

Vistaskipti/Migration

9. Samstarfsráðastefna Háskóla Íslands og Manítóbaháskóla Ávarp rektors Háskóla Íslands, Jóns Atla Benediktssonar

Vigdís Finnbogadóttir, Katrín Jakobsdóttir, Prime Minister of Iceland, Anne-Tamara Lorre, Ambassador of Canada to Iceland, Þórður Bjarni Guðjónsson, Consul General of Iceland in Winnipeg

Ladies and gentlemen,

On behalf of the University of Iceland, it is a great pleasure and honour to welcome you to the 9th Partnership Conference between the University of Manitoba and the University of Iceland. In 2019, we celebrate the 20th anniversary of the Agreement between the two universities that continuous to allow for an exchange of students and professors, and the series of conferences. The Partnership Conference is the corner stone of the Agreement, providing the circumstances needed for scholars and students to cultivate the Canada-Iceland connection through an exchange of ideas, and in turn, to enlighten the general public on both sides of the Atlantic on cutting edge research findings from within various fields of academia.

I would like to thank Dr. David Barnard, President and Vice-Chancellor of the University of Manitoba, who could not be with us this time around, and Dr. Jefferey Taylor, Dean of Arts, for their invaluable support of our continuous partnership. The indispensable role played by the Valuing Icelandic Presence committee at the University of Manitoba in safeguarding the Agreement is no less crucial.

The subject of collaboration has shaped the vision of the University of Iceland throughout its history and we continue to view international collaboration as essential for both our students and faculty. In the context of our collaborators

world-wide, however, our connection with the University of Manitoba stands apart, thanks to the existence of its Department of Icelandic Language and Literature.

All the more reason for us to safeguard and further strengthen our relations through new partnership initiatives. Here, I am referring to the subject raised by Katrín Jakobsdóttir, Prime Minister of Iceland, which will provide us with a gleaming opportunity to enhance our collaboration with the Department of Icelandic Language and Literature in teaching, research and publication. Thereby, we will be able to cultivate and harvest – through an abiding collaboration – the vast fields of migration in Icelandic–Canadian culture.

And this brings me to the program of our 9th Partnership conference. It is safe to say that the speakers will enlighten us on the subject of migration across time, or from the tenth century Iceland onward. As to be expected, the conference will offer a dense approach to the subject of Icelandic nineteenth century immigrants and their descendants in history, languages, literature, culture, and lived experiences. Other aspects of the subject of migration will be addressed, including the migration of narrative traditions, lived experiences of refugees and asylum seekers, and sexual and queer migration. Philosophical ideas on migrants and social hierarchies are also present in the program, and the subject of indigenous peoples in Canada and their sense of belonging finds its place there too.

The two keynote addresses are centred on the subject of Icelandic immigrants and their descendants in Canada. Dr. Richard Sigurdson, Dean of Arts and Professor of Political Sciences at the University of Calgary, and former Dean of Arts at the University of Manitoba, will draw, in part, on his experience as a descendant of Icelandic immigrants. Dr. Guðrún Guðsteinsdóttir, Professor of

English Literature at the University of Iceland, will discuss the renowned short story *Vonir – Hopes*, by the Icelandic writer Einar H. Kvaran.

Both keynote speakers have played a significant part in safeguarding the Agreement. The same is true of Dr. David Arnason, professor emeritus at the University of Manitoba, Dr. Eموke Zathmary, former President of the University of Manitoba, Dr. Páll Skúlason, former President of the University of Iceland, and Svavar Gestsson, former Consul in Winnipeg. I would also like to use this opportunity to acknowledge Dr. Sveinn Yngvi Egilsson, Professor of Icelandic Literature at the University of Iceland. He served as the Chair of the Conference Committee at the University of Iceland for three conferences in a row.

And the following individuals have been serving on the conference committees for the 9th partnership conference at the respective universities: Magnús Diðrik Baldursson, Director of the Office of the Rector, Margrét Hallgrímsdóttir, Director of the National Museum, and the scholars Dr. Magnús Þór Þorbergsson and Dr. Birna Bjarnadóttir, all on behalf of the University of Iceland, and Peter John Buchan, Head and Instructor, and Dr. Dustin Geeraert, Instructor, on behalf of the University of Manitoba.

In closing, I would like to bring your attention to a couple of side-events in the program of the 9th Partnership Conference that highlight the creative dimension of both the subject of migration and the deep-running Canada-Iceland connections. This afternoon, at 16:45, the exhibition *Transitions / Vistabönd* will open here in Veröld - House of Vigdís, and you are all welcome to attend the opening. The participants are the composer Anna Þorvaldsdóttir, the artists Karlotta Blöndal, Olivia Plender, Unnar Örn and Ragnar Kjartansson, and the author Kristín Ómarsdóttir. I would like to thank Dr. Birna Arnbjörnsdóttir, the Director of the Vigdís Finnbogadóttir Institute of Foreign Languages, for the

excellent collaboration in the making of the exhibition, and Kristján Steingrímur Jónsson, the curator, for his great work.

The second side-event takes place at the very end of the conference, tomorrow at 6pm. That is when we will migrate downtown to the House of Benedikt Gröndal, where a special panel will introduce a couple of transatlantic publication enterprises, including the soon to be published Special Volume at the University of Victoria on the Modern Reception of the medieval Saga of the Sworn Brothers, *Fóstbræðrasaga*, featuring articles by a group of scholars from both sides of the Atlantic, edited by Dr. Dustin Geeraert. The special panel will also feature an introduction to the soon to be published bilingual publication of a collection of poems by the Icelandic-Canadian farmer, poet, pacifist and social prophet Stephan G. Stephansson, edited by Dr. Birna Bjarnadóttir and Moorea Gray. The latter publication is directly related to another new initiative at the University of Iceland, namely the near future establishment of the Stephan G. Stephansson Professorship in Literature at the Vigdís Centre for Multilingualism and Intercultural Understanding, in memory of our Icelandic poets and writers of North America.

Evidently, the Partnership Conference between the University of Manitoba and the University of Iceland is up and running, and while I thank the speakers, facilitators and organizers for their participation, the Vigdís Finnbogadóttir Institute of Foreign Languages for the great collaboration in hosting the conference and its related exhibiton, Gröndalshús for hosting the special publication panel, and you, the audience, for being here, I wish you all an enlightening and inspiring conference!