

Lontie René

Born: May 16, 1920 (Leuven)

Died: May 11, 2000 (Herent)

Schooling

He obtains his doctorate at the KUL (Catholic University of Leuven) in 1942, under the tutorship of professor J.C. Jungers head of the department of physical chemistry. He obtains a grant at the NFWO (National Funds for Scientific Research) at the laboratory of professor P. Putzeys (1897-1983) who is in charge of the doctorates of the pharmacists. In 1946 he joins the laboratory of Professor E.J. Cohn at the Harvard Medical School (Boston, Mass., USA) to perform research on the separation of proteins and their physico-chemical properties.

Professional Career

In the meantime professor Putzeys is entrusted with the organization of the department of biochemistry and the accompanying lectures. Lontie is recalled from Boston to take over the curriculum of analytical chemistry and its laboratory at the Pharmaceutical Institute. In 1951 he is appointed professor of biochemistry. It is a difficult start due to the limited equipment and the unfortunate location of the lab in a cellar. In 1950 the Marshall-funds provides the means to purchase new equipment and to design the necessary apparatus; among them 2 counter-current separators. The laboratory expands with 2 assistants and reaches the impressive team of 44 researchers.

When professor Putzeys becomes emeritus professor in 1968, Lontie is appointed professor of biochemistry and the accompanying lab practice of the master degree of chemistry and biology.

Professor Lontie becomes emeritus in 1985.

Scientific realizations

Even in his earliest research at the NFWO he is interested in the metal-containing proteins, especially the copper-containing hemocyanin and applies the diffusion of light to determine the molecular masses of proteins. Further research provides an insight in the proteins of barley, the polyphenols in milk and beta-lacto globulins and thiolproteins. With a self-designed apparatus he manages to determine the sequence of the amino-acids and perform the spectroscopic analysis.

He is very accurate and demands the same of his students. They are expected to complete his compact lecture-notes. He is very interested in providing an insight into the molecular structures.

“Your work has to sustain the most severe criticisms” is his motto.

He is often pronounced as being “the most literate man in Leuven”. In the laboratory and even on the street he always carries a book or magazine around. The obtained information and his own research lead to a three-volume book “Copper Proteins and Copper

Enzymes” (1984)

He is a frequent speaker at international meetings. He is an active member of the VCV (Flemish Chemical Society) presiding an international symposium on the structure of proteins (organized in 1954 by the VCV), and is elected chairman of the VCV from 1960 till 1956. He is chairman of the third symposium on hemocyanins in 1971 in Leuven and contributes to the ninth session in 1989.

Lontie is (co)mentor of 300 master dissertations, 78 doctorate scriptures and (co)author of 270 scientific articles.

His hobbies

He is interested in the aspects of the history of chemistry and chairs the committee of the exhibition “300 Years of Chemistry in Leuven”.

He is a fan of classical music (especially baroque), of art books and ancient buildings. His trip to China, sponsored by the dean Mgr. Van Waeyenbergh (1891-1971) reveals Lontie as a sensitive photographer. He lectures in Dutch, English, French and German and is fascinated by the dialect of Leuven. Only a few members of his inner circle are aware that he is a poet who translates his poems in the above mentioned languages (including the dialect!)

Lontie is remembered as a hard-working, talented, erudite, critical professor aiming to maintain the highest standards. In his lectures, research and laboratory work he remains a discreet, sensitive and austere person.

Paul Balduck
Summer 2012