

LAUDATIO

PROF. HENNING HOPF, PRIMO LEVI AWARD LAUREATE 2023

Laudator:

Prof. Gianluca Maria Farinola, President Società Chimica Italiana

Leipzig, September 4th 2023

Sehr geehrte Damen und Herren,

Liebe Kolleginnen und Kollegen,

Lieber Präsident Danielmeier

Gentile Prof. Levi,

Gentile Consigliere Paolilli

it is a honour for me to be here today to celebrate the third edition of the Primo Levi award, the joint prize of the Gesellschaft Deutscher Chemiker and the Società Chimica Italiana. I take as a privilege, in my role as the President of SCI, to be the laudator of Prof. Henning Hopf, the award recipient nominated by the bilateral selection committee, whose components are present in the audience and who I acknowledge. I would also thank the GDCh for hosting this very important ceremony.

Since Prof. Henning Hopf is regrettably unable to be here in person for today's ceremony, I wish these words of profound appreciation will reach him, together with our wishes for a swift recovery.

This Award is named after Primo Levi, who was both a victim and survivor of Auschwitz, an internationally renowned writer, a chemist and an intellectual, one of the foremost voices in contemporary literature and among the brightest minds of our era. Levi's writings depict some of the most dramatic pages in our recent history. Starting from them, he explores the 20th century's complex human dimensions and the human spirit's timeless essence, with the insightfulness that originates from his mindset as a chemist.

The Primo Levi Award recognizes outstanding achievements of chemists or scientists close to the chemical disciplines who have distinguished themselves not only for their excellence as researchers, but also for their service to mankind and for upholding human rights. The award values exceptional personalities who contribute to raising awareness regarding the crucial role of chemistry in fostering a just, inclusive, and sustainable global society. So are the previous awardees, Prof. Roald Hoffmann and Prof. Vincenzo Balzani.

This award represents a strong message from science in favour of the principles of ethics, peace, respect, and tolerance. In our present historical context, the significance of this award is amplified, as we find ourselves in a period where the shadows of war loom once again in Europe. Against this backdrop, the collective voice of our two societies resonates even more profoundly, since these two nations share a history scarred by moments of darkness, wherein the very principles we hold dear were abused.

Our two Chemical Societies have a long history of friendship and joint initiatives. I would like here to mention the Ziegler-Natta Lectureship and, notably, the prestigious EuChemS Historical Landmark Award 2022 at the European level to “Karl Ziegler and Giulio Natta legacy” recently bestowed by EuChemS following a competitive selection process.

Despite the different histories and dimensions of our societies, we both share the common purpose of fostering an ethics-driven culture of Chemistry. We share the belief that our responsibilities as chemists encompass not only the advancement of science, the provision of high-quality education, the establishment of sustainable production practices, and the pursuit of excellence in our diverse professional roles. Our responsibilities also encompass the presence of our voices within the realms of politics and economics, where decisions are made that wield the potential to impact the progress and well-being of people within our respective countries, Europe, and the world at large.

In this endeavour, we both hold the commitment to uplifting our shared European identity, as is evident in our engagement with EuChemS and our partnership in publishing under the common umbrella of Chemistry Europe.

We are both presently in the process of developing new ways through which to exert our action as chemists and novel languages to engage with the wider community, as perfectly expressed in the GDCh slogan “rethinking chemistry”. This is a simple but very meaningful statement which underscores awareness among contemporary chemists of the responsibility of our role, which

goes together with the need to set up new frameworks of engagement.

But what defines the qualities that characterize an individual as a chemist?

Primo Levi depicts it unsurpassably. I wouldn't dare to tamper with the perfection of his words by adding anything of my own. But let me just read with you a few excerpts that are fitting for our current occasion.

“La chimica è l’arte di separare, pesare e distinguere”

(P. Levi, L’Altrui Mestiere)

“Chemie ist die Kunst des Trennens, Wiegens und Scheidens”

(P. Levi, Anderer Leute Berufe)

“A me interessavano di più le storie della chimica solitaria, inerme e appiadata, a misura d’uomo, che con poche eccezioni è stata la mia: ma è stata anche la chimica dei fondatori, che non lavoravano in équipe ma soli, in mezzo all’indifferenza del loro tempo, per lo più senza guadagno,[...]”

(P. Levi, Il Sistema Periodico, Argento)

"Mich interessierten mehr die Geschichten von der einsamen, wehrlosen Chemie, die nach bescheidenem Menschenmaß gemacht ist; dies war mit wenigen Ausnahmen bei meiner Chemie der Fall gewesen: eine ebensolche hatten aber auch die Begründer betrieben, sie hatten nicht in Gruppen gearbeitet, sondern allein, umgeben von der Gleichgültigkeit ihrer Zeit, zumeist ohne Bezahlung,[...]”

(P. Levi, Das Periodische System, Silber)

“Che la nobiltà dell'Uomo, acquisita in cento secoli di prove e di errori, era consistita nel farsi signore della materia, e che io mi ero iscritto a Chimica perché a questa nobiltà mi volevo mantenere fedele.”

(P. Levi, Il sistema periodico, Ferro)

“Dass das Edle im Menschen, erworben in jahrhundertelangen Prüfungen und Irrtümern, darauf beruhte, die Materie zu beherrschen, und dass ich Chemie studierte, weil ich diesem Edlen die Treue halten wollte.”

(P. Levi, Das Periodische System, Eisen)

To the utmost degree Prof. Henning Hopf represents the substantial quality and the nobility of being a chemist, from his excellence in research to his courageous engagement of revisiting the history of German chemistry during the Nazi period, to his tireless work at the service not only of the German and European chemical communities, but also those of less developed countries.

Henning Hopf started his chemistry studies in Göttingen and continued them at the University of Wisconsin in Madison, where he received his Ph.D. in 1967. This was followed by his habilitation in Karlsruhe. After a post-doctoral stay in the UK, and his professorial start in Würzburg, he moved to TU Braunschweig, where he remained until his retirement in 2006, and where he is still active as Emeritus Professor.

Henning Hopf's contributions to Chemistry are many. First and foremost is his work in the field of synthetic organic chemistry. At the centre of his interests are hydrocarbons, especially aromatic or highly unsaturated systems. His synthetic work is not only elegant, but also always purposeful to shed light onto properties of molecular and supramolecular architectures. His list of publications contains more than 650 original papers, review articles, and patents. In addition, there are several books bearing Henning Hopf's name on the cover. One of the most representative is "Classics in Hydrocarbon Chemistry", a masterpiece anchored in the same dedication to understanding as his synthesis are. These research accomplishments have earned Henning Hopf honorary doctorates, memberships in academies, and numerous awards and honours, including the Adolf von Baeyer Medal of the GDCh in 1996.

Besides these scientific aspects, Henning Hopf's dedication to the chemistry community has been impressive and continuous, consistently putting humanity and justice up front. Starting from the GDCh: he has been longstanding member of the Executive Board, Deputy President and President in 2004 and 2005. In his position as literature officer of the Executive Board, he has played a crucial role in Europeanizing GDCh journals, and in development of the society's position on Open Access. The Literature Prize of the Fonds der Chemischen Industrie, the Gmelin-Beilstein Medal and, more recently, his appointment as Fellow of ChemPubSoc Europe, now Chemistry Europe, are visible signs of the appreciation for this commitment.

In 2015 Henning Hopf received the highest honor of the GDCh, the "Honorary Membership"

While he was President of the GDCh he started a comprehensive scientific project that explored the role that the GDCh's predecessor organizations played in enhancing co-operation between chemistry and the Nazi regime. These studies have been carried out for decades and still continue, with his characteristic rigor and energy. This also resulted in a very thorough monograph of the science historian Helmut Maier, "Chemists in the Third Reich".

This revisitation led to the cancellation or renaming of GDCh Awards named after German chemists who had supported the Nazi government.

Another aspect of Henning Hopf's activities to make chemical enterprise more responsible can be found in work within the International Organization for Chemical Sciences in Development (IOCD) where he is was co-founder of the action group Chemists for Sustainability C4S. The purpose of the group is to demonstrate the central role of chemistry for the further development of our planet.

Together with coauthors he has published in leading science/chemistry journals about 30 essays on topics such as resilience, circular chemistry/economy, the interaction of chemistry with policy makers and with the public, diversity and inclusion, ethics, and many other important topics, also developing the concept of "One World Chemistry". Nowadays these topics are broadly accepted and discussed, but he has been one of the pioneers in bringing them up.

Fostering international cooperation has always been a prominent goal for Henning Hopf. He has initiated student exchanges between

his university and universities in Romania, India and Arab countries and he focused on supporting chemists in less well-off countries, also promoting donation of scientific libraries and equipment.

In conclusion,

Henning Hopf's outstanding personality stands as an enduring beacon of inspiration for present and future generations of chemists, highlighting two illuminating guiding principles: scientific excellence, and ethical responsibility of scientists in positive actions in society, both directed to shaping a brighter future.

Our two Societies gratefully acknowledge Prof. Henning Hopf for his generous work in building up a wide community of chemists aware of their pivotal role in the construction of an equitable, inclusive, and sustainable progression towards human well-being.

The Gesellschaft Deutscher Chemiker and the Società Chimica Italiana extend their congratulations to him as the distinguished laureate of the 2023 Primo Levi Award.