

Chancellor Dharker,

Many of us gathered here today will be united by a shared love of literature. Reflecting on a long and varied teaching career, today's honorary graduand told me how she valued the rich life experiences her students brought to the discussion of literature, adding that, "the understanding of ourselves in time and society is what literature offers, and if it is expressed in language of form, beauty and imagination, then it is great literature; it is Art." These inspiring words were written by Pamela Woof, the distinguished scholar and educator, who in addition to her pioneering work to raise the profile of Dorothy Wordsworth, "exquisite sister" of the poet William Wordsworth, spent twenty-six years as a lecturer in the Department for Continuing Education at Newcastle University.

With the exception of a single poem, none of Dorothy Wordsworth's writings were published in her lifetime and the long shadow cast by her more famous brother meant that she was significantly overlooked for many years. The Grasmere Journals, generally regarded as Dorothy's most important work, were first published in 1897 and there was a long gap before Mary Moorman's second edition in 1958. Professor Lucy Newlyn, Emeritus Fellow in English at St Edmund's Hall, Oxford, describes Pamela's "scrupulous, scholarly" editions of the Alfoxden and Grasmere Journals, published in 1991 and 2002 respectively, as, "indispensable tools for anyone reading or researching in this field". Michael McGregor, Robert Woof Director of the Wordsworth Trust, concurs, adding that Pamela is now regarded as, "the foremost authority on Dorothy Wordsworth".

In bringing fresh insight to bear on Dorothy's work, Pamela has helped open up new fields of study. Michael Rossington, Professor of Romantic Literature at Newcastle University, highlights the broader impact of her research: "Pamela's foundational scholarship has made a significant contribution to a growing area of interest for students and scholars of the Romantic era...writing by women, especially life-writing, where unpublished journals and diaries, of which the Grasmere Journals are priceless examples, play a key part." Pamela's research has reached audiences far beyond the academy through talks, classes and exhibitions. Her book, *Dorothy Wordsworth: Wonders of the Everyday*, published in 2013, is a wonderful example of her scholarly output to accompany major exhibitions curated by her at the Wordsworth Trust.

Pamela was born on the 8<sup>th</sup> of September 1931, in Padiham, near Burnley. Aged eleven, she won a scholarship to Accrington High School, where she achieved outstanding results in her Higher School Certificates. In 1950, she secured an Open Exhibition to read English Language and Literature at St Hugh's College Oxford. Although her elder brother studied Engineering at Liverpool University, Pamela's mother had great misgivings about her daughter entering higher education and would have preferred her to remain at home. Pamela remembers feeling both fear and excitement as she set off for Oxford. She had never been away from home before and the journey required her to take a bus to Burnley, before catching a train to Oxford. Pamela fondly recalls her father standing with her at the bus stop, whilst quietly slipping her a fiver.

She flourished at Oxford, joyfully embracing its many delights, including trips to the cinema, theatre, dances, afternoon tea, games of tennis. She achieved first class honours and seemed destined for a life of scholarship. However, despite passing the qualifying exams for a Doctor of Philosophy, Pamela gave up her studies after only a year. There were a number of factors which contributed to this decision. All of her undergraduate friends had left, and she no longer had rooms in college. She was the only Arts postgraduate at St Hugh's and there was no Middle Common Room at that time. Reflecting on this period, Pamela said of herself, "I was young, lost and suddenly lonely." Her tutor showed no empathy with her situation and her mother wanted her at home – so back she went. She secured a teaching role at the local girls' grammar school and delivered adult education classes at Burnley Public Library in the evening. After two years, she wanted to see more of the world, but where could she go? Her elder brother, now a qualified engineer, had moved to Toronto, so in 1956, Pamela embarked upon the long and arduous journey by sea to visit him. And it was in Toronto that she met her future husband, Robert Woof.

Whilst Robert and Pamela had been fellow undergraduates at Oxford, their paths had never crossed. Having met in Toronto, they found they had much in common. Both were grammar school pupils from Lancashire with a shared love of Romantic Literature. Ever resourceful, Pamela had taken on two jobs – one teaching basketball at a girls school – a role she managed to secure despite knowing nothing whatsoever about the game, and another marking undergraduate essays for the University of Toronto. Juggling the two roles proved challenging. She used to sneak off to the showers during games, to try and

catch up on her marking. It was at this point, she told me, that Robert stepped in as her knight in shining armour and helped her mark the essays. They soon fell in love and married in 1958.

Robert had come to Toronto on a Goldsmith's Travelling Fellowship for postgraduate studies, attracted by the presence of two of the most distinguished romantic scholars of the period; Kathleen Coburn and J R MacGillivray. In 1961 Robert was offered a Lord Adams Research Fellowship at Newcastle University which would enable him to work on the manuscript archive at the Dove Cottage Library in Grasmere; so they returned to England and thus began their long and fruitful relationship with the Wordsworth Trust.

For many years, Pamela's primary focus was to support Robert's research and raise their four children, Madeleine, Lawrence, Thomas and Emily, whom we are delighted to have with us today. Pamela's eldest daughter, Madeleine, told me that her mum used to get up at 5am to fit in a couple of hours of research before the children went to school. Madeleine also recalls lively literary suppers at their home in Jesmond, where guests included Seamus Heaney, Edward Bond, and Tony Harrison. Her sister Emily recounts that family life included lots of walks, sometimes involving research trips to Lakeland graveyards, so that Mum and Dad could check out important details pertaining to the Wordsworths or their associates. Emily also recalls a rather scary walk up Helvellyn and Striding Edge with her Mum. It wasn't until 1970, when Pamela was thirty-nine, that she felt able to take on a full-time lectureship in the University's Department for Continuing Education, where she remained until she retired in 1996.

Everyone I spoke to when researching this citation had such engaging memories to share, and there is insufficient space to do them justice. In addition to her outstanding scholarship, many people mentioned Pamela's warmth, energy and good humour. I'd like to close my citation with an extract from a poem about Pamela written by her friend and colleague Professor Lucy Newlyn, which I think beautifully captures some of these qualities.

Her element is air,  
her movements deft and quick  
like a bird that barely touches earth,  
or skims the water...

The moon was our companion  
as we walked that night  
From her cold Easedale flat  
Talking all the way, with dinner after.

She laughed like a child in the darkness,  
her beautiful head thrown back -  
moonlit, starlit - and the valley  
echoed with her laughter.

Chancellor Dharker, in recognition of her outstanding scholarship, particularly in relation to Dorothy Wordsworth, and a lifetime of inspiring others to experience a rich and enduring appreciation of literature, in all its forms, I present to you, Pamela Woof, for the award of Doctor of Letters, *honoris causa*.

*Jill Taylor-Roe, Senior Public Orator*

*5<sup>th</sup> December 2022*