

## Editorial: The Public Image of Chemistry, II

Since public images of science emerge at the interface between various publics and scientists, it is important to understand the role of the scientific community in shaping their own public image. What kind of self-image do they promote? To which kind of publics do they reach out? How do they interact with these publics? Therefore, the second part of our special issue on the Public Image of Chemistry has a specific focus on how the image has been shaped by chemists from the early 19<sup>th</sup> century to the present.

For chemists interested in improving their public image it might be surprising to learn that such efforts have been undertaken for more than two centuries. However, neither the issues that chemists are concerned with nor the approaches to popularize chemistry are new. The lack of success of these strategies suggests that, rather than repeating the same old mistakes again and again, it would be wiser to pause for a moment and take lessons from history. The present issue of HYLE provides an excellent opportunity in that regard.

The three articles, although each focusing on a specific episode and aspect, span the entire history of the popularization efforts of chemistry. ERNST HOMBURG from the University of Maastricht investigates popular chemistry books written by chemists throughout the 19<sup>th</sup>-century to make chemistry appear more attractive. These books reflect both the incremental professionalization of the discipline and the corresponding work-force demand to which their authors responded by eventually creating the public image of some wondrous, magic technology. ANDREW EDE from the University of Alberta takes a closer look at the text and images of an influential popularization project by the American Chemical Society in the interwar period. Here, the wondrous magician has increased to the level of a benevolent god in a white lab coat who nourishes and takes care of his people. In contrast, in his analysis of the presentation of chemistry in science museums throughout the 20<sup>th</sup> century, PETER MORRIS from the Science Museum London provides a sobering image. Museums have not only deliberately understated the image of chemistry compared to the sometimes aggressive popularization efforts by chemical communities, they have also provided very limited and continuously shrinking exhibition space for chemistry.

Among the many lessons one could draw from the history, one is particularly obvious. Rather than contemplating the identity of chemistry in order to derive and support an adequate image, chemists have preferred to hide themselves behind the chemical industry. Instead of explaining what chemistry is, they have pointed to technological progress. And when public questions grew more critical, they frequently responded with exaggerated promis-

es of technological progress, even if nobody would listen. It has become a matter of routine and division of labor. Those who do chemistry need no longer contemplate the identity of chemistry. To some extent the public images of the disciplines reflect also their intellectual state.

The third part of our our special issue on the Public Image of Chemistry will appear in the forthcoming spring 2007 issue of HYLE.