Lisa Jardine

(1944–2015)

Historian of science who chaired pioneering embryology regulator.

LISA JARDINE

Lisa Anne Jardine rewrote the history of European intellectual and scientific life in the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries. She was always most interested in the precise ways in which her research subjects did their jobs. She showed how the sixteenth-century theologian Desiderius Erasmus invented a new kind of career as a scholar and writer in the world of print; how Robert Hooke and Christopher Wren transformed the city of London's landscape in the seventeenth century; and how the Huyghens family and their Dutch compatriots created a sparkling world of exotic gardens, spectacular works of art and penetrating inquiries into nature.

She told these stories in huge biographies and histories that were as accessible and elegant in style as they were novel in content. These included *The Curious Life of Robert Hooke* (HarperCollins, 2003) and *Going Dutch* (Harper, 2008). Latterly, she steered the United Kingdom's pioneering regulator, the Human Fertilisation and Embryology Authority (HFEA) safely through choppy waters.

Jardine, who died of cancer on 25 October 2015, was professor of Renaissance studies at University College London. Born on 12 April 1944 in Oxford, Jardine was in some ways fated to study and write about science and the humanities. Her father, mathematician and biologist Jacob Bronowski, created the landmark 1973 BBC documentary series, *The Ascent Of Man*. Like him, Jardine read mathematics at the University of Cambridge, later switching to study English. She then did an master's in translation at the University of Essex and a doctorate in Renaissance studies at Cambridge.

She became fascinated with what might be called the history of knowledge and the practices by which humans attain it. She admired dominant historical figures of the Royal Society in London, such as Hooke and Wren, and showed how they found new ways to unpick the fabric of nature. In 1996 she devoted a pioneering book on the Renaissance, *Worldly Goods* (Macmillan), to the merchants and customers of the fifteenth and sixteenth centuries who learned to appreciate fine paintings, sumptuous fabrics and rare objects. The Renaissance itself, in her view, emerged from their finely honed consumerism.

As Jardine's interests developed, she invented new ways of writing history. Scholars knew for centuries that the sixteenth-century writer Gabriel Harvey adorned his books with vast marginal notes. Jardine deciphered them — and identified Harvey as a figure of a previously unknown kind, a Renaissance political adviser who served great men by reading the classics with them. Historians of science, in the 1980s and after, concentrated on reconstructing the precise, local practices of men such as Hooke and Robert Boyle. Jardine did the same: but she never forgot that they were polyglots, in dialogue with others across Europe. English science in its early heyday, as she portrayed it, was not a creation of national genius but a structure raised on foundations laid by the Dutch.

In the 1970s and 1980s, when women were still rare in academia, Jardine became a mentor and model for a great many younger scholars, both male and female. Her greatest talent — and greatest love — was teaching. She lectured to prodigies and ordinary students with equal engagement, mentored brilliant scholars with immense generosity, and always found a way to look after one more student than the budget allowed. Even more than her books, her students are her monument.

Committed to public service, Jardine held many high-profile posts. She judged the Man Booker and Whitbread literary prizes, and served as a trustee for London's Victoria and Albert Museum and a council member of the Royal Institution. In her two terms as chair of the HFEA, from 2008 to 2014, she led efforts to reduce multiple births resulting from *in vitro* fertilization (IVF), provide fairer compensation for donors, reduce regulatory overlap and give better access to data for researchers — all this at a time when the future of the globally respected organization was uncertain.

She felt particularly honoured to have overseen the 2012 public consultation on mitochondrial replacement. This IVF technique aims to prevent women from passing on harmful mutations in the cell's energy-producing structures, mitochondria, by using a third party to provide healthy mitochondrial DNA for a future baby. The United Kingdom this year became the first country in the world to allow this technique in the clinic, and the HFEA's engagement exercise is frequently cited in current debates on genome editing in sperm, eggs and embryos.

What mattered most to Jardine was not the institution she served, but the quality of her service. Of her many distinctions, election to the Royal Society as an honorary fellow particularly delighted her. She was just as proud of her stint as governor of a London school.

Her favourite brooch read *multum in parvo* ('a lot in a little') — her joke about her height. She was a commanding presence in public, a dazzling speaker whose plenary lectures were the most memorable events at many conferences. A wider British public knew her from many years of broadcasts, including the 2013 BBC radio series *Seven Ages of Science*, in which she vividly conveyed the excitement and complexity of historical research. Her voice on the page was distinctive: trenchant, accurate and unfailingly eloquent, whether she was arguing a historical case in a journal or engaging in a contemporary debate in a newspaper or online article.

Lisa was a rare figure — she combined academic brilliance with a deep commitment to public service, and made it all look so easy. ■

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