

BRUYLANTS Albert

Born: August 22, 1915 in St.Gillis (Brussels)

Died: July 12, 1990 at Winksele

Albert Bruylants is the eldest son of professor Pierre Bruylants (1885-1950). After his primary and secondary studies in Leuven and Godinne, he graduates as a Ph.D. (Science) at the University of Leuven in 1938 after supplementary research at the University of Groningen. He becomes aspirant at the NFWO (National Foundation for Scientific Research) in 1941.

Conscientious professor

In 1942 he takes over the course of general chemistry from his father in the BA-years. This is followed by his appointment as professor of organic chemistry in the MA-years in 1946, first in Leuven and later on in Louvain-la-Neuve.

He is valued for his clear and didactic exposition: exact wording, mitigated enthusiasm, severe but listening with a willing ear, taking authoritative action when necessary and a shrewd insight.

His book “*Algemene Scheikunde*” (General Chemistry), written in cooperation with J. Verhulst and J.C. Jungers elaborates the principles established in 1920 by his predecessor/father Pierre Bruylants in “*Traité de Chimie Elementaire*”. Alberts treatise is translated in Spanish. He has trained hundreds of scientists.

Scientific Jack-of-all-trades

His 300 monographs confirm his interest in organic chemistry and he introduces a new trend: the physical organic chemistry. He is fascinated by the link between structure and reactivity and he studies the field of chemical kinetics. This explains his close relationship with J.C. Jungers. He is also interested in geometrical structures and isomerism (a.o. of the unsaturated amides). The subject of his first monograph is about the “*Structure stérique des stérols*”. Another favorite is finding out about reaction mechanisms through the study of homologous series, the hydrolysis of amines, reactions of nitriles, condensation between the carbonyl function and ethylene derivatives and chlorination.

Ambassador of the Belgian Science

Albert Bruylants becomes a member of numerous scientific Belgian and foreign committees, such as the Royal Academy of Belgium, the National Council for Scientific Policies, president for 15 years of the 4th Committee of the NFWO, member of the American Chemical Society, national

delegate at the IUPAC, etc. He receives a large number of Belgian and foreign honors: the Empain Prize, doctor honoris causa of the Universities of Rennes and Aix-Marseille, holder of the Lavoisier Medal, host-professor at the Universities of Paris and Montpellier, member of the European Academy for Sciences, Arts and Letters (UNESCO), honorary member of the Société Chimique de France (French Chemical Society).

Historian and Politician

His ample family history (“*Gustave Bruylants, Fernand Ranwez and their School of Pharmacy at the University of Louvain - 1875-1925*”) justifies his interest in the history of chemistry and sciences. A large number of publications vouch for his insight: « *Esquisse de l’Histoire de la Chimie en Belgique pendant le XIX^e et le début du XX^e siècle* », « *Cet autre Bicentenaire : le Traité de Chimie de Lavoisier* », « *Esquisse historique de la Chimie organique et appliquée* », a biography of Henry and Adolphe Van Tiggelen, etc.

He was also member of the societies devoted to the history of science: the Lavoisier Committee of the Institut de France, the Liebig Museum at Giessen. He is also intrigued by Napoleon; in 1990 he publishes a study “*Waterloo 1915. L’Europe face à Napoléon*”.

After the first school controversy (1949-1952), Albert Bruylants stands for a seat in the communal elections in 1952 and becomes mayor of Winksele from 1953 till 1958.

In his farewell lecture before his emeritus status on September 25, 1984 he mixes liquids with the colours of the Belgian flag in three beakers and by mixing a number of colours he lets his audience guess about the flags of other European states.

Paul Balduck

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