



# The Literary London Society

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## LLS Newsletter – Winter 2014-15

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1. [General News](#)

2015 promises to be another eventful and stimulating year for the [Literary London Society](#): preparations for the annual [conference](#) are well underway and we now have three confirmed plenary speakers: Dr Gregory Dart (University College London), Prof. Kate Flint (University of Southern California) and Imtiaz Dharker (poet, artist and documentary film-maker). [The Reading Group](#) have organised an exciting roster of sessions: in March we'll welcome Dr Laura Wright (Cambridge) who will introduce us to Anita Brookner's London; in April, Prof. Patrick Wright (KCL) will talk about Iain Sinclair's *Downriver*; and in June we look forward to a session led by Duncan Carson on the film collective *Nobody Ordered Wolves*. The next issue of the [Literary London Journal](#) is also soon to be published and will contain articles on topics such as Peter Ackroyd and Teddy Boys, as well as reviews on books and events focusing on International Slavery Remembrance Day, World War II, underground London, and working-class artists of the East End, among others.

With best wishes for the New Year,  
LLS Committee

2. [CPF: Literary London Conference 2015](#)

## **Call for Papers: The Literary London Society Annual Conference 22–24 July 2015**

**'London in Love'**

**Hosted by the Institute of English Studies, University of London**

Proposals are invited for papers, comprised panels, and roundtable sessions, which consider any period or genre of literature about, set in, inspired by, or alluding to central and suburban London and its environs, from the city's roots in pre-Roman times to its imagined futures. While the main focus of the conference will be on



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literary texts, we actively encourage interdisciplinary contributions relating film, architecture, geography, theories of urban space, etc., to literary representations of London. Papers from postgraduate students are particularly welcome for consideration.

While papers on all areas of literary London are welcomed, the conference theme in 2015 will be '**London in Love**'. Topics that might be addressed could include:

- 📖 **Romance narratives:** marriage and elopement plots, historical romances, the 'romance as quest', Dark Romanticism, confessional narratives, the Bildungsroman's objects of desire.
- 📖 **London as seducer or muse:** Love on/off the map, desire lines and landscapes of infatuation.
- 📖 **Literary decadence:** Deviance, perversion, prostitution, eroticism and clandestine love plots.
- 📖 **The poetics of attachment and betrayal:** Sonnets, Aubades, literary and folk ballads, Ghazals, Landays, Laments and erotic verses.
- 📖 **Alternatives to proscribed relationships:** Queer, GLBTQ, multicultural, sci-fi and posthuman love stories; non-romantic bonds of friendship and kinship.
- 📖 **Romance drama:** City comedies, exotic and supernatural heterocosms, masques, comedies of manners and family dramas.
- 📖 Inexplicability and impossibility of loving the city/of love in the city.
- 📖 **Love and networks of power:** courtly and chivalric romances, the court vs. the city, pornography.

Please submit all proposals for 20-minute papers, comprised panels, and roundtable sessions through the Literary London Society website (<http://www.literarylondon.org/conference/cfp.html>).

**Deadline for submissions: 28 February 2015**

For further information please contact Peter Jones at [conference@literarylondon.org](mailto:conference@literarylondon.org)

### 3. [CFP: Literary London Journal](#)

We welcome submissions to [The Literary London Journal](#). We will consider all submissions that meet the aims of the Literary London Society, which is to 'foster interdisciplinary and historically wide-ranging research into London literature in its historical, social, and cultural contexts, to include all periods and genres of writing and representation about, set in, inspired by, or alluding to central and suburban London and its environs, from the city's roots in pre-Roman times to its imagined futures'.



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All submissions are blind peer-reviewed by experts in the field. This means that articles are published on the quality of the research rather than on the reputation of the author. We therefore welcome excellent articles from contributors at all stages of their career, from graduate student to emeritus professor. We also welcome proposals for edited special editions of the journal.

All submissions and proposals should be addressed to the Editor, Susan Fischer, using the following email address: [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)

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

The Literary London Reading Group is a Postgraduate initiative that meets at Senate House on an almost monthly basis to 'explore those processes that contribute to creation and destruction of an imagined city and its fictional territories'.

Whether a text is situated in Pall Mall, Eel Pie Island or in an imagined dystopian future, part of the skill of writing urban experience arises from successfully 'siting' a narrative and capturing that elusive sense of place that grounds it in a distinctive setting.

#### **Schedule:**

**Tuesday 17 March 2015, 6.00-7.30pm – Senate House, Room G37**  
[Dr Laura Wright](#) (Cambridge) — Anita Brookner's *London*

**Tuesday 14 April 2015, 6.00-7.30pm - Senate House, Room 104**  
[Professor Patrick Wright](#) (KCL) – Iain Sinclair's *Downriver*

**Tuesday 16 Jun, 6.00-7.30pm – Senate House, Room G37**  
[Duncan Carson \(Nobody Ordered Wolves\)](#) — Cinematic London and *The L-Shaped Room*

The group is public and open to anyone with an interest in Literary London. As it's a reading group, however, we encourage attendants to read the materials (available on the [blog](#)) in advance of the session — but otherwise there are no stipulations or requirements.

Visit [our website](#) for more details or [contact](#) the organisers, Peter Jones, Lisa Robertson and Eliza Cubitt.



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## 5. [Publications of Interest to LLS Members](#)

- [Contemporary Fictions of Multiculturalism: Diversity and the Millennial London Novel](#) by Michael Perfect (Basingstoke: Palgrave Macmillan, 2014)
- [Learning to Die in London, 1380-1540](#) by Amy Appleford (Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 2014).
- [Shakespeare in London](#) edited by Hannah Crawforth, Sarah Dustagheer and Jennifer Young (Bloomsbury Arden, 2015)

## 6. [Events of Interest to Members](#)

- The Hidden Voices of London Literature Event  
27 January 2015, Asia House

'Broadcaster and journalist Bidisha's latest book *Asylum and Exile: The Hidden Voices of London* goes behind the headlines to offer a moving account of the lives of refugees in the UK. To mark the book's launch, Asia House is hosting a thought-provoking discussion on the experiences of refugees and asylum seekers from countries such as Syria, which the book chronicles in vivid detail.

Writer and activist Rachel Holmes will chair the discussion, which will take place between Bidisha herself and Maurice Wren, CEO of the Refugee Council, which is supporting the event. It also coincides with Holocaust Memorial Day and will draw attention to the less talked about stories from Britain's refugees'.

Visit [here](#) for more details.

## 7. [Report on 'In Harkness's London' Conference](#)

'In Harkness's London: The Life and Work of Margaret Harkness'  
Birkbeck School of Arts, 22<sup>nd</sup> November 2014:

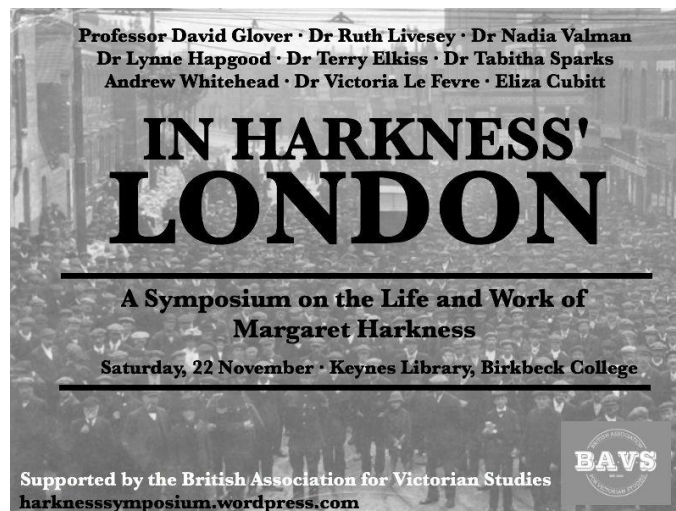
By Eliza Cubitt and Peter Jones

This one-day symposium was the first event to bring together research on the late nineteenth-century writer and social activist Margaret Harkness. In recent years, a revival of critical interest in London's East End has produced important scholarship on urban poverty, philanthropy, and the emergence of socialist and labour politics. While many of these studies have introduced Harkness as an important figure in late nineteenth-century literature and politics, her work and her life remain obscure. This



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event brought together leading researchers to collate historical and critical scholarship with the aim of encouraging debate, and exploring avenues for further research.



'In Harkness London: the Life and Work of Margaret Harkness' event poster.

Terry Elkiss opened proceedings with a fantastic keynote paper, demonstrating his recent findings of 'hidden Harkness'. Using LSE archives, including the diary and letters of Beatrice Webb, Elkiss offered new perspectives on Harkness's character: while Harkness has frequently been seen as mercurial, her lifelong commitment to the poor and to women demonstrates her political steadfastness.

In her talk on 'Battersea Dreaming', Victoria Le Fevre read Nelly Ambrose in Harkness's *A City Girl* (1887) as a consumer, whose ideals and gaze are both imbued with a commercial quality. In the same panel, David Glover examined the political context of Harkness's novel *George Eastmont, Wanderer* (1905), which is set during the 1889 Dock Strike. Glover suggested that Harkness's project requires, but doesn't achieve, a cycle of novels – similar to the project of Emile Zola in his *Les Rougon-Macquart* series, or to Balzac in *La Comédie Humaine*.

Tabitha Sparks's paper examined subjectivity in *A City Girl*, suggesting that understandings of the novel as unsophisticated express the challenge of its terseness. Sparks identified as problematic for readers the apparent lack of feeling and thought exhibited by Nelly. In Nadia Valman's paper 'Walking Harkness's London', the peripatetic protagonists of *Out of Work* (1888) and *In Darkest London* (1889), a novel of almost perpetual movement, were insightfully compared to Nelly's alienation and difficulty of movement suggested by Sparks and LeFevre. The connection between characters' movement and the 'micronarrative' form in *In Darkest London* were neatly established by Valman: like the characters, the novel moves persistently between scenes and episodes. Questions in response to these papers unpicked the unusual relationship between East and West London expressed in Harkness's work; a theme that continued to be of interest throughout the day.



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If the biographical form of the 'woman journalist' is hard to pin down, then the significance of her literary legacy is just now beginning to be properly valued and assessed. By focusing on questions of genre, Ruth Livesey's path-breaking talk showed how much is still to be redressed in existing criticism of Harkness. Livesey highlighted clear problems with Engels's critique of *A City Girl's* relation to realism, and instead espoused a more sophisticated treatment that posits this novel as a reappropriation of the early Victorian domestic melodrama. Lynne Hapgood drew out a pervasive aesthetic dilemma within Harkness's fictional method, which emerges from her struggle to give voice to the voiceless. Her characters come to exemplify conditions of language poverty through their silences and social alienation.

Eliza Cubitt's talk explored another sort of aesthetic dilemma which turned on Harkness's suspicion of the uses of art and ekphrastic enquiry in the realist novel. But Cubitt also hinted at the creative possibilities of this 'differential aesthetic'. Andrew Whitehead was intrigued by the way that *George Eastmont, Wanderer* sheds light on the writer's life and her relationships to political colleagues such as Henry Hyde Champion. There are certainly unmistakable lacunae in Harkness's enthralling life history that the likes of Terry Elkiss are endeavouring to demystify. Whitehead noted that a significant period that the author spent in India remains largely unaccounted for, as do significant portions of the international activity of the 'special correspondent'.

The day's proceedings concluded with a roundtable discussion of Harkness's little-known and unfinished novella, 'Connie' (1893 – 4), which was published serially in *The Labour Elector*. After spirited debate about the novel's imagined conclusions, delegates were pleased to continue informal discussion at the reception. We look forward to hearing more about this enigmatic figure at future events, and in research precipitated by this occasion.