

LAUDATIO HANS L. HOUTZAGER

*M. Thiery**

Dear colleague and friend. Although we met only a few years ago, we for many years have been in the habit of exchanging reprints of our publications. Two decades have fled by since the day I first stumbled upon of your medical-historical papers, a study devoted to Reinier de Graaf published in the journal *Organorama*. This paper caught my eye not only because of the eponymic significance of your hero, but also because it was with one of de Graaf's books — the 1672 edition of "*De mulierum organis generationis*" — that I had started my medical-historical book collection. The beautiful copy of this great classic had come into my possession for the ridiculously low price (you will never believe it) of 175 BF, taxes included. And it was at that particular auction that I had the privilege to be introduced to the Flemish grand master of medical historiography : Léon Elaut. But enough of youthful reminiscences and back to our laureate of to-day.

Ladies and Gentlemen. Hans Leonard Houtzager was born on the 23th of November, 1935, in Delft, The Netherlands, the city where he has spent the greater part of his life and the one to become the epicenter of his medical-historical endeavors.

After service in the Royal Dutch Air Force, Mr. Houtzager took up the study of medicine (1958-66) at the venerable University of Leyden, his second historical pole. After graduation, he specialized in obstetrics and gynecology at the University of Nijmegen, where he obtained the MD diploma in 1968 on a thesis titled "*Estrogen metabolism in molar pregnancy*". Since 1971, Dr. Houtzager practises OB/GYN at the Reinier de Graaf Hospital in Delft.

* Gent, 2 February, 1993

His medical-historical career, conducted in parallel with his medical activities, started early. Indeed, only two years after starting his medical practice, Dr. Houtzager was appointed part-time Research Assistant to the famous Dutch medical historian Gerrit Arie Lindeboom, MD, FRCP, Emeritus Professor of Medicine, then head of the *Medical Encyclopedic Institute* of the Free University of Amsterdam. His affiliation with the Institute was to come to an end in 1983, when the post was abolished as a consequence of the economical policy at Dutch Universities.

Over the years, Houtzager held a variety of related functions. He acted as Curator of the *Chair of the History of Pharmacy* at the University of Leyden, was secretary of the Foundation *Historia Medicinae*, joined the reading committee of the *Lindeboom Memorial Prize*, presided over the Delft Medical-Pharmaceutical Foundation "*De Griffioen*", was president of the historical section of the *Dutch Society of Obstetrics and Gynaecology*, and head of the publication committee of the society *Delfia Batavorum*, refereed medical-historical *MD Theses*, co-organized *Symposia* co-memorating de Graaf, Leeuwenhoek and Pieter van Foreest etc., etc.

Houtzager is also a great writer. To mention only his medical-historical writings : between 1972 and 1991 he published more than 150 papers, contributed a score of historical chapters to medical textbooks, wrote monographies, and edited *Symposia Proceedings*.

Although his written work covers a wide variety of topics his main concern is the 17th century, the "Golden Age" of The Netherlands, and the plead of scientists gravitating around Reinier de Graaf. De Graaf is and remains his great hero, the man to whose short life and innumerable discoveries he devoted not less than 25 papers ! He is inexhaustive on the life and work of de Graaf, whose opus has no longer any secret for him : he knows it by heart.

My dear Hans. On account of your outstanding contribution to the field of medical historiography in general and your original studies of the

fascinating century during which scientists as de Graaf, Langly, Steno, Swammerdam, Ruysch, Van Horne, Sylvius, Leeuwenhoek, and many others made their everlasting discoveries, the members of the *ad hoc* committee decided unanimously to bestow upon you the George Sarton Memorial Plaque. Let me congratulate you and Mrs. Houtzager for the honor you so well deserve.