



**ACADEMIC CEREMONY OF INVESTITURE OF  
PROFESSOR SYDNEY BRENNER AS DOCTOR HONORIS CAUSA**

**Speech by Dr Mireia Trenchs, acting rector of Pompeu Fabra University**

Dear Prof. Sydney Brenner, new doctor *honoris causa* by Pompeu Fabra University,  
Prof. Josep Joan Moreso, former rector of Pompeu Fabra University,  
Prof. Claudi Alsina, Secretary-General of the Interuniversity Council of Catalonia (CIC)  
Prof. Lluís Calvo, Institutional Coordinator of the CSIC in Catalonia  
Professor Arcadi Navarro, academic sponsor of the new doctor *honoris causa*  
Professors Miguel Beato, Jaume Bertranpetit and Fernando Giráldez  
Master Joan Guinjoan  
Academic authorities,  
Members of the university community,

I wish to apologise for the absence of Rector Jaume Casals who is, at this very moment, on an institutional trip in the United States. I know that he would have liked to be with us today. For me, it is a very great honour to stand here and have the privilege to host this ceremony on his behalf.

Let me start by making a short reference to the piece we have just listened to. Named *Verbum (Genoma in musica)*, this piece was composed in 2003 by master Joan Guinjoan, when he was asked by the Residence for Researchers to create a piece of music revolving around a scientific topic.

The human genome caught the attention of the master, who reflected in this piece his poetical interpretation of the gene sequence associated with the speech. As a result, today we have had the opportunity to listen to a masterpiece which combines music creation and one of the most important scientific developments of our time: the deciphering of the human genome. With his contribution, professor Guinjoan has shown to all of us that the gaps between academic disciplines can be overcome; that inspiration can flow freely between cutting-edge

science and artistic expression; that, as one of our university mottos underlines, the final understanding of the human being can only be reached by means of interconnections between technological advancements, the health and life sciences and the studies in the social sciences and the humanities.

The skilful interpretation by master Alfonso Calderon has also contributed to our enjoyment today. So let me thank both of them on behalf of the whole audience.

Today's ceremony has particular significance for our University. Professor Sydney Brenner is the first Honoris Causa by Pompeu Fabra University within the Biomedical Sciences field and, as my colleagues have stated in their laudatory speeches, our University is highly proud to have professor Brenner as a new member after its 24 years of existence.

Our Department of Experimental and Health Sciences was founded in 1998 with the goal to become a research centre with international presence and recognition in the fields of molecular biology and biomedicine. During these years, a good number of researchers have been recruited through competitive calls funded by both Catalan and Spanish governments in order to attract international talent.

Nowadays, despite its youth and modest size, the Department has a remarkable presence in a variety of research fields such as Cell and Molecular Biology, Evolutionary Biology and Complex Systems, Biomedical Informatics, Genetics and Neurosciences, or Public Health and Education in Health Sciences. Moreover, it has achieved a growing research output, as international rankings show, and a major synergy with other outstanding research centres, such as the Centre for Genomic Regulation. Actually, both the Department of Experimental and Health Sciences and the Centre for Genomic Regulation work together within the Barcelona Biomedical Research Park framework, which is one of the largest hubs of biomedical research in southern Europe. The Park, which gets together seven independent research organisations, gathers a critical mass of 1,400 people coming from 55 different countries. Certainly, the Park has promoted fruitful synergies and promising scientific collaborations.

There is not much more I can add about Professor Brenner's contribution to research and science. My colleagues from the Department of Experimental and Health Sciences have clearly explained his contribution to our understanding of modern molecular biology, programmed cell death and the role of genes in organ development. Such contributions merited his Nobel Prize award in Physiology or Medicine in 2002, together with professors John Sulston and Robert Hirtviz.

Professor Beato's speech has focused on Dr. Brenner's academic background and major achievements as one of the intellectual pillars of molecular biology. Professor Giráldez has explained in detail his major contributions in the field of developmental biology, with an especial focus to the introduction of *Caenorhabditis elegans* as a model system. Finally, I feel that with his laudatio, professor Bertranpetit was honouring professor Brenner not only for his

contribution to genome sequencing or evolutionary biology, but also for being such a source of inspiration over the years.

After listening to the three of them, all major scientists in our University, and especially after listening to you, professor Brenner, talking with such enthusiasm about science and knowledge, I do believe that your words today –and, above all, your achievements– will turn into a never-ending source of inspiration for teams of senior and junior scientists at our Department of Experimental and Health Sciences. I also hope that both Dr. Brenner’s devotion to the advancement of science and multidisciplinary team work and the interdisciplinary spirit of today’s ceremony will inspire this young university in its path to projecting a unique personality and to becoming the leading international research university it aims to be.

There is nothing else I could add now, but I would like to emphasize the huge privilege that it is for Pompeu Fabra University to count you among our community.

Thank you very much, Dr. Brenner, for having accepted this *honoris causa* and for devoting some of your precious time to those who, from now on, you may call, if you wish, your colleagues and friends.