

Laudatio Lisa Jardine

Jürgen Pieters

I am very honoured to be able to introduce to you this afternoon, as *collega proximus*, Professor Lisa Jardine, this year's candidate for the Sarton Chair. To be able to do so by means of an extensive laudatio, in front of this audience, and in this magnificent building, not only honours me, truly so, it actually also thrills me – in the past few years I have pointed so many students in the direction of one or other book professor Jardine has written, that I particularly welcome this moment as the perfect occasion to formally render *homage* to this exceptional scholar.

I could begin by telling you some of the stuff that one is expected to tell at an occasion such as this and give you a brief survey of Lisa Jardine's vita. I could begin by telling you that

- she is Centenary Professor of Renaissance Studies at Queen Mary, University of London and the Director of an outstanding research centre, the Centre for Editing Lives and Letters (the centre's acronym is CELL, which is certainly not a coincidence, since for more than a year now Professor Jardine also serves as Chair of the Human Fertilisation and Embryology Authority in the UK);
- she is a Fellow of the Royal Historical Society;
- she holds honorary doctorates from the University of St Andrews, Sheffield Hallam University and the Open University;
- she is a Trustee of the Victoria & Albert Museum, and Patron of the National Council on Archives;
- during the first semester of the 2008/9 academic year Professor Jardine was Distinguished Visiting Professor at the Netherlands Insti-

tute for Advanced Study in the Humanities and Social Sciences, jointly sponsored by NIAS and the Royal Library in The Hague (the KB). In 2009/10 she will be Scaliger Visiting Professor at the University of Leiden, the Netherlands;

- she is a Commander of the British Empire, and rightly so.

I could start by telling you that. I could also start by saying something about her publications, both the scholarly ones and the ones intended for a larger audience. Let me begin with the latter. Professor Jardine writes and reviews for all the major UK national newspapers and magazines and also for the Washington Post. She appears regularly on arts, history and current affairs programs for TV and radio. She is a regular contributor to the radio-show 'A point of view', on BBC Radio 4. A selection of her talks for that program has recently been published.

Professor Jardine's no less impressive record of scholarly publishing contains no fewer than sixteen books, of which I can only mention some: there are books on Shakespeare and his contemporaries (an early one on the representation of women in Elizabethan and Jacobean drama) and a number of highly acclaimed biographies of major figures from the early modern period: Erasmus, Robert Hooke, Sir Christopher Wren and Sir Francis Bacon (on whose writings she wrote her PhD, which was defended in 1973 at the University of Cambridge).

Lisa Jardine is also the author of two more general introductions to the culture of the early modern period, or the Renaissance, entitled *Worldly Goods* and (co-written with Jerry Brotton) *Global Interests: Renaissance Art between East and West*. Those are two of the books that I keep recommending to my students – they are at the same time thorough and specialized, but also clear in design and execution, and it's this perfect balance between more specialist and more general aims that, I think, are a prime characteristic of Lisa Jardine's work, and one which has deservedly ensured her a very large audience.

A second hallmark of her work is the great attention that she pays to individual lives and to the shaping force of individual decisions for cultural developments, no matter how collectively structured or otherwise constrained these decisions are. Lisa Jardine's interest in the past is an interest in the people of the past. She is a biographer first and foremost, and

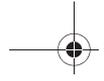
as the full title of the research center that she directs shows – The Centre for Editing Lives and Letters – the historical materials that she studies are the traces that the dead have left to the living, traces that give us an idea of the actual lives that they once led.

So, as I said, I could start with the vita, I could start with the publications. I could do that, but I could also start with a confession – I must say that I have only recently (last year to be precise) gotten to know professor Jardine personally. But, nevertheless, I have always had this thing with her. I promise I won't make this too embarrassingly personal, but in order to make this clear, I need you to join me back in time, for a minute or so, to, say, some fifteen years ago when I was a student doing a post-graduate program in literary theory, trying to figure out (as most post-graduate students do) what to do with the rest of my life which threatened to begin any time now. More specifically, I was trying to find out whether writing a PhD could serve as the beginning of that 'rest of my life' or would merely postpone the rest of my life to happen for another four years. Also, if I were to write a PhD, I would need a topic, a field in which to specialize that could interest me, well, for the rest of my life. In hindsight, there have been (apart from some professors in Ghent and my PhD supervisor in particular) three scholars whose books have had a decisive impact on my own work, in the sense that they determined my decision to write about the past, and about the early modern period more specifically, but to do so from a decidedly presentist position – over the past decade and a half, I have read as much of their work as I could get my hands on. As you will have imagined, Lisa Jardine is one of those three – the other two are Stephen Greenblatt and Catherine Belsey; those of you who are familiar with their names will understand that as far as I am concerned Lisa Jardine is up there with true giants.

What is it that I found, and still find, so appealing in Professor Jardine's work, and that of her two colleagues? Since I could go on and on about this, but have very little time left, let me try to put it as succinctly as possible. Lisa Jardine's books are – to borrow a phrase first coined by the French historian Jules Michelet – marked by a great amount of tenderness for the past. She cares about the past, and its inhabitants, and it is this passionate interest in the actual lives of actual people that, in my view, are at the core of her work and of its obvious success. Readers warm to her writings (and

I'm referring to actual experiences here, not simply my own, but also to that of a number of students with whom I talked about Jardine's work) – readers warm to her writings because these writings are warm, because their embrace of the past is a heart-felt one and her books clearly manage to infect their readers with this enthusiasm. My earlier reference to Michelet was not a casual one, since in his ideal conception of a poetical historiography (a form of history-writing that has the aspirations and the capacities of literary writings) the work of the historian needs to have a transferential aim, and doubly so; it needs to bring back to life the past (to translate it into something present) while at the same time drawing its readers into the past, but into a live past. To read Jardine on Erasmus, on Francis Bacon, on the murder of 'Willem van Oranje' (the first assassination of a head of state with a hand-gun, as the subtitle of Jardine's *The Awful End of Prince William the Silent* has it) or, in her latest book, on Constantijn and Christiaan Huygens has the effect which Michelet's writing can have: the reader faces the past, in a dramatized version, a live version as it were, because the imagination of the historians renders the past present. But at the same time the historian's voice keeps interfering, not in a meddling way, but in a continued attempt to point the reader at the strangeness of the effect of what is happening on the page. Something that is definitely no longer there (something of the past) is made present, conjured up, and this very activity is the core-business of historians, of those who write history and in doing so make history. In her latest book, Jardine hints at several points to the present from which the past is being portrayed, and it is in persistently addressing that mutual relationship (between past and present) that she is able to make clear why and how the past can matter to us. '*I want to use the past and present to stimulate and challenge the listener and seduce them into thinking differently*', she writes in one of her books. She cares about the past because she cares about the present. The past is not there simply to illuminate the present, or to illuminate it in a simple way. It is there to make us wonder what we are doing, what we have done, and what we are going to do. As she writes in another of her books: "The task is not nostalgic reminiscence but a fresh understanding of the rootedness of our present uncertainties."

Lisa Jardine's latest book, *Going Dutch*. Subtitle: *How England Plundered Holland's Glory* deals with the cultural, political and scientific interactions



between Dutch and English culture in the seventeenth century, a topic which serves as the background of her lecture tonight. *Going Dutch* has been translated into Dutch as *Gedeelde Weelde*, and has now been short-listed (together with two other competitor volumes) for the Cundill International Prize in History, the world's largest non-fiction award in historical literature. The fact that she has been shortlisted for this award is further evidence to the broad appeal of her work, both on a scholarly community of specialists and peers, and on a more general audience. It is a good tradition that the Sarton Committee selects its candidates among scholars who not only bridge the gap between what C.P. Snow famously called the two cultures (and only recently, Lisa Jardine held the CP Snow lecture at Christ's College in Cambridge, her alma mater) but also between the ivory towers of academia and society at large. In light of these criteria, and in light of all the above, I am sure Lisa Jardine is a perfect candidate for the honorary degree we are today bestowing upon her.

