Lady Visitor to the College, it is my pleasure to present to you Miss Joan Bakewell.

In the last century Charles Kingsley, who successfully exploited the tendency towards sentimental moralizing in the English character, wrote this line, which became a popular adage:

‘Be good sweet maid and let who will be clever.’

Part of the purpose of our founders was to challenge such repressively pious attitudes to the upbringing and education of young ‘maids’. We honour Joan Bakewell today as a shining example of how it is possible to be both good and clever. She is known to millions as the presenter of *The Heart of the Matter*, a BBC discussion programme which has been going out regularly for the last ten years. But she is also remembered for many earlier successes in the media, notably *Lake light Line-up*, which dates back to 1964, when she was admired as much for her beauty as for her intelligence. As she herself has said: ‘I was recruited as a face. But staying power depends on something else. Men in TV are always looking round for new female faces, and the only way to survive is to have some special knowledge, expertise that endures.’ Endure, she certainly has, becoming a trail-blazer for women in the media, and today we celebrate the particular expertise which has enabled her to do so.

That expertise has many sides to it. One of her producers, Olga Eldridge, expressed it by saying: ‘She's such a professional. None of the vanity of some male presenters you could happily kill: the kind who find a bald spot and threaten suicide. Joan's the role model. She has such style, she's so calming, and intellectually she challenges me.’ Style, beauty, intelligence, these are enviable assets, but I should like to dwell for a moment on the way she has chosen to use those assets.
For the main quality that comes across to anyone who has watched her programmes or read her books is the evident care and commitment she brings to the people whose dilemmas she investigates in her work. It is this quality which makes her a journalist of a very high order indeed. In her memoir, published last year and entitled *The Heart of the Matter*, she writes: ‘The point of programmes such as *The Heart of the Matter* is not to judge or to prescribe, but to show the variety of human response to moral dilemmas that arise in people's lives. It is an arena in which viewers can speculate about how they themselves might behave in such circumstances and be given confidence in their own judgements.’ In other words, she seeks out the key issues of our day and attempts to present these in such a way as to encourage each and every one of us to exercise our own moral judgement.

She and her team at the BBC are particularly good at putting their finger on the pulse of the times, highlighting those issues where we can sense a turning point in cultural or moral attitudes. The changing views of both the church hierarchy and the parishioners towards gay clergy is one example. Another is the revolution in biological attitudes to who we are: how much are we determined by our genes and how far have the recent advances in genetics limited our sense of being able to exercise free choice? In cases like these, she is sensitive to those fault lines in our culture where the personal becomes political: where, for example, inherited ideas about fostering and adoption come into collision with prejudice against lesbian couples. What makes her thoughts and her writing about these issues carry such conviction is that she is prepared to put something of herself into them, to admit, as every researcher knows, that the research process itself affects the understanding and knowledge gained. A particularly moving example is the account she gives, in her memoir *I referred to a moment ago*, of an investigation into the loss of land and culture by the Canadian Cree peoples. She counterpoints this with her own response to her father's death, since this was how the investigation was, in fact, experienced by her.

But together with this warmth and personal commitment goes a belief in the importance of honest neutrality, and this is the quality we should most celebrate today. She looks back to her training in BBC journalism by Jenny Branski, where the emphasis was on remaining absolutely neutral, not making easy allusions which would hint slyly to an audience where their sympathies should be going. Neutrality is not really the right word to describe this attitude. The right words are honesty and humility - qualities not much in evidence in public life over the last decade.
When asked to sit on a government commission investigating the use of animal organs in human transplant operations, she declined, on the grounds that she would be in danger of elevating her own opinions (as expressed in the programmes) to the level of government policy. Would that there were more like her in public life today!

Joan Bakewell's achievements are many. As well as her career in broadcasting, she has written books and radio plays, has contributed a regular arts column to The Sunday Times, is a Governor of the British Film Institute and of the Aldeburgh Foundation, and is director of an independent film company whose recent successes include *Breaking the Code* and *Wits against Hitler*. As Olga Eldridge said, ‘Joan's the role model.’

In recognition of her achievements in broadcasting and media may I invite you, Lady Visitor, to induct as an Honorary Fellow of the College, Miss Joan Bakewell.

Professor David Brady  
Head of the Department of Drama