
FRANÇOIS CUISINIER: THE CHESHIRE CAT
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Brazilian Astronomy has recently lost François Christophe Cuisinier, a researcher and professor at Observatório do Valongo from the Federal University of Rio de Janeiro. Not many people know, or remember, but François was invited by me to come to Brazil for a post doc position at the Astronomy Department of the University of São Paulo (IAG). He worked in the group led by Agnes Acker, whom I knew for a long time, and who was the main author of the new catalogue of planetary nebulae, which replaced the classic work of Perek and Kohoutek. He was the first post-doc from Strasbourg to work in our group, to be followed later by Sophie Durand, perhaps in a less successful attempt.

At that time, our group at IAG was working on the chemical composition of galactic planetary nebulae, in particular with objects of the solar neighbourhood, based on the fact that our results would constitute a fundamental part in the the study of the chemical evolution of the Galaxy and other spiral galaxies. In fact, the nebulae are formed by stars having masses between 0.8 and 8 solar masses at the main sequence and can be observed in all galactic regions, including disk, bulge and halo. They cover a reasonably wide range of stellar populations, so that they can give information about several aspects of galactic evolution.

François had completed his PhD in Strasbourg and was interested in the adventure of coming to these tropics, even if for some people that would seem to be meaningless. He came to São Paulo, where he stayed for two years, from 1996 to 1998. During this time, we completed a project, still important today, with the determination of the chemical composition of planetary nebulae in the galactic bulge.





We have used data secured at the ESO 1.52m telescope in La Silla, which foreshadowed the intense use of that observatory by Brazilian groups, leading to the possibility of a Brazilian participation in ESO.

After the post doc, François decided to stay in the country. As Patan Deen Singh, more than 20 years earlier, he stayed and became a Brazilian, even more so than many of us. And, the same as Singh, he left us too soon. There was an open position at UFRJ, and François, with a very good CV and a strong scientific background, obtained a permanent position at that university. His stay in Rio would certainly be more adequately described by someone else. But during his initial stay in São Paulo, what attracted our attention was not his hair, already sparse, nor his rounded shape (good old times), but his laughter: loud, shameless, totally non-European, that could be heard from far away in the hall, or at meetings of the Brazilian Astronomical Society (SAB). François was from Alsace, the old and ambiguous Alsace-Lorraine, which periodically changed hands between France and Germany. However, he did not appear to be French or German. To me he was a Belgian, born in the wrong place



In *Alice in Wonderland*, by Lewis Carroll, there is a character - the Cheshire Cat - that appeared on the top of a tree, and then disappeared, but his smile stayed there. François is a kind of Cheshire Cat: he is gone, but his sonorous laughter still remains in all who have known him.



John Tenniel (1820-1914)