



FILM REVIEW

The officers' ward

Optimum Releasing,
£14.07 Amazon.co.uk

Director Francois Dupeyron

Writer Marc Dugain,

Francois Dupeyron, based on the
novel by Marc Dugain

Stars Eric Caravaca,

Denis Podalydes, Gregori Derangere,
Sabine Azema, Andre Dussollier

Certificate 15

Running time 135 minutes

Country France

Year 2001

This film, based on a novel by Marc Dugain and written and directed by Francois Dupeyron should be mandatory viewing for all those who care for patients with facial disfigurement. Adrien Fournier is a young French lieutenant who is injured in the opening salvo of the Great War. Initially abandoned for dead, he is evacuated to a military hospital in Paris where he comes to rest on The Officers Ward. This ward contains those other survivors of facial disfigurement by burns or other injuries, who are treated by a surgeon enthused in the emergent field of reconstructive surgery. No Plastic Surgeon can see this without recalling the illustrations of Gillies work (<http://website.lineone.net/~andrewbamji/mcal.html>), or the war wounded of the Queens Hospital Sidcup, and without reminding themselves how much these tortured souls



were guinea pigs, willing for any help to reverse their appalling fate.

The film is beautifully shot in such a way that scenes would have replayed and replayed in my head for their composition alone. But in addition the story is an insistent and haunting one of painful progression through failed surgery after failed surgery as Fournier meets each successive milestone on the way to being able to face himself, let alone the world that is itself afraid to face him. Even for a surgeon familiar with these milestones, this is a story so empathetically told that it instructs and fascinates and finally uplifts. The one-night fling that Fournier has on the eve of war haunts him as he idealises and fantasises the love and contact that he needs to support his odyssey, and which he gets from his nurses in a way that should remind of us the power that nursing can and should have for our patients.

The film is never a sentimental or saccharine production: it is a blunt portrayal of bravery, humour and compassion. It allows us to become intimate with a struggle few can imagine. I came away from it realising that surgery then as now can only heal the wounds, and that imperfectly. Healing the person is more important. See this film.

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