

Lorraine Daston (Max Planck Institute for the History of Science) Sarton Medal (2012) for lifetime scholarly achievement

The winner of this year's Sarton Medal, the History of Science Society's most prestigious prize for lifetime scholarly achievement, is Lorraine Daston, currently the Executive Director of the Max Planck Institute for History of Science in Berlin. It is an honor to describe the extraordinary scholarship and service that make her particularly worthy of this distinction.

Lorraine Daston opens our eyes to the profound historicity of scientific ways of knowing. She is, fundamentally, a historian of rationality, keen to understand how human reason has imposed order on natural phenomena and on human behavior in all their multifariousness and unpredictability. She is a philosopher's historian, a scholar of ideas, taking apart abstract concepts like probability and objectivity and revealing within them the living, breathing ideas in the making.

She makes clear that ideas have lives that cannot be explained away as mere effects of the play of interests. Expanding how we think about rationality, she illuminates the moral and affective states that have been judged necessary to scientific practice at different points in history—the sets of values that she has taught us to call science's "moral economy." She is our most astute critic of the pretensions of rationalism, but also our most impassioned advocate for the enormous potential of human reason.

Raine describes her path to the field of history of science as circuitous, a result of being unable to choose between the sciences and the humanities. After graduating summa cum laude in History and Science from Harvard, she earned a master's degree in history and philosophy of science from Cambridge and a Ph.D. in history of science from Harvard. Already a rising star, she won the Schuman Prize from the History of Science Society for a graduate essay on "British Responses to Psycho-physiology." She then spent two years at the Columbia Society of Fellows in the Humanities before taking up her first professorship at Harvard. Posts at Princeton, Brandeis, Göttingen, and the University of Chicago followed, but no institution has had the good fortune to hold onto Raine for nearly as long as the Max Planck Institute for History of Science in Berlin. Since 1995 she has led a division of the MPI that is broadly dedicated to "Ideals and Practices of Rationality."

As a scholar, Raine produces histories that are visionary, synthetic, and transformative. She has shown historians of science how to balance our fondness for microhistories with large-scale, long-durée narratives. She tracks the metamorphoses of such seemingly timeless categories as the rational, the factual, the objective, and the natural. She does so, above all, by attending to subtle shifts in the practices of knowledge-making, in habits of calculation, attention, representation, and observation. Her first book, *Classical Probability in the Enlightenment* (1988), showed how the mathematics of probability theory originated in the Enlightenment quest to codify rationality. Tracing the origins of probabilistic calculations to such practical pursuits as judicial decision making and the pricing of life insurance, she argued that probability theory functioned as both a description of and a prescription for rational behavior.

Raine's next book, *Wonders and the Order of Nature, 1150-1750* (1998), co-authored with Katharine Park, approached the history of reason from what might appear to be its negation, the emotion of wonder. Subverting the traditional narrative of the history of science as a progressive naturalization of wondrous objects, Daston and Park placed the passion of wonder at the very center of the origins of modern science. They showed that only a

fundamental shift in epistemology could permit Enlightenment natural philosophers to distance themselves from such a “vulgar” passion. Daston and Park went on to expand our understanding of “early modern” science further with their co-edited volume for the Cambridge History of Science series. Most recently, Daston, together with Peter Galison, has given us a history of a category that, it would seem, would need no history: *Objectivity* (2007). Their book is a seminal contribution to the project of historical epistemology.

It finds, in the making of scientific images, clues to the succession of remarkably divergent virtues that scientists have sought to embody in the name of objectivity. This interest in the moral weight of natural science persists in the book Raine is now completing, on the conflation of natural and moral order. Thanks to Raine’s prodigious erudition and analytical acumen, she has thus contributed fundamentally to histories of science from the Middle Ages through the late twentieth century. Appropriately, she is one of only two people ever to win the History of Science Society’s highest book prize, the Pfizer, twice (for *Classical Probability and Wonders*). Raine is also, and not least, a master of the scholarly essay, turning out five to ten prime specimens every year. Each one is a model of eloquence and analytical precision. This became all the more remarkable to me years ago when I overheard her remark that she has no patience for the process of revision.

Another noteworthy feature of Raine’s oeuvre is that so much of it has been collaborative. Indeed, she has cultivated intellectual partnerships from the very start of her career. As a newly minted Ph.D., she became involved in an unprecedented experiment in authorial collaboration, the work of six scholars in all: three historians of science, two philosophers, and a psychologist. The result, *The Empire of Chance: How Probability Changed Science and Everyday Life* (1989), is perhaps the most seamlessly comprehensive analysis of a scientific concept ever attempted. Raine’s other co-authored monographs were longer in the making, but well worth the wait. One began its gestation in graduate school, in conversations about monsters and seventeenth-century metaphysics with her classmate Katharine Park, and was published to the highest acclaim in 1998. Her book with Peter Galison was co-written over a period of twenty years, during most of which the two of them were teaching on different continents. These partnerships testify, among other things, to Daston’s talent for life-long intellectual friendship. As she and Park put it in the preface to their book, “Collaboration is rare among humanists, but we recommend it heartily.”

Raine has crafted still more superb books out of the research groups that she directs at the MPI. Her multi-year, multi-disciplinary projects, organized around innovative themes such as “the moral authority of nature,” “scientific personae,” “things that talk,” and “practices of scientific observation,” have set a fertile research agenda for historians of science from all over the world and have inspired scholars at all stages of their careers. The research collectives that she assembles at the MPI are wonderfully eclectic. As a predoctoral fellow there, for instance, I had the good fortune to fall into a reading group with two art historians; soon I was part of a conference on the functions of “pattern” in art and science. I suspect that such cross-fertilization is the rule, not the exception.

Raine guides this revolving group of scholars with a light but sure hand, posing questions and articulating methods of inquiry in ways that forge common ground. The exemplary collections of essays that have emerged from her department clearly reflect her intellectual leadership and her talent for curating productive conversations.

Through these projects, Raine has built lasting bridges between the history of science and other disciplines, including art history, gender studies, philosophy, and literature. Her influence reaches even beyond academia, through books and articles that introduce the latest themes in the history of science to the general public of the German-speaking world. She has also been known to publish generous, insightful reviews of her colleagues’ works in widely read forums like the *London Review of Books* and the *Frankfurter Allgemeine Zeitung*. Indeed, our field owes much of its current recognition and appreciation among outsiders in Europe and beyond to Raine’s diplomacy and inspiring prose.

Raine's abundant generosity towards students and junior colleagues is legendary. Many come to work in Daston's group for a year or two as postdocs, others as dissertation writers or workshop participants. All emerge as better scholars—trained, for instance, to spy the Big Questions lurking in their archival materials and to tease out the themes that link their work to scholarship in other fields. It is hard to imagine a more reliable and patient reader of drafts, which she can be counted on to return with a game-changing critique—tucked, of course, into a warm and encouraging note. She is just as supportive to her peers.

Joan Richards, in her memoir *Angles of Reflection*, has this to say of the character she slyly calls Genie and of the friendship they formed in graduate school: “Genie was different...She was always ready to meet me at the outermost edges of my thinking, she was always ready to help me when I got stuck, she was always ready to rejoice when I made a breakthrough. As long as Genie was there I never really worked alone.” That says it all, doesn't it?

Deborah Coen

http://www.hsonline.org/Meeting/2012HSSMeeting/2012_HSS_Prize_Ceremony.pdf