

Dear Colleagues!

On behalf of the József Attila University organizing this time the thirteenth International Competition in Analytical Chemistry, I am pleased to welcome you between the walls of the university and I wish you to have a nice stay and a successful business here. I consider it a great honour to our Alma Mater to host ~~of~~ a traditional, high-level student competition, and personally, I feel it a privilege to assist in the opening of such a remarkable event.

As a simple mathematician, wearing in addition the heavy chain of the office, I am not able and hence I am not willing to give any preliminary appreciation of the competition; surely, a more competent speaker will do that. On this occasion I would only tell you a couple of words on the eponym of our university and how his work is related to science. The name József Attila /where, as it is customary in our country, József is the family name/ sounds rather strange for non-Hungarian ears, mainly the Christian name Attila, which is a contradiction in terms by itself, because Attila - or Etzel in the old German epic - was the most famous Hunnish king, and Huns serve as a synonym for non-Christian and uncivilized devastators. Actually, as it turns out from the memoirs of Priskos, a Byzantine diplomat, Attila was a severe military leader having, however, a court open to European culture of his age, the fifth-century Europe of the Great Migration. In 1902, a fine novel appeared in Hungary, a tender love story of a liberated Greek and a Hunnish girl with the background of a great historical tableau, Attila's court and his famous battles. After the publication of the novel the name, Attila, became extremely popular, and József Attila was baptized in 1905.

He was a great poet and thinker, one of the most admirable Hungarians of the twentieth century. Some sixty years ago, he was expelled from this university for his brilliant and shocking "Song of Innocence". As for the great poems he wrote in mature age, the best characterization is perhaps the following one by Arthur Koestler: "The unique quality of the poems of his later years lies in their miraculous union of intellect and melody."

In this respect, I can think of no contemporary poet he could be compared to. His most complex and cerebral poems read like folk songs, and sometimes like nursery rhymes; ideology is here completely distilled to music which whether adagio or furioso is always eminently cantabile."

After this quotation, it is almost incredible that the poems of József Attila are full of scientific and sociological terms. He freely used this vocabulary in the most pathetic poems; thus, in "A Winter Night" the "molecules" appear in a perfectly artless way, no doubt, for the first time in Hungarian poetry. Actually, the main topic in József Attila's work is society, as he writes, "the male companion of Mother Nature", and in this respect he is a true follower of our national traditions in literature. But no human being without a fine feeling of science could create such lines, as, e.g./and, of course, you should to read and understand it in Hungarian!/: "the order, our beautiful ability, a tool for the mind to accept the finite infinite." I cannot refrain from reciting it in Hungarian : "Mig megvilágosul gyönyörű képességünk, a rend, mellyel az elme tudomásul veszi a véges végtelent"

And the poem, these lines are quoted from, is quite appropriate to finish my short opening address with. It also says: "Children of the matter, we are here, together, sceptically. Lift up our hearts!" Let this profane "sursum corda" encourage the competitors. I wish that József Attila's lines on poetry were applicable also to the young scientists who are present now, together with his additional line. He wrote: "The poet is the engineer of the charm, and creates a subjective harmony of cheer". And the additional line is: "As you in the objective sphere."

I declare the thirteenth International Competition in Analytical Chemistry opened.