



# The Literary London Society

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LLS Newsletter – Summer 2013

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1. [General News](#)

Everyone will agree that the Literary London 2013 conference, held last month at Senate House, was a tremendous success thanks to all the delegates and, of course, the conference organiser, Martin Dines. Featuring speakers such as Courtia Newland, Vic Gattrel (Cambridge) and Matthew Rubery (Queen Mary), and drawing scholars from a range of disciplinary backgrounds and from around the globe to discuss the theme 'London in Crisis and Disorder', it proved, once again, that the Society continues to expand and develop in lively and exciting ways.

Included in this Newsletter is a detailed account of the 3-day event, written by LLS early career rep, Lisa Robertson, reminding delegates of the experience and hopefully encouraging those who did not attend this year to come to next year's conference which, it has now been announced, will address the theme '**Ages of London**'. A call for papers for Literary London 2014 will be circulated in the near future...

The Literary London Society is also pleased to have recently launched a Facebook group that will provide an online forum for members to share research ideas, ask questions, post event updates and conference listings, and network with other Literary Londoners. Members are warmly encouraged to post links to their own research and publicise their own events.

<https://www.facebook.com/groups/literarylondonsociety/>

2. [Conference Review by Lisa Robertson](#)

If misery loves company, crisis summons a crowd. This year's Literary London Society conference, which treated the theme of 'London in Crisis and Disorder', of course drew its own rout of scholars from around the globe – but so too did the conference theme make clear the degree to which any crisis or disorder is necessarily generated by, endured or resolved in the company of others. The conference, hosted by the Institute of English Studies, University of London and



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held between 17 and 19 July 2013, brought together papers from a range of disciplines that supported the society's objective to foster interdisciplinary research into any literary manifestation of London. The event opened with a public lecture by Courttia Newland which emphasised the production and experience of working-class literature. Speaking less about his own writing than about the people and places that had influenced him – family, school rivals, teachers, writers – Newland described the cultural process of 'digging in the crates' to read the past into the future and in doing so give voice to marginal communities. At the following morning's plenary address, Vic Gatrell (Cambridge) drew on his forthcoming monograph *The First Bohemians* (2013) to investigate the eighteenth-century cultural hotbed of Covent Garden. This heterogeneous social group, with its level of cultural production and sexual freedom, qualifies as an early bohemia in which artists like William Hogarth represented (and in doing so exposed to the market) the vibrant social milieu of their own neighbourhood.

As at any large conference, a number of parallel panels forced delegates to make difficult choices between sessions – but the rather ingenious organisation ensured it was almost impossible to choose based on subject or period. The individual panels knit together diverse topics to produce engaging, and often surprising, unities. The panel 'Unruly Boroughs', for example, brought together nineteenth-century realism and a contemporary interpretation of the Condition-of-England novel: Eliza Cubitt (UCL) commented on the disruption of 'a totalising judgement' by 'nomadic' subjects in urban literature and street photography, whereas in Craig Melhoff's reading of *Lionel Asbo* (2012) the world that is unable to be totalised – the 'floating world' – is one culturally adrift and cut-off from history. A later panel on 'Disorderly Homes' included Jane Jordan's compelling paper which suggested that the very class of women condemned by the blue of Booth's poverty map participated in a 'moral policing' of the street and 'functioned as auxiliary parents' in the Eliza Armstrong Abduction Case. Jivitesh Vashisht (Warwick) commented on the ways that a similar 'moral policing' generates anxieties of surveillance that become an organising principle for anarchists' homes and in Conrad's *The Secret Agent* (1907) and *The Informer* (1906).

To conclude the first day of the conference, a round table discussion brought together Susie Thomas, Jerry White, and Anne Witchard in a panel chaired by the BBC's Philippa Thomas, all of whom have contributed to the recent publication *London Fictions* (2013), edited by Andrew Whitehead and Jerry White. While Anne Witchard explained that Thomas Burke's *Limehouse Nights* (1916) seeks in part to control a district considered a blight to a city that wished to see itself as an ordered hierarchy, Jerry White reminded us of the devastating race riots that haunted the pages of *Absolute Beginners* (1958) and that became a palpable articulation of oppression for other marginal or 'outsider' groups. In *The Buddha of Suburbia* (1990), as Susie Thomas suggested, collective identity is as mutable as those individuals who participate in its creation; and although



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*NW* (2012) might pivot on the experience of alienation in the modern city, Philippa Thomas proposed that the novel represents its inhabitants as at least united by the restrictions of poverty and preconception.



Barbican Estate, Architects Chamberlin, Powell & Bon (1971 - 82). Amy Butt (bpr architects) examined the representation of the high rise in new wave science fiction and interrogated the historical narrative of its ideological decline and material deterioration. Photograph David Roberts (2009).

The final day of the conference opened with a plenary address given by Matthew Rubery (QMUL) who recontextualised the historical legacy of investigative journalism in a reconsideration of the relationship between 'the sensational and the serious'. Through a case study of the undercover reportage of Elizabeth Banks in the 1890s, Rubery demonstrated that while the work may have been (and still is) dismissed as sensational, the article provoked a serious response from its readership that resulted in important social change. The day continued with creatively arranged panels that stimulated engaged cross-disciplinary discussion. The panel 'London Settings', devoted to dramatic literature, raised important questions about urban individualism and isolation: the National Theatre's recent production of *Timon of Athens* (2012), noted Andelys Wood (Union) offered an effective critique of the self-interest of modern capitalism; although Harold Pinter's *Betrayal* (1978) documents personal abandonment, Radmila Nastic (Kragujevac) demonstrated the degree to which memory is necessarily relational in the play; Rudolf Weiss' (Vienna) reading of Simon



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Stephen's *Pornography* (2007) considered urban alienation to explore the degree to which personal and public transgression overlap. The panel demonstrated that the necessary quality of theatre as shared experience belies any emphasis on individualism; theatre works instead to underscore the degree to which individual crises are predicated on our relationships with others.

The panel 'Peripheral Visions' presented the subject of city limits, both socially and geographically. G. Kim Blank (Victoria) introduced us to the London coterie from whom it was necessary for Keats to distance himself – Leigh Hunt and the Cockney School – in order to *avoid* being a London poet and write something beyond 'fantastic fopperies'. In *Barnaby Rudge* (1841), as Jason Finch noted (Abo Akademi), London's limits are 'related together in unique layers' that attest to their interdependence. The later panel 'Queer London' reflected on the degree to which the city defies both geographic and temporal limitations. Both James Polchin (NYU) and Katharine Stevenson (Texas) discussed semi-biographical texts that might be described as 'Coming-to-London' novels. In a reading of Neil Bartlett's *Who Was that Man? A Present for Mr Oscar Wilde* (1988) James Polchin considered how the text's use of meta-narrative forges a relational identity across centuries for men in the city's gay community. For Christopher Isherwood, as Katharine Stevenson suggested, the city instead represents the 'tyranny of the past', something romantic yet sinister, that nevertheless required and enabled him to piece together personal and social identity.

This rich and inspiring (and, given the heat, somewhat perspiring) three-day event concluded with custom rather than crisis: three post-graduate students form a final panel to reflect on their experience and give some order to disordered thoughts. This panel helpfully distilled the extraordinary amount of assimilated knowledge to offer delegates what Virginia Woolf refers to as that 'nugget of pure truth to wrap up between the pages of your notebooks and keep on the mantelpiece forever'; that is, we love London's crisis and disorder, for it is immensely generative.

The crisis keeps us interested; the disorder makes us work.

About the author: Lisa Robertson is a PhD student at the University of Warwick where she is researching the relationship between new urban housing and literary representation in the late nineteenth century. Together with Peter Jones, she convenes the Literary London Reading Group hosted by the Institute of English Studies at Senate House. Most recently she has contributed to the *Phaidon Atlas of Twentieth-Century Architecture*



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### 3. [LLS Journal](#)

*The Literary London Journal (LLJ)* is the only journal to provide a common forum for scholars and students engaged specifically in the study of London and literature. It is fully peer-reviewed, indexed by the MLA International Bibliography, appears online and is free to all. The editors particularly welcome more interdisciplinary, mixed-media work and are interested in suggestions for special issues (Robert Hampson [Royal Holloway] is currently working on a special issue on Conrad for *LLJ*).

For more information, or to read the current or past editions, please follow this link: <http://www.literarylondon.org/london-journal/>

If you are interested in submitting a paper or proposing a special issue, please contact the editor, Susan Fischer: [journal@literarylondon.org](mailto:journal@literarylondon.org).

Or, if you would like to write a review for the journal, please contact Susie Thomas: [reviews@literarylondon.org](mailto:reviews@literarylondon.org). Susan also welcomes reviews on films, exhibitions or plays about London.

### 4. [The Reading Group](#)

The Literary London Reading Group is currently in the process of finalising this year's schedule, but we're pleased to announce we've lined up some exciting and innovative sessions, which promise to have a more 'poetic' bent, for the forthcoming academic year. This includes a session dedicated to London's Comics and Graphic Novels, another that looks at Tales from the Underground, and a special panel discussion on Women's Housing in London. You'll find the full schedule posted on our website ([www.literarylondonrg.wordpress.com](http://www.literarylondonrg.wordpress.com)) in early September. Feel free to contact ([literarylondonrg@gmail.com](mailto:literarylondonrg@gmail.com)) the organisers, Peter Jones and Lisa Robertson, with any questions or if you'd like to sign up for our mailing list. We'll look forward to seeing you at our first session on Tuesday, 15 October from 6.00 - 7.30 at Senate House!

### 5. [Events/Conferences of interest to LLS people](#)

- Literary Footprints: A Celebration of London's Literary Heritage  
1st - 31st October 2013

40 walks taking literature out onto London's streets, as well as special events and readings.

Events confirmed so far include:



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- ❖ Keats in Hampstead
- ❖ Author Jerry White talks about Grub Street at the Guildhall Library
- ❖ Following Mrs Dalloway through locations from Virginia Woolf's classic London novel
- ❖ Readings in a Roman Amphitheatre
- ❖ Andrew Whitehead co-editor of "London Fictions" speaking about Victorian fiction
- ❖ London Destroyed – a walk about dystopian visions of London from Mary Shelley to J G Ballard
- ❖ A Literary Walk Through Smithfield and Clerkenwell
- ❖ A whole series of walks celebrating Charles Dickens
- ❖ Mary Poppins Celebrated
- ❖ Child of the Jago – a look at the social housing inspired by Arthur Morrison's novel

Visit <http://footprintsoflondon.com/other-events/literaryfestival> for further details.

- *A Tale of Two Cities* at Kings Head Theatre

25 Sep, 26 Sep, 27 Sep, 28 Sep, 29 Sep, 1 Oct, 2 Oct, 3 Oct, 4 Oct, 5 Oct and 12 more dates

One of the darkest and most romantic of Dickens' novels, *A Tale of Two Cities* was adapted for the stage by the dream-team of Terence Rattigan and John Gielgud, and now gets its world premiere in a daring production by King's Head Theatre artistic director, Adam Spreadbury-Maher.

In a time when governments all over the world are facing down political unrest and fierce protests, this revolutionary story has never been more relevant.

Retaining the thrill and tension of the French Revolutionary setting but merging it with a modern, East London aesthetic, the production reimagines Dickens' dangerous and doomed antihero Sydney Carton as a member of the 27 Club (which includes Jimi Hendrix, Janis Joplin, Kurt Cobain and Amy Winehouse).



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THEATREUPCLOSE PRESENTS


**CHARLES DICKENS'**  
**A TALE OF**  
**TWO CITIES**

IN A WORLD PREMIERE STAGE ADAPTATION BY  
**TERENCE RATTIGAN**  
& **JOHN GIELGUD**

**"Few dramatists of the 20th century wrote with more understanding of the human heart than Terence Rattigan"**  
MICHAEL BILLINGTON

**"One of the most talented directors on the fringe scene"**  
WHATSONSTAGE.COM ON  
ADAM SPREADBURY-MAHER

DIRECTOR  
ADAM SPREADBURY-MAHER



**KH** THEATRE & OPERA

**THEATREUPCLOSE**  
25 SEPTEMBER – 19 OCTOBER 2013  
TICKETS: £10 – £25  
25-27 & 29 SEPTEMBER ALL TICKETS £10  
THEREAFTER TICKETS FROM £15

**WWW.KINGSHHEADTHEATRE.COM**

THE KING'S HEAD THEATRE  
115 UPPER ST  
ISLINGTON  
N1 1QN **KH**  
**0207 478 0160**

To arrange a group discount (which is available to groups of ten and over, with the discount increasing with the size of the group), LLS members should call 0207 226 8561 and ask for Rachel Lerman.

Visit <https://kingsheadtheatre.ticketsolve.com/shows/873496408/events>



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6. [Notices of new publications of interest to LLS members](#)

- ***New Suburban Stories (Bloomsbury Studies in the City)***

**Edited by Martin Dines (Kingston University) and Timotheus Vermeulen (Radboud University Nijmegen)**

Forthcoming in September 2013



For decades the suburb has been a maligned space which has been conceived in terms its failings, or what it is not – the city, the countryside, the small town. *New Suburban Stories* examines cultural material which challenges conventional understandings of the places in which an increasing proportion of the world's population resides. If previous cultural studies of the suburbs have limited themselves to Anglophone contexts and have dwelt on white, middle-class experience, this anthology recognizes the diversity of suburbanites and the changing nature of suburban environments across the globe. It is avowedly interdisciplinary and examines, amongst other forms and genres, poetry, autobiography, photography, social media and public art, as well as new cultural practices emerging from communities inhabiting these innovative spaces. Whilst broad in scope, the anthology advances new and distinct lines of enquiry for the study of the suburbs and their representation, including how such places have begun to be understood as historical and affective, and how suburban communities have sought to take control of their own representation and write their own stories.



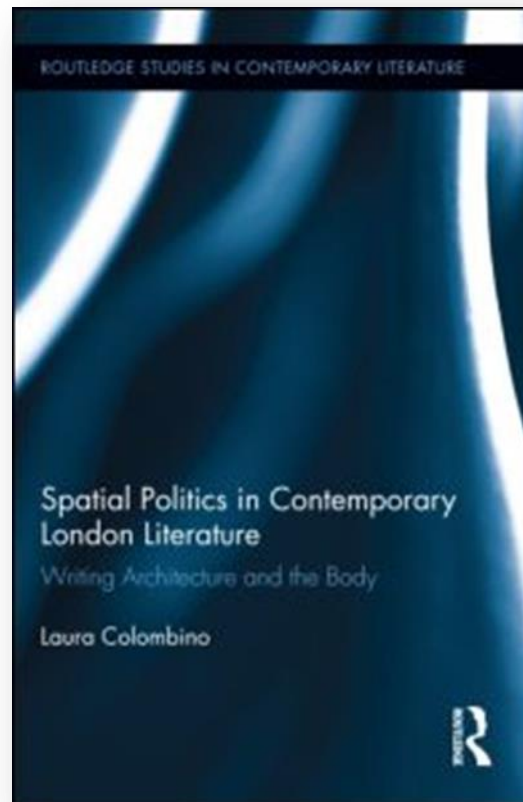


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- **Spatial Politics in Contemporary London Literature**

Writing Architecture and the Body

By **Laura Colombino**



**Series:** [Routledge Studies in Contemporary Literature](#)

'Epistemologically adventurous, insightful and rigorously researched, this highly original, nuanced and always readable study is written with panache and an originality of argument and depth of insight that puts this volume at the head of such studies'

—Julian Wolfreys, *Loughborough University, UK*