 1890. The asepsis of Dr. Lister, and the German, Ernst Von Bergman (5). The latter was the first doctor to introduce the sterilization of surgical instruments (and dressings) using heat, in addition to a long etcetera. And since we are talking about Dr. Lister, who was famous for operating on Queen Victoria, in the book by Julian Barnes, it is said that Pozzi, the gynecologist portrayed in the painting that inspired

the British writer, attended the British Medical Association conference that was held in Edinburgh in 1876 and taught by Lister. Pozzi knew him and his methods. Later, he implemented his ideas in his practice, becoming a.

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"Listerian" (Pozzi was referring to the "Scottish rite" – alluding to the Brit 's thoroughness). The chance meeting with Lister was, for the Italian doctor, the beginning of a lifelong fruitful period in which knowledge was exchanged with European and North American colleagues. And even though the belle époque was in reference to the European splendor, the United States also had this butterfly effect. In North America, the most brilliant place to study medicine was born, the John Hopkins School in Baltimore Maryland which opened in 1893 (6). John Hopkins had prodigies such as Dr. William Steward Halstead, the father of American surgery (and named the first professor of surgery at JH) who also happened to be the tutor of another great, Dr. Harvey Cushing, who would later develop the bases of neurosurgery. Two separate continents, but parallel development and exchange. Mere coincidence? Chance? or Butterfly effect? (7). Perhaps W. Röntgen was not aware of his search, and that desire (or his will) was not "as visible" as it was in other cases, such as that of Koch, Pasteur, or Lister himself (with conscious concerns and questions that cradled many years). As Carl Jung would say many years later, it was the materialization of the unconscious…, the collective unconscious. Röntgen may not have been aware, but he had plenty of imagination. What is more, for Carl Jung, active imagination has the psychic potential capable of triggering the butterfly effect (ref. 7 page 101). Considering imagination as one of the highest qualities of the human being. Good Röntgen! What I write is because I want to share an idea, something that flutters like a butterfly (that came out of a book chosen at random). An idea that wants to stay away from lax rambling (given the formality of the text), but that also does not want to be seen as dogma, or something written in stone, just an idea that should be analyzed. The butterfly effect (described in essence as a series of events that generate effects on related things) "plays" a lot with quantum physics; and quantum physics introduces a type of chance unknown in classic physics (Bunge. Ref. 8 pg. 244). What is more, quantum physics has demonstrated (demonstrated at least, by the literature that supports these sayings), that atomic sub particles communicate with each other regardless of distance. I was surprised, to say the least, that when I picked up the book by Barnes, a conscious reality materialized (its reading) and consequentially, it left me with new questions in the middle of the Belle Époque scenario (the scope of its parallel resonance effect and its flight through time until today). And as I said in previous paragraphs, we doctors read a lot (we also always philosophize). Reading, without a doubt, makes you fly, and our quantum-imagination combines; the past and the present; coincidence with chance..., this chance transforms the caterpillar into a butterfly and the butterfly takes flight. A non-linear flight, without a doubt. Not even a question-and-answer sequence. Sometimes you do not have answers when you read a book, but rather a zig zag of questions are added that, with active imagination, perhaps, cease to be questions and become realities (8).

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I picked up another book again, opened it in the middle, and saw a paragraph that surprised me.

Maybe I will tell you about it in another editorial.

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DOI: 10.31579/2768-2757/124