

# TIS The Independent Scholar

A peer-reviewed interdisciplinary journal

ISSN 2381-2400

## *Volume 2 (September 2016)*

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[CONTENTS](#)

[FROM THE EDITOR](#)

[ABOUT THE AUTHORS](#)

[CRITICAL ESSAYS](#)

[BOOK REVIEWS](#)

[NOTES FOR CONTRIBUTORS](#)



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## **ELIZABETH L. EISENSTEIN (1921-2016)**

NCIS and scholars worldwide join in mourning the death of historian Elizabeth Lewisohn Eisenstein. Her pioneering work on the effects of the Gutenberg Press laid the theoretical and factual groundwork for the field today known as Print Culture or Book History. A native of New York City, she obtained her BA at Vassar College and her MA and Ph.D. degrees from Radcliffe. She came from a prominent German-Jewish family in Manhattan: Lewisohn Stadium, a Doric-colonnaded amphitheater

built on the campus of the City College of New York in 1915 and demolished in 1973, and Columbia University's Lewisohn Hall were named after her paternal grandfather Adolph Lewisohn, a financier, mining magnate and philanthropist.

Today she is best remembered for her two-volume classic, *The Printing Press as an Agent of Change: Communications and Cultural Transformations in Early Modern Europe*. Published in 1979, it remains in print. Eisenstein's first book, *The First Professional Revolutionist*, was published in 1959; her last book, *Divine Art, Infernal Machine: The Reception of Printing in the West from First Impressions to the Sense of an Ending*, came out in 2011. In 2007, three scholars of Book History, Sabrina Baron, Eric Lindquist, and Eleanor Shevlin, edited *Agent of Change: Print Culture Studies after Elizabeth L. Eisenstein*, a testament to her continuing impact as a scholar.

Eisenstein turned from "mere" history of print to a deep, nuanced and influential consideration of its impact and implications. The movement from a scribal intellectual culture to one marked by a widespread distribution of texts available to all who could read, regardless of place, space or time, had profound transformative effects. Scholars as diverse as Robert Darnton, who began, as did Eisenstein, by examining the Enlightenment and the French Revolution, to the social theorist John B. Thompson in his *The Media and Modernity* (1995), utilized her scholarship and insights in their work.

Elizabeth Eisenstein had a distinguished career. She worked briefly for Time-Life, taught at the American University in Washington, D.C. and went on hold the Alice Freeman Palmer Chair of the history department at the University of Michigan, among other posts. I had the privilege of hearing her address the Washington Area Group for Print Culture Studies (WAGPCS) when her last book appeared. Scheduling the talk presented real difficulties, because it had to mesh with her tennis schedule: a world class player dubbed "the Assassin," who acquired tennis titles as well as academic honors, she was as adept at a rebound as an intellectual riposte. Her husband and two of their four children survive her, along with a sister, grand- and great-grandchildren. Her daughter, Margaret DeLacy, is a founding member of NCIS, and remains a familiar name in academic circles.

Let us honor the memory of Elizabeth L. Eisenstein.

SHELBY SHAPIRO

General Editor

## THE ELIZABETH EISENSTEIN ESSAY PRIZE

### Announcement of the 2016 Winners

The Elizabeth Eisenstein Prize is open to all NCIS members and recognizes excellence in independent scholarship. The Prize is awarded annually for the best peer-reviewed published article submitted by a member of NCIS, and brings the winner an honorarium, which this year is \$350. The Eisenstein Prize was established in April 1993 and is named for Elizabeth Lewisohn Eisenstein (1923-2016), Professor of History at American University (1959-1979) and the University of Michigan (1975-1985), and mother of Margaret DeLacy, one of NCIS's founders, in recognition of Professor Eisenstein's long-standing support of NCIS. After 2012 the Prize lapsed due to lack of funding, but was revived this year following Professor Eisenstein's passing in January 2016, with funding from NCIS and Margaret DeLacy.

The call for papers attracted a strong field of papers from NCIS members in the USA, England, France, Romania and Poland. They represented a wide range of disciplines including theology, musicology, women's studies, history, literature, systems practice, art history, media studies, identity studies and cultural anthropology. The submissions were assessed according to three criteria: clarity of argument, writing style, and accessibility to an intelligent but multidisciplinary audience. After several months of deliberation, and a plenary discussion by the review committee, the aggregate assessment scores put two papers well ahead of the rest of the field, and in these circumstances there is provision for awarding a runner-up prize, which attracts kudos but no honorarium. We are therefore delighted to announce that the winners of the 2016 Eisenstein Prize are as follows:

#### WINNER

"The Painted Page: Books as Symbols in Renaissance Art" by Barbara Williams Ellertson & Janet Seiz.  
Published in *The Independent Scholar* Vol. 1 (2015): 20-33.

#### RUNNER-UP

"Clichés Revisited: Poland's 1949 Łagów Composers' Conference" by Cindy Bylander.  
Published in *Polski Rocznik Muzykologiczny* [Polish Musicological Annual] 2015: 15-34.

The 2016 Eisenstein Committee would like to offer our congratulations to the worthy recipients.

Amanda J. Haste (Chair)  
Susan Roth Breitzer  
Lee Ellen Harper  
Patricia Silver

*NOTE: In deciding on the winner and runner-up, the fact that one of them had been published in NCIS's own peer-reviewed journal was extensively debated. However, the committee were unanimous in their view that authors should not be penalized for publishing in TIS (this was one of two TIS articles submitted this year) as (a) they are thoroughly peer-reviewed, and (b) the majority of committee members had not been involved in the TIS editorial or review process.*

### **Winning Essays**

The winning essay, "The Painted Page: Books as Symbols in Renaissance Art" was published in *The Independent Scholar* Vol. 1 (2015) and can be seen by following this link:

[http://www.ncis.org/sites/default/files/TIS%20Volume%201\\_ALL%20%286%29.pdf](http://www.ncis.org/sites/default/files/TIS%20Volume%201_ALL%20%286%29.pdf)

We hope to reproduce runner-up Cindy Bylander's essay "Clichés Revisited: Poland's 1949 Łagów Composers' Conference" in the next issue of TIS, if the necessary permissions can be obtained.