



HISTORY OF SCIENCE
SOCIETY

Prize Ceremony
Saturday, November 5, 2016
Atlanta, Georgia

Katharine Park (Harvard University, emerita)

Sarton Medal for lifetime scholarly achievement

The winner of the 2016 Sarton Medal is Katharine Park, Emerita Professor of the History of Science at Harvard University. Over the course of her distinguished career as a groundbreaking scholar of medieval and early modern science and medicine, Park has dramatically expanded the horizons of the history of science. Her scholarship, set out in dozens of articles and book chapters and in prize-winning monographs and co-authored books, has transformed our understanding of the history of science and has proven vital for research in STS, the visual culture of science, and cultural studies of science and gender. She is beloved as an inspiring and dedicated teacher, colleague, and mentor.

Park received her Ph.D. from Harvard University in 1981 and was elected a Junior Fellow at the Harvard Society of Fellows while a graduate student. She moved from Harvard to a job at Wellesley College, where she taught in the History Department for seventeen years. Her early scholarship focused on the medical profession in Renaissance Florence, the subject of her Ph.D. research and her first book, *Doctors and Medicine in Early Renaissance Florence* (Princeton University Press, 1985). While the topic was traditional, Park's approach to it was not. Rather than focus only on the physicians of Florence, she surveyed "the entire world of medical practice" in the wake of the first plague epidem-



ic in 1348. She examined the interactions between different types of healers in Florence; she included social, political, and religious contexts; and she was one of the first historians to use the term "medical marketplace" to describe the diverse approaches to disease and healing available at that time. A stellar piece of scholarship, this book was an early example of a trend towards examining the history of medical knowledge and practice as a story of give-and-take between a vibrant array of healers and patients,

rather than as a top-down field led by university-trained physicians. In her later articles on surgical specialists (1998), snake-handlers (1999), the role of gender within the hierarchy of medical practice (1998), Park argues not for a straight line of development, or a narrative of scientific progress, but for attention to the diversity of cultural, intellectual, social, and institutional vectors that shaped science over the *longue durée*.

While at Wellesley, Park began work on a project on human anatomy and dissection, which would occupy her for the better part of two decades. Her article "The Criminal and the Sainly Body," which won the *Renaissance Quarterly* article prize in 1994, dispelled the notion that there was a religious taboo against autopsy and dissection in the Latin Middle Ages. It remains widely cited and taught today. Another article, "The Life of the Corpse" (*JHMAS*, 1995), demonstrated Park's talents in comparative history, highlighting differing attitudes towards the dead body and dissection between Italy and Northern Europe. Park also began publishing on two additional areas of scholarship during this period: gender and perceptions of the body, the subject of several articles (e.g. "The Rediscovery of the Clitoris," 1997), and the pre-modern interest in "wonders," a topic she worked on together with Lorraine Daston.

The project on wonders came to fruition with the publication of Park and Daston's *Wonders and the Order of Nature, 1150-1750* (Zone Books, 1998). This magisterial volume won the HSS Pfizer Prize in 1999 as well as the Roland H. Bainton Book Prize from the Sixteenth Century Studies Society and Conference, and was translated into Italian in 2000 and German in 2002. To say that *Wonders* was groundbreaking is to un-

derestimate its impact. Not only did it demonstrate the crucial role that concepts of monstrosity have played in defining the boundaries of nature, it also argued that natural oddities and the ideas about the hidden, or occult, forces of nature that often accompanied them were part and parcel of the study of nature in pre- and early-modern Europe. *Wonders* helped intensify the pushback against the idea of a seventeenth-century "Scientific Revolution" that banished such "unscientific" notions. As she has further demonstrated in her essay "The Meanings of Natural Diversity: Marco Polo on the 'Division' of the World" (1997), the valences and affects of diversity and difference have often been rendered legible in relation to particular intersections of political, economic, and scientific imaginaries—in the Middle Ages, certainly, but in later periods, as well. The influence of Park and Daston's broad view of the history of science is apparent in their co-edited volume *The Cambridge History of Science*, vol. 3: *Early Modern Science*, published in 2006 after nearly a decade of meticulous work.

In 1997, Park moved to Harvard University to assume the Samuel Zemurray, Jr. and Doris Zemurray Stone Radcliffe chair, a position that was initially split between the History of Science and the Studies of Women, Gender, and Sexuality (located solely in the History of Science from 2003). There, she continued her work on gender and the body, writing articles on personifications of nature, allegories, childbirth, and a critique of the "one-sex" body. Her work on gender, autopsy, and dissection culminated in the publication of *Secrets of Women: Gender, Generation, and the Origins of Human Dissection* (Zone Books, 2006), awarded the HSS Rossiter Prize in 2007, the William Welch Medal from the American Association for the History of Medicine in 2009, and translated into French in 2009. Many scholars had noted that the cadaver in the frontispiece of Vesalius's *Fabrica* is female, but none had understood its significance until Park established that the practice of human dissection, long held to be emblematic of the turn toward scientific proof that characterized the early modern period in Europe, actually grew out of medieval practices of embalming, of forensic autopsies, and of gynecological surgeries. Furthermore, Park demonstrated conclusively that women subjects and actors were at the heart of these medieval practices, and that they were attentive to questions of proof and causality.

Since her retirement from Harvard in 2015, Park has continued her project of re-thinking entrenched narratives of pre-modern science in a new book (with Ahmed Ragab) surveying the history of medieval science and medicine in the Arabic, Latin, and European vernacular traditions.

Park's influence extends far beyond her own research areas.

Scholars of the modern biological sciences have adapted many of her key insights about monsters and non-conforming bodies to understand teratological discourse and epidemiology, as well as the biomedical history of concepts of deformity and disability. Literary scholars have drawn on her work to understand Shakespeare, science fiction, and the development of the Gothic novel. Film scholars have pointed to her theorization of monstrosity in relation to affect and the broader social contexts of meaning as crucial for understanding the significance of horror films. Art historians have turned to her work on allegorical emblems and anatomical diagrams to understand contemporary bioart. Cultural theorists of biotechnology and digital culture have shown the extent to which new and emerging technological innovations threaten certain modern conceptions of the human—provoking ideas of the "posthuman"—by pointing to Park's arguments.

Beyond her scholarship, Park is known as a generous colleague, a dedicated teacher and mentor, and a strong advocate for women scholars. She has been an active member of the HSS Women's Caucus since its foundation. At Harvard, she chaired the Committee on Degrees in Women's Studies from 1998-2003, and she taught courses at the Graduate Consortium for Women's Studies, which was then housed at Radcliffe. In a time in which being a woman professor at Harvard was not always easy, she acted as an unofficial mentor and advisor to junior professors. She was beloved as the Director of Graduate Studies in the History of Science Department during the last years before her retirement. Park also has taken on broader administrative duties, serving as the Lehman Visiting Professor and Acting Director of the Villa I Tatti, the Harvard Center for Renaissance Studies, in 2000-1. She has been active in the HSS, as a member of Council (1991-93; 2002-04), the Committee on Research and the Profession (1991-93), the Nominating Committee (1991, 1997), and the Pfizer Prize Committee (2010-13), which she chaired in 2013. She has held elected positions in other academic societies, most notably the Renaissance Society of America and the American Association for the History of Medicine. In addition to her book prizes, Park has been awarded numerous prestigious national fellowships and prizes, including grants from the Guggenheim Foundation, Radcliffe Institute, NEH, and ACLS, and she was elected a member of the American Academy of Arts and Sciences in 2001.

Katharine Park is one of the giants of our field. We are delighted to see her recognized with the Sarton Medal, an honor she richly deserves.

Joan Cadden; Paula Findlen; Colin Milburn; Alisha Rankin; Elly R. Truitt