



Mr. Chancellor,

Elsewhere, in one of the ancient universities (which shall remain nameless, suffice it to say that it is in the south of England and surrounded by countryside that is very flat), there continues a long tradition of delivering honorary degree citations entirely in Latin. The Public Orator at this venerable seat of learning was presented with a problem when an honorary degree was conferred upon one of this country's most distinguished broadcasters: there is no word in Latin for 'television'. A solution was found: Sir David Attenborough was described as someone 'who has made his living in a glass-fronted box'.

Dame Joan Bakewell, whom we are honouring today, has also made her 'living in a glass-fronted box', although happily we at Newcastle University are sufficiently progressive that we are able to speak of her accomplishments in the vernacular. Over the past four decades, she has forged a successful and prestigious career in a variety of broadcast media, not only on television, but radio, and in print as a journalist, playwright, author and novelist. She has established a reputation for serious and effective communication that addresses some of the major issues of our time. Her three areas of particular interest are the arts, religion, and old age. It is for her achievements as an advocate for older people that we are honouring her today.

In considering what we may call the Three Ages of Joan Bakewell, it is therefore pertinent to dwell more on her Third Age career, whilst remarking upon the shape, character and achievements of its entirety. A native of Stockport, Joan Dawson (as she

was born), was a talented Grammar School girl who won a place at Newnham College, Cambridge. She was an undergraduate in the early 1950s at a time when women were still barred from the Cambridge Union, although her political teeth were cut at the Labour Club, and through intellectual sparring with her tutors, Eric Hobsbawm and Betty Behrens. Her lifelong devotion to the arts was fostered through her student involvement in theatrical and film society circles, where she found that she relished good conversation, and the company of creative people. Graduating with a degree in History and Economics, her career as a freelance broadcaster took shape in the early 1960s. But it was as a presenter of *Late Night Line-Up*, a daily programme which had started with the opening of BBC2 in 1964, that she became a household name. *Late Night Line-Up* had a unique format, providing in-depth interviews with the leading artists and musicians, cultural and political opinion-formers of the 1960s, from Václav Havel to Barbara Streisand, Spike Milligan to Marcel Duchamp. At the height of the student riots of 1968, twenty ring-leaders from Paris were invited to London to appear on the programme. Dame Joan recalls in her autobiography, *The Centre of the Bed* (published in 2003) that she and her colleagues sometimes fell foul of the grandees of the BBC, charged with being 'hell-bent on creating trouble'. Her dedication to no-limits, high-quality broadcasting continued into the 1970s, 80s and 90s with programmes such as *Reports Action* (which ran for four series in the 1970s), *Newsnight*, and *The Heart of the Matter*, which she presented from 1988 to 2000. A former Booker Prize judge, she has served on countless national committees and advisory bodies, and took a key role in establishing the National Campaign for the Arts.

Today, she is one of the most distinctive and recognisable voices in the media. Joan Bakewell's particular blend of cerebral inquisitiveness, pragmatism and charm fosters serious intellectual discussion that refuses to 'dumb down' in a world of soundbites. Her programmes engage wide audiences. She has welcomed the change in climate that has brought more female newscasters and senior-level producers in recent years, but she continues to campaign for gender equality in broadcasting, and has particularly highlighted the discrimination that still exists against women presenters as they mature in years.

And so, to speak of her Third Age. In many respects, this most recent stage of her career is a model of what can be done with what she calls the 'abundance of energy and enthusiasm waiting to be used by people in their sixties and seventies'. In 2003 she

began a column for the *Guardian* newspaper called *Just Seventy*, which she followed up with the publication of her book *The View from Here: Life at 70* in 2007. Her broadcasting career continues with her series for BBC Radio 3: *Belief*. She also appears on Radio 4's *Saturday Live*, BBC 1's *Daily Politics*, and GMTV's Sunday programme. Her latest play was broadcast on Radio 4 in 2007. In 2008, she was awarded a DBE and was appointed a 'Voice for Older People', by the UK government. Her first novel, *All The Good Girls*, was published in February 2009. She is currently Chair of the theatre company Shared Experience and also of The National Campaign for the Arts. In July 2010, Dame Joan presented a specially-authored *Panorama* programme on which she explored the challenges ahead in caring for an ageing population, and made the point that the old keep on getting older. In November 2010 she was made a working peer in the House of Lords, and will shortly be created Baroness Bakewell of Stockport. She also has a weekly column in the *Independent* newspaper each Friday.

With typical clarity and precision, Joan Bakewell has set out her manifesto for aging. She says: 'We need, each and every one of us, an entirely new attitude to being old.' She believes passionately that "Old" is not another country, a place you're shunted off to when the real business of life is done... It is an era, as vividly a part of living as any other... full of value and delight, of incident and insight'.

Mr. Chancellor, for her work as an advocate for older people, I present as a candidate for the degree of Doctor of Civil Law, *honoris causa* Dame Joan Bakewell.