

The 2021 James Randall Leader Essay Prize in the new 'Fair Well-Known' Category

This year's Fair Well-Known goes to **Jean Blacker** for her article "'But That's Another Story": Wace, *Lazamon*, and the Early Anonymous Old French Verse *Bruts*", published in *Arthuriana* 31.4 (Winter 2021). Professor Blacker is Emerita Professor of French at Kenyon College. Wace, as is well known, is one of the great back-up singers of Arthurian literature: that is, Wace's *Brut* is probably mentioned more in passing in relation to other works than it is studied on its own terms. By 'broaden[ing] the context in which Wace's [*Brut*] is usually seen,' Blacker successfully explodes 'a number of misconceptions about' the *Brut*, especially regarding its genre and courtliness. Blacker does this in part by devoting considerable attention to 'the vexed question of multiple versions of an "original story".' Valorising codicological and textual variance, Blacker maintains that the poem's manuscript contexts indicate that English audiences considered the *Brut* predominantly historical, whereas French audiences considered it to be more of a romance. By juxtaposing the anonymous Old French verse *Bruts* against Wace's *Brut* Blacker highlights the ways in which Wace brings out the theatricality and emotion of his narrative. At the same time, the comparison reveals that the anonymous *Bruts* are more courtly than Wace's *Brut* and that medieval readers, 'or at least' scribes and book-makers, considered Wace's handling of the material to be 'a superior text'.

Blacker's critical acumen, thoroughness, and engagement with both the critical reception and manuscript contexts of the *Bruts* earns her the 2021 Fair Well-Known award.