

## SHARP 2015 Regenerates Interest

THE GENERATION and Regeneration of Books was the theme of the 23rd annual, entirely bilingual conference of the international Society for the History of Authorship, Readership and Publishing (SHARP), held this year in Montreal, on the campuses of McGill University and the Université de Sherbrooke (Longueuil), on July 7–10. SHARP supports the study of book history by creating a global network of book historians working in a wide range of scholarly disciplines. The 2014 conference held in Antwerp, Belgium, is well documented on the SHARP website, SHARPweb.org.

This year's conference was notable in many respects. For the first time, it was conducted in two languages, English and French. Accordingly, and as part of its sponsorship of the event, the Alcuin Society provided its bilingual catalogue of books honoured this year with the Alcuin Awards for Excellence in Book Design in Canada.<sup>1</sup> The winners were also exhibited for the duration of the conference at McGill's Humanities and Social Sciences Library, a welcome addition to the extensive program of events. Richard Virr, head and curator of Rare Books and Special Collections, included the exhibition in the guided tours of the collection he conducted for conference participants.

Jointly organized by Josée Vincent of the Université de Sherbrooke and Eli MacLaren of McGill, the conference itself included four plenary sessions, pre-conference workshops, a publishers fair, digital projects showcase, MA student poster exhibition, the opening of the exhibition *Between Author and Reader: The Archive*, and 230 individual presentations, including PhD Student Lightning Sessions on research-in-progress.

Leslie Howsam (SHARP president from 2009 to 2013) gave the opening address, titled "Thinking Through Book History." Her provocative talk on the subject of book history as an "interdiscipline" preceded a candid discussion

and roundtable, "The Legacy of National Histories of the Book." Howsam's keynote in turn set the stage for an engaging conference providing a wide variety of perspectives.

Most recently, Howsam served as editor of *The Cambridge Companion of the History of the Book*, launched at the University of Windsor in January 2015. The book offers a 21st-century understanding of the subject, organized in three parts: part 1 on book cultures from a local, national and global point of view; part 2 about the material book and the mutable text; and part 3 concerning methods, sources and approaches to book history. She was instrumental in the SHARP sponsorship of the bibliography project Book History Online (BHO), hosted by the University of St Andrews in Scotland (see <http://bibliographies.brillonline.com/browse/book-history-online>).

One of the many presentations of interest was that on the Book Traces crowdsourcing project by Amanda Watson, librarian for English and comparative literature at New York University, "Old Books and New Tricks: Regenerating the Library Visit." As libraries go digital, many old books containing fascinating traces of the past are in danger of being discarded. Sponsored by NINES (Nineteenth-century Scholarship Online) and under the direction of Andrew Stauffer of the University of Virginia, Book Traces confronts the question of the future print record by identifying unique shelf copies of 19th- and early-20th-century books most at risk of being lost in the wake of digitization.<sup>2</sup>

Another session of particular relevance for Canadians in the wake of the work of the Truth and Reconciliation Commission of Canada report was a session titled "First Nations and the Book," which discussed "reading" practices of oral and written cultures in a digital age.

Several awards were made at SHARP's annual general meeting. The De Long Book Prize, normally awarded to a single book published in

the preceding year, was exceptionally awarded to both Daniel Wakelin, for *Scribal Correction* and *Literary Craft: English Manuscripts 1375–1510* (Cambridge UP, 2014), and Paula Rabinowitz, for *American Pulp: How Paperbacks Brought Modernism to Main Street* (Princeton UP, 2014).

Conference co-chair Eli MacLaren described Robert Darnton’s closing keynote address as a “tour de force,” a play on his title “A Literary Tour de France.” To discover what readers were reading on the eve of the French Revolution in 18th-century provincial France, Darnton undertook a major research project following the evidence of booksellers and shopkeepers: “these scrappy, ragged middlemen (and women: many of the toughest dealers were wives and widows) functioned as crucial intermediaries in the diffusion of literature.”

This captivating aspect of book history is produced in the form of an online “pyramid book” that allows readers to drill down for more and more details according to the individual reader’s interest. Darnton animates the findings of the archives of the Société typographique de Neuchâtel (STN), a Swiss publishing house that produced its own editions and enjoyed a large wholesale trade everywhere in the kingdom from its headquarters just across the border from the Franche-Comté, one of the traditional provinces of eastern France.

This international conference was both comprehensive and well organized. Many participants—myself included—were attending a SHARP conference for the first time. Many more were returning for at least a second time. The conference was a most rewarding experience, highly recommended for anyone interested in any aspect of book history. Be sure to check online for details of next year’s meeting, on the theme of Languages of the Book, slated for Paris on July 18–21, 2016. Or, if Paris is too far, await the conference’s return to Canada in 2017, when the University of Victoria will play host.

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1. SHARP 2015 had many sponsors besides the Alcuin Society; Eli MacLaren of McGill University kindly provided a full list of collaborators, detailed in a sidebar.

2. The project was described at length in Grant Hurley, “Book Traces: Preserving Biodiversity,” *Amphora*, no. 168 (Fall 2014): 23–24.

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## Acknowledging sponsors

The organization of an event of this size required the collaboration of many organizations. The SHARP 2015 conference was the work of associates of the Groupe de recherches et d’études sur le livre au Québec, Université de Sherbrooke, McGill University, and Bibliothèque et Archives nationales du Québec, with the collaboration of the Society for the History of Authorship, Reading and Publishing.

The Bibliographical Society of Canada, the Association québécoise pour l’étude de l’imprimé, and the Canadian Association for the Study of Book Culture also helped organize the conference—notably by financing the conference website, by sponsoring the plenary sessions, and by managing the poster exhibition.

SHARP 2015 was also generously supported by the Gladys Kriebel Delmas Foundation, the Canada Research Chair in Publishing History and Literary Sociology, the Faculté des lettres et sciences humaines at Université de Sherbrooke, the Dean of Arts Development Fund and the Department of English at McGill University, the Alcuin Society, the University of Chicago Press, the University of Massachusetts Press, The Word Bookstore, the Social Sciences and Humanities Research Council of Canada, and the Department of Canadian Heritage.