

**NCSA 2016 President's Award**  
**Robert M. Ryan**  
**Professor Emeritus of English, Rutgers University**

Today's recipient of the NCSA President's Award has been a member of our community as a local arrangements conference organizer, presenter, attendee, two-term Board member and a valuable member of our Senior Advisory Committee. He has been a constant and calming presence over the years, demonstrating the gentlemanly approach to scholarly community and the ways in which its support can make our isolated endeavors feel less so. He also brings that witty glint in his eye to the table too. I am delighted to recognize the contributions of Robert M. Ryan, "Bob," Professor Emeritus of English at Rutgers University.

His career is surely rooted in his student life in New York City, which explains much about the erudite but worldly person he remains; after seminary studies, Columbia University awarded him his Ph.D. in English. Theology is a persistent theme in his work, one evident in the many articles and books he has published, and it was his focus as, in 1971, he began his position at Rutgers, one he held until 2006. His earliest work appeared in *Blake: An Illustrated Quarterly* and the *Wordsworth Circle*, established and respected journals that underscore even at its start the high caliber of his career's work; he would come to sit on the editorial board of the latter. His first book, *Keats: the Religious Sense*, appeared under Princeton University Press's imprint in 1976. It changed the way scholars read Keats, as it illuminates not only what had been hitherto overlooked about Keats and religion, perhaps because of Keats's rejection of formal religious dogma, but also because of how this study illuminates the period's religious thoughts and strands. But Bob didn't focus solely on Keats. He broadened his focus in his 1997 Cambridge University Press book, *The Romantic Reformation: Religious Politics in English Literature, 1789-1824*, which was awarded the British Council Prize in the Humanities and the Christianity in Literature Award. In that work, he expanded his address to the larger strands of theologies as they intersected with current events of the Romantic period, asserting that the Romantics' works were actively designed to engage with and impact the nation's religious character and future. The work is steeped in religious knowledge and textual interpretations, ranging in its address from Blake through Wordsworth to the later Romantics. Bob didn't stop there, continuing to publish articles in the *Keats-Shelley Journal*, *Christianity and Literature*, and again and again in the *Wordsworth Circle*. In 1998, with Ronald A. Sharp he edited *The Persistence of Poetry: Bicentennial Essays on Keats*, which was a collection of papers from the John Keats Bicentennial conference at Harvard that he and Sharp organized; it was published with the University of Massachusetts Press. The following year, he hosted NCSA in Philadelphia, arranging one of the liveliest and most successful conferences the Association has enjoyed. And the year after that, the Keats-Shelley Association of America recognized his career's accomplishments with their Distinguished Scholar Award in Washington, DC in 2000, presented to him by his student and long-time NCSA member, Regina Hewitt.

But Bob was by no means at the culmination of that career; he continued to teach, to write, to travel to undertake development work with his children off the beaten track, in places such as Nepal, Mongolia and the Galapagos Islands. For he seizes opportunities to see the world and in many ways to bring to today romanticized ideals of the past. Irish-American and married to a true Irish woman, he thus belongs to both sides of the pond, and his singing of hymns in the shower early in the morning at the Wordsworth Conference is the stuff of legend. His explorations of Cumbria and other literary haunts in England have no doubt fueled his work and his enthusiasm for it; I have yet to find a literary piece with which he is not already familiar. Such passion was evident to his students too; while at Rutgers, he received The Warren I. Susman Award as well as the Charles and Mary Lindback Award for Excellence in Teaching. And on Monday, April 11<sup>th</sup>, 2016, Bob's most recent work, *Charles Darwin and the Church of Wordsworth*, was published by Oxford University Press. Bob is not only a recognized teacher and exceptional scholar, but he is also a presenter, organizer, long-serving member and friend in our community. All of us who have met and chatted with him have left the conversation the better for it; we look forward to seeing him the following year. Bob is a pleasure to know, and it is my pleasure to recognize his contributions to NCSA today with the President's Award.

**Lucy Morrison**  
**NCSA President**  
**April 15<sup>th</sup>, 2016**