

PUBLIC IMAGES OF CHEMISTRY IN THE TWENTIETH CENTURY

**Conference to be held in Paris
Cité des Sciences et de l'Industrie, September 17, 2004
Maison de la chimie, September 18, 2004**

**Organized by the Commission for the History of Modern Chemistry,
Division of the International Society for the History of Science**

**Under the auspices of the Académie des Technologies
and the Société de Promotion de l'Industrie, Comité Chimie**

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INTRODUCTION

Whereas in the nineteenth century chemistry was regarded a model science, the epitome of technical advances and a source of literary inspiration, over the twentieth century the public image of chemistry became much more ambivalent. How is it that 'chemical' has been often equated with unnatural and noxious?

The purpose of this conference is to analyse the different images of chemistry through a variety of medias (literature, theatre, movie, cartoons, exhibitions) and to investigate the consequences of the major events that have affected the public perception of chemistry.

The notion of the 'public image' prompts various questions such as

- To what extent were the two World Wars responsible for the changing image of chemistry?
- What was the cultural impact of the flood of synthetics in everyday life?
- What part did chemists and chemical companies play in the emergence of environmental concerns?
- What is the perception of chemical science and chemical industries among science students?

The conference will approach the image problems from two perspectives

- Chemistry from the outside: how are chemists perceived by the public through literature, movies, museums and exhibitions, pictures and cartoons?
- Chemistry from the inside: how do chemists introduce themselves to the public through education, popularising and corporate advertising?

The conference will close with a Round Table:

Public Debates and Public Relation: Towards an Ethics of Chemistry

PELIMINARY PROGRAM (10.06.2004)

Friday, September 17, 2004
Cité des sciences et de l'industrie, Salle Jean Painlevé

Welcome Address

9h00 – 9h40 Getting Started

Alain Coine (Rhodia, France) "The Chemical Horror Show: the Image of Chemistry emerging from an investigation amongst public opinion leaders in France"

Marc Devisscher (CEFIC) "Image of the European chemical industry 1992 - 2004, from bad to worse or maybe not?"

**9h40 – 11h00 First Session:
Chemistry and Chemists in the Literature**

Roslynn D. Haynes (Sydney, Australia) "(Al)chemists in Fiction: The Master Narrative"

Philip Ball (UK) "Chemistry in XXth-century novels"

Discussion

11h00 Coffee

**11h20 – 12h40 Second Session:
Chemistry and Chemists in Movies and Popular Culture**

Peter Weingart (Bielefeld, Germany) "Chemists and Their Craft in Fiction Film"

Jeffrey L. Meikle (Austin, Texas) "Material Doubts: The Popular Consequences of Plastic, 1945-2000"

Discussion

Lunch

**14h00 – 16h00 Third Session:
Representing Chemists and Chemistry in Pictures and Exhibitions**

Elisabeth Vaupel (Munic, Germany) "Is it possible to exhibit chemistry? Reflections about some historical attempts to put chemistry on show.»

Joachim Schummer (Columbia, USA) and Tami Spector (San Fransisco, USA) "The Visual Image of Chemistry and Chemists"

David C. Brock (Philadelphia, USA) "Revolutionary Tools and the Women Who Wield Them: (Re)presenting Chemistry to Diverse Audiences"

Discussion

16h00 Coffee

16h20 – 17h40 **Fourth Session:
Chemistry in Education**

Robert D. Hicks (Philadelphia, USA) "Lessons Learned in Teaching the History of Modern Chemistry On-line"

R. Emmanuel Eastes (Paris, France) "From primary school to university: the main obstacles to the comprehension of chemistry"

Discussion

18h30 Keynote speaker: Prof. Guy Ourrisson (Académie des sciences)

Conference Dinner

**Saturday, September 18, 2004
Maison de la Chimie, Salle 262**

9h00 -10h20 **Fifth session:
The Chemists' Self-Images**

Pierre Laszlo (France) "On the Self-Image of Chemists, 1950-2000"

Paul Caro (Académie des technologies) "The chemist as an autodidact"

Discussion

10h20 Coffee

10h40 – 11h40 **Sixth Session:
Popular Science and Corporate Advertising**

Robert Bud (London, UK) "Penicillin as a wonder drug: The construction of a public image and its collapse"

D. Rhees (The Bakken Library and Museum, USA) "From 'Merchants of Death' to 'Better Living Through Chemistry': The Case of Du Pont"

11h40 **Seventh Session:
Public Debates and Public Relations
Round Table: "Toward an Ethics of Chemistry"**

Chaired by Bernadette Bensaude-Vincent (Univ. Paris-X Nanterre, France)

With Jean Pierre Dupuy (Ecole Polytechnique France and Stanford University), Andrée Marquet (Chimie et société) et Herve This (Collège de France)

Cocktail at the Maison de la Chimie