

LAUDATIO CARLOS GYSEL

*Luc Dermaut**

As *collega proximus* and as a colleague orthodontist of the candidate to whom the Sarton Memorial Medal is presented today, it is my pleasure and privilege to introduce to you Mr. Carlos Gysel. Besides being a dentist, Mr. Gysel is the author of numerous publications on the history of dentistry in Belgium. Moreover, he has obtained international recognition for his endeavours as medical historian. To him our University presents the Sarton Medal in recognition of his work and in gratitude for all he added to our knowledge concerning the evolution of medicine in general and of dentistry in particular. But let me first introduce the man and his work.

Carlos is a typical West-Fleming. He was born in Knokke on the 21st of March, 1914. As many people born in West-Flanders, he had no intention to stay where he was born. His studies made him a traveling pigeon. He attended secondary school in Brugge and later in Gent. Since Gysel clearly wanted to become a dentist and because at that time the Ancient Language Certificate was a must for admission to a School of Dentistry, he studied Greek and Latin on his own and passed examination before the National Central Jury. This effort would prove to be essential for his later studies on the history of dentistry. Indeed, it made him a perfect classicist and a true humanist, capable to read in the original text the authors from his preferred centuries, the Renaissance and the Enlightenment. Even the very arduous Latin of Erasmus, Vesalius or Fallopio had no longer any mysteries for him.

As already said, it was Gysel's dream to become a professional dentist. Having obtained the certificate of classical languages he went to

* Gent, March II, 1993

the *Catholic University of Louvain* where he graduated as Licentiate of Dentistry in 1941. From there on the pigeon flew to Eeklo as a general dentist, later to Antwerp where he started a prosperous orthodontic practice, from which he resigned only a few years ago.

Gysel, following his temperament, has always been very active in this discipline. He presented scientific papers and made efforts for the recognition of dentistry in our country. Between 1952 and 1955 he acted as president to the Belgian Society of Academic Dentists. He founded the Belgian Society for Orthodontics and was its president from 1957 till 1982.

He became a member of the board of the *European Orthodontic Society* and was its president-elect in 1971. At the beginning of my postgraduate training in orthodontics at the University of Groningen, The Netherlands, I remember very well the congress which was organized that year at Knokke and which was presided by Gysel. Coming from Belgium myself I was proud that the president-elect of the most important European society was a countryman of mine. It was there and then that I met Mr. Gysel for the first time.

Since many years he is a member of a number of important international societies, e.g. the *Deutsche Gesellschaft für Zahn-, Mund- und Kieferheilkunde*, the Italian Society of Odonto-stomatology, and the *Académie nationale de Chirurgie dentaire de France*. The American College of Dentists and the Pierre Fauchard Academy presented him with their fellowship, while the *Société française d'orthopédie dentofaciale* made Gysel an honorary member.

In 1958 he was organizer and president of the congress of the *Fédération dentaire internationale*, which was held at Brussels. His professional know-how and scientific knowledge have been recognized extensively and the City of Paris presented him in 1964 with the bronze City Medal. In his own country as well honors were lavishly bestowed upon him : in 1982 he was the recipient of the silver medal of his Alma Mater and five years later he was presented with the silver-gilt medal of

the Belgian Dentist Society.

Ladies and Gentlemen, this was a brief overview of the dental career of Mr. Gysel. Today we honor him for another part of his scientific activities : the history of dentistry and its anatomical and physiologic bases. A long time ago, during his student years, his curiosity awoke about the historical background of dentistry and the evolution of our understanding of the structure and function of the stomatognathic system. Having set up his private practice, Gysel started to explore these interesting fields. He is an excellent writer — as a matter of fact more writer than speaker — and thanks to his knowledge of ancient and modern languages he succeeded to present his research in a flow of papers dealing with literally every facet of the history of stomatognathic anatomy and physiology. The fact that Mr. Gysel had his entire training in French explains why the bulk of his written work is in this language. It has to be emphasized, however, that several of his papers were published in Dutch or translated in Italian and in English.

The list of Gysel's medical-historical publications is so extensive and the topics covered so diversified that it is impossible to present them all. However, within the time allotted, I shall attempt to give you a brief summary of his *opus*.

Gysel is the author of a number of books and chapters in textbooks dealing with the historical aspects of stomatology, in particular of dentofacial morphology. On the last subject he is omniscient and has tapped from nearly all original sources available. His books *La Naissance de la Morphologie Dentofaciale*, published in 1980, is a classic.

Gysel has published more than 200 articles about the history of dentistry in national and international journals. This impressive series can be classified in three main groups. Firstly, his papers on the history of the anatomy of the stomatognathic system, in which the contributions of well known and less-well known anatomists are analyzed critically, from Vesalius, via Ruysch and Camper, to Cuvier and Meckel. Secondly, the evolution of dental knowledge, from Charentanus in the 16th to Berdmore

in the latter half of the 18th century. The last group of papers covers the history of dentistry in Belgium and made Mr Gysel one of the most prominent connoisseurs of the history of domestic dentistry.

To conclude I must tell you that Gysel has devoted a dozen or so articles to subjects marginally related to medicine, e.g. literature, philosophy and arts, and many of us will no doubt remember the beautiful pages he has written about some of his beloved authors, e.g. Bossuet, Descartes, Pascal, Erasmus and Michelangelo, as well as his studies of Rubens en Plantijn.

Ladies and Gentleman, I hope I did stress the importance of the interdisciplinary approach by which Gysel has followed the footsteps of George Sarton, which brought the members of the Sarton Committee to select Carlos as recipient of the Sarton Memorial Medal, a honor bestowed by our University on those who by their personal contribution to the history of sciences have helped this discipline to progress.

Thank you for your attention.

