

LAUDATIO CHRISTINE ISERENTANT

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Prof. Iserentant is a well-known professor of physics to the students of the first year chemistry and geology but she is very well known to most people present here through her many initiatives in which the students and the whole educational physics program takes a central position. Yesterday still, she was active working at the introductory days for incoming high-school students. Today, one of the Sarton medals is given to her.

Prof. Iserentant was born on november,4 in 1940 in Bruges. She started studies in physics at the "State University of Gent" and took the degree of 'licentiaat' in physics in 1962. She started research at the 'Natuurkundig Laboratorium', together with Prof. Robbrecht, on the issue of magnetic properties in solid state physics. More specifically, she studied Jahn-Teller structures in deformed perovskites and this resulted in a Ph.D. degree in Physics in 1967.

In 1973, she got the title of 'werkleider', in 1983 she was promoted to the degree of associate professor and became professor of physics in 1991.

Very soon, a substantial interest for the history and use of instruments in physics developed with a major accent on the extensive set of instruments from the late professor of physics, prof. Verhaeghe, and of the physics professors at the University of Gent even before that period. Because of her interest in having this large set of instruments conserved, a very large part of the various instruments dating from the early years of physics teaching at the University of Gent has been conserved (1920-1930) in optimal conditions. It now forms an essential part of the present museum of sciences at the University of Gent.

Prof. Iserentant has put up an extraordinary amount of energy in order to bring the work of the late professor Joseph Plateau, world famous physicist from the University of Gent, in the forefront at various exhibitions. A selection of what she accomplished in this context encompasses eg the mini-exhibition about J. Plateau put up at the meeting of the Belgian

Physical Society in 1983, her highly-appreciated contribution to the exhibition "Between art and knowledge" on the occasion of 175 years of the University of Gent, and this with a public collection of scientific apparatus of Plateau. She contributed in an essential way in setting up the 'travelling' exhibition "From Mercator to Frimout" in the framework of the Flemish science weeks, and this in the period 1994-1995. During those weeks, she was coordinating the activities within the Faculty of Sciences. Her very promotion in all those activities contributed a lot in order to widen the inheritance of J. Plateau and his many contributions to physics into a broad region of society, far beyond the smaller borders of the physics community. She also contributed to the exhibition "Joseph Plateau - Physicist and Artist" in the context of the 21st. International Filmfestival, in 1994, which was presented in the 'St. Pieters abdij' and was essential in setting up an exhibition, entitled "The scientific and cultural inheritance of J. Plateau" that was organized in the Museum for Sciences at the University of Gent. In these various ways, Prof. Iserentant has contributed a lot into bringing to a wider public the interrelationship between the hard facts of physics and the artists aspects that was generated through the work of the late and world-recognized Gent physics professor J. Plateau. Here determinative role in bringing this task to a good end cannot be underlined strongly enough.

Something I should not forget to mention here is the very fact that Prof. Iserentant has been playing and still holds a key-role in bringing the young university students in contact with the realm of physics. This she has done through her large teaching duties (just ask any student in the first or second year of chemistry and geology), through a very large set of activities like the organization of the 'abituriëntendagen' (introductory and orientation days for students from high-school) since 1988, the active work in setting up the Flemish Physics olympics, also since 1998 and, at present, as coordinator for the Flemish Science Weeks within the Faculty of Sciences. In bridging the gap between the early history of physics and the present-day new evolution in physics, she often used the role-model played by J. Plateau and his heritage, as collected for a large part by herself, when explaining to the younger students. I am sure that using this method, Prof. Iserentant has made many of those students at ease with various concepts

of physics and conveyed to them the idea that many present-day applications (like the transistor, CD-player, magnetic gadgets, internet,..) are strongly related to basic ideas laid out many years before.

Dear Christine, those many tasks you have carried out with large devotion and strong persistence are so characteristic for your spontaneous way of working. I just quote a few examples but there are for sure a much larger number to be put up here: your 'mission' visits to the LUC in 'Limburg' to present the physics program of the University of Gent, your guidance to the always new generation of incoming young students in their first contacts with our university and with the Faculty of Sciences, the fact you gave the students a broader vision beyond the more specific physics training, your organizational work and talents in setting up a wide spectrum of activities like the physics olympics, and, last but not least, your restless efforts in spreading out the work of J. Plateau to an audience, as large as possible. No one ever tried, in vain, to ask your help or support in those many aspects that are too often put under the common word of 'service work' but of which, every single person present here, knows for sure that this was done with 100% of full commitment and enthusiasm, with 'love' for your 'physics'.

Today, all these elements are brought under the spotlight with the presentation of the Sarton medal.