

Award for Lifetime Service to Arthurian Studies

The North American Branch of the International Arthurian Society is proud to offer its award for a lifetime of service to Arthurian studies to Bonnie Wheeler. This exceptional commendation was created in 2014 specifically to honor Norris J. Lacy for his extraordinary contribution to our field and to the Society, and it has not been awarded to anyone since. The Grail Award for Lifetime Service to Arthurian Studies, like its namesake, the Holy Grail, only reveals itself to the most worthy. Bonnie Wheeler has been found worthy.

It is impossible to imagine what Arthurian studies would be like without Bonnie Wheeler. To begin with, she served for many years as a member of the Executive and Advisory Committee of the IAS-NAB. She is the founding editor and current Executive Director of *Arthuriana* and for fifteen years oversaw the process of selecting submitted articles and the publishing of special issues. She is also series editor of two of Palgrave Macmillan's peer-reviewed series, one of them *Arthurian and Courtly Cultures*. She has served as a commentator and historical consultant for A&E and The History Channel's programs on Camelot, The Holy Grail, and Joan of Arc., and is author and presenter of two courses for the Teaching Company Great Courses series, "Medieval Heroines in History and Legend" and "King Arthur and Chivalry." With achievements such as these Bonnie has reached an audience that goes well beyond academe.

It is at this point that we invoke that old saying, "a rising tide lifts all boats." Bonnie has been that tide for so many of us. For this reason, this award serves as recognition of Bonnie's achievements during her entire career, and in many sub-fields of medieval studies. She is founder and president of the International Joan of Arc Society and published widely on that most interesting of saints. Her thirteen edited collections include important volumes on Arthurian topics, but on many others, as well, and the learning and energy they represent have lifted the profile of Arthurian Studies by association. The second Palgrave series she edits, *The New Middle Ages*, now includes no fewer than 257 volumes! She was the founding chair of the committee that created TEAMS (Teaching Association for Medieval Studies). As a longtime board member of Middle English Texts, she oversaw the publication of many Arthurian texts in this series. Bonnie's editorial achievements in Arthurian Studies are being recognized by her winning the 2021 Norris J. Lacy Prize for Outstanding Editorial Achievement, but it is worth pausing to reflect upon the astonishing number of important volumes edited or overseen by Bonnie in the 1990s and 2000s. This output includes groundbreaking books on mediaeval women, on gender, and various Arthurian matters, including the publication of William Matthews' famous and long-unpublished lecture on the Caxton text of Malory's *Morte Darthur*.

Bonnie has received numerous honors over the course of her career. She's a six-time winner of SMU's Outstanding Teacher Award, and has been elected to many leadership positions in the field, including Councillor of The Medieval Academy of America, President of the Council of Editors of Learned Journals, Council Nominating Committee for the national Phi Beta Kappa Society, and many more. She has been honored by her colleagues, friends, and former students with not one, but two *festschriften*, *Magistra*

Doctissima: Essays in Honor of Bonnie Wheeler (2013) and *Essays in Honor of Bonnie Wheeler* published in *Arthuriana* in 2009. SMU honored Bonnie by creating “The Bonnie Wheeler Centennial Endowed Professorship in Later Medieval English Literature,” a professorship which she herself has held since 2019.

In 2018, she received the Robert L. Kindrick-CARA Award for Outstanding Service to Medieval Studies. The citation for that award is worth repeating here in part:

Professor Wheeler has been a powerful shaping force in our discipline for the past thirty years. Inspiring and cultivating young scholars, fostering their intellectual growth and mentoring their professional possibilities, she is an award-winning teacher and galvanizing mentor. As her letter-writers comment: she has been “an inspiration, a catalyst of change, and a fairy godmother for those working on nontraditional projects.”

There is no question that Bonnie Wheeler deserves an Arthurian Lifetime Achievement Award – or Grail – from the IAS-NAB, but her influence is so ubiquitous it is hard to pinpoint specific items for praise. Perhaps most significant, though, is Bonnie’s lifetime support of both Arthurian Studies and junior faculty. Bonnie helped to make the journal *Arthuriana* well known outside the confines of America, including by changing its very name. Her support of female faculty is now enshrined in the long-running and extremely important Bonnie Wheeler Fellowship. She is an inspirational and award-winning teacher and was instrumental in the creation of the Norris J. Lacy Prize: it was also Bonnie’s tenacity, eloquence, and generosity that convinced Norris to let the award bear his name. It hardly needs saying that Bonnie created the Lacy Prize for *other* scholars and did so to recognize and reward the type of scholarship that too many tenure and promotion committees undervalue. It is thus only appropriate that she be the recipient of a Lacy Prize herself (see citation for Lacy Prize 2021). It is equally appropriate that her many obvious and even more unobvious contributions to Arthurian Studies be rewarded with a Lifetime Achievement Award for her sheer Force-of-Natureness.

In other words, we offer this Award for Lifetime Service in Arthurian Studies to Bonnie Wheeler because she is a force of nature, and we are all boats rising on the tide of her energy, generosity, and erudition.