

# Sarah Bilston

Paul E. Raether Distinguished Professor of English  
Chair, Department of English Literature  
Trinity College, Hartford CT USA

## Education

Somerville College, University of Oxford, UK (1995-2000)  
D.Phil. in English Literature (2000); M.St. (1996)

University College, University of London, UK (1991-5)  
M.A. with distinction (1995); B.A. in English Literature, with first class honors (1994)

## Selected Honors & Appointments

Paul E. Raether Distinguished Professor of English (Fall 2025-present)  
NEH Fellowship Recipient (Spring 2023)  
Fellow, Linnean Society of London (elected Spring 2023)  
NEH Summer Stipend Recipient (June-August 2022)  
Public Humanities Collaborative Faculty Fellow, Trinity College (Summer 2022)  
Digital Scholarship Faculty Fellow, Trinity College (2021-22)  
Professor of English Literature, Trinity College (July 2019-present)  
Thomas Church Brownell Prize for Excellence in Teaching, Trinity College (2017)  
Honorary Fellow, Davenport College, Yale University (2017-present)  
Associate Professor of English Literature (w. tenure), Trinity College (July 2011-June 2019)  
Assistant Professor of English Literature, Trinity College (2005-June 2011)  
Lecturer, English Dept. and WMGST, Yale University (2001-5)  
Life Member, Clare Hall, University of Cambridge (2001-present)  
Junior Research Fellow, Clare Hall, University of Cambridge, England (2000-2001)

## Publications

### Scholarly Books

*The Lost Orchid: A Story of Victorian Plunder & Obsession*. Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 2025. [An *Economist* and *New Yorker* Best Book of 2025; starred Kirkus review; reviewed to date in the *New Yorker*, *New York Review of Books*, *The Economist*, *Publishers Weekly*, *New Statesman*, *Harper's*, *Country Life*, *Foreward*, *Washington Free Beacon*, *Australian Book Review*, *H-Environment*, *Nineteenth-Century Contexts*]

*The Promise of the Suburbs: A Victorian History in Literature and Culture*. New Haven: Yale University Press, 2019. [Choice Outstanding Academic Title; reviewed also in *Victorian Studies*, *Nineteenth-Century Contexts*, *English Literature in Transition*, *English Historical Review*, *Nineteenth-Century Gender Studies*, *Victorian Review*, *Journal of Victorian Culture*]

*The Awkward Age in Women's Popular Fiction, 1850-1900: Girls and the Transition to Womanhood*. Oxford: Clarendon Press, 2004. [Reviewed in *Review of English Studies*]

[www.sarahbilston.com](http://www.sarahbilston.com)

## Fiction

*Sleepless Nights. A Novel.* HarperCollins US (2009) and Sphere UK [Little, Brown] (2008). Sold also in Italy, Netherlands, Japan.

*Bed Rest: A Novel.* HarperCollins US (2006) and Sphere UK [Little, Brown]. Sold also in Brazil, Sweden, Spain, Netherlands, Italy, Germany, Japan. [*Wa Po* “Spring Pick” 2006]

## Academic Articles, Book Chapters

“The Selborne Society in the Archives: What the Linnean Society’s Holdings Tell Us About Early Conservationism.” *The Linnean* 41:2 (2025): 26-30.

“Competing for Celebrity: Sarah Grand, Matilda Betham-Edwards, and *Mid-Victorian Memories*.” *Cusp: Late Nineteenth-Century and Twentieth-Century Cultures* 3 (2025): 28-58.

“The Infrastructures of Plant-Hunting.” *Victorian Literature and Culture* 52 (2024): 375-80.

“‘Pictures, Plants and Ornaments’: Jane Ellen Panton and Creative Practice in the British Victorian Suburbs.” Ilja Van Damme, Ruth McManus & Michiel Dehaene, eds. *Suburban Creativity*. Toronto: U of Toronto Press, 2023. [Global Suburbanisms Series]

“‘The Most Extraordinary Novel of Modern Times’: Collaborative Fiction in *The Gentlewoman*.” *Victorian Literature and Culture* 50 (2022): 669-92.

“‘Your Vile Suburbs Can Offer Nothing But The Deadness Of The Grave’: The Stereotyping of Early Victorian Suburbia.” *Victorian Literature and Culture* 41 (2013): 621-42.

“‘They Congregate in Towns and Suburbs’: The Shape of Middle-Class Life in John Claudius Loudon’s *The Suburban Gardener*.” *Victorian Review* 37 (2011): 144-59.

“Queens of the Garden: Victorian Women Gardeners and the Rise of the Gardening Advice Text.” *Victorian Literature and Culture* 36 (2008): 1-19.

“It is Not *What* We Read, But *How* We Read”: Maternal Counsel on Girls’ Reading Practices in Mid-Victorian Literature.” *Nineteenth-Century Contexts* 30 (2008): 1-20.

“Conflict and Ambiguity in Victorian Women’s Writing: Eliza Lynn Linton and the Possibilities of Agnosticism.” *Tulsa Studies in Women’s Writing* 23 (2004): 283-310.

- Republished in *Nineteenth-Century Literature Criticism: Criticism of Novelists, Philosophers, and Other Creative Writers Who Died between 1800 and 1899, From the First Published Critical Appraisals to Current Evaluations*. Vol. 362. Ed. Catherine C. DiMercurio. New York: Gale Cengage/Layman Poupard, 2018. 271-86.

“Authentic Performance in Theatrical Women’s Fictions of the 1870s.” *Women’s Writing* 11 (2004): 39-53.

“A New Reading of the Anglo-Indian Women’s Novel (1880-1894): Passages to India, Passages to Womanhood.” *English Literature in Transition* 44 (2001): 320-341.

## Academic Reference

“Women’s Suburban Fiction” [2000 word entry]. *Palgrave Encyclopedia of Victorian Women’s Writing*. Palgrave/Springer Nature: 2019.

“Eliza Lynn Linton.” Invited volume advisor. *Nineteenth-Century Literature Criticism: Criticism of Novelists, Philosophers, and Other Creative Writers Who Died between 1800 and 1899, From the First Published Critical Appraisals to Current Evaluations*. Vol. 362. Ed. Catherine C. DiMercurio. New York: Gale Cengage/Layman Poupard, 2018. 271-86.

## Selected Reviews

Rev. of Elizabeth A. Campbell, *Victorian Nightshades: How the Solanaceae Shaped the Modern World*. *ISLE: Interdisciplinary Studies in Literature and Environment* (January 2026).  
<https://doi.org/10.1093/isle/isaf100>

Rev. of Judith Taylor, *Women and Gardens: A History from the Victorian Era to Today*. *H-Environment, H-Net Reviews* (January 2026).  
<https://www.hnet.org/reviews/showpdf.php?id=62386>

Rev. of Nathaniel Robert Walker, *Victorian Visions of Suburban Utopia: Abandoning Babylon*. *Victorian Studies* 65 (2022): 164-6.

Rev. of Winter Jade Werner, *Missionary Cosmopolitanism in Nineteenth-Century British Literature*. Columbus: Ohio State University Press, 2020. *Journal of British Studies* 60 (2021): 507-8

Rev. of Barbara Leckie, *Open Houses: Poverty, The Novel, and the Architectural Idea in Nineteenth-Century Britain* and Joanna Hofer-Robinson, *Dickens and Demolition: Literary Afterlives and Mid-Nineteenth-Century Urban Development*. *Victorian Studies* 62 (2020): 346-351. <https://muse.jhu.edu/article/760666>.

Rev. of Eleanor Fitzsimmons, *E. Nesbit: Victorian Iconoclast, Children’s Author, and Creator of The Railway Children*. *Victorian Review* 45 (2019): 330-33. <https://muse.jhu.edu/article/757846>.

Rev. of Laura Baker Whelan, *Class, Culture and Suburban Anxieties in the Victorian Era*. nbol-19.org, 2010. [http://test.nbol-19.org/view\\_doc.php?index=56](http://test.nbol-19.org/view_doc.php?index=56).

Rev. of Christa Zorn, *Vernon Lee: Aesthetics, History, and the Victorian Female Intellectual*. *ELT* 48 (2005): 75-9.

Rev. of Dominic Hibberd, *Harold Monro: Poetry of the New Age*. *ELT* 46 (2003): 437-441.

Rev. of Nicola Diane Thompson ed., *Victorian Women Writers and the Woman Question*. *Notes & Queries* 47 (2000): 382-3.

## Selected Journalism

“How Orchid Hunters Complicate Colonial Narratives.” *The Atlantic* (May 18, 2025).  
<https://www.theatlantic.com/ideas/archive/2025/05/victorian-orchid-hunters/682812/>

“She *Didn’t* Start it: Jane Ellen Panton, A Victorian Marie Kondo.” Yale University Press Blog, April 3, 2019. <http://blog.yalebooks.com/2019/04/03/she-didnt-start-it-jane-ellen-panton-a-victorian-marie-kondo/>

“Breaking up Families? America Looks Like a Dickens Novel.” TheConversation.com, 20 June, 2018. <https://theconversation.com/breaking-up-families-america-looks-like-a-dickens-novel-98660>. Republished by outlets around the world including *Chicago Tribune*, *Houston Chronicle*, *San Francisco Chronicle*, *International Business Times*, *Alternet.com* and *Salon.com*.

“The Death of Chick-Lit,” *Slate/Double X*. 11 August 2009.

Featured article on Bed Rest, *Eve Magazine UK* (May 2007); featured article on Bed Rest, *You Magazine UK* (July 2007).

“Don’t Take This Lying Down,” *New York Times* (24 March, 2006).

Op-eds in *Hartford Courant* and *Tallahassee Democrat* on motherhood (June 25 & 26 ‘06).

### **Selected (Recent) Radio Appearances, Podcasts**

WICN 90.5 Public Radio (August 18, 2025)

- <https://wicn.org/podcast/sarah-bilston/>

RNZ Radio New Zealand (July 2, 2025)

- <https://www.rnz.co.nz/national/programmes/afternoons/audio/2018993900/the-decades-long-international-hunt-for-a-rare-orchid>

New Books Network (June 11, 2025)

- <https://newbooksnetwork.com/the-lost-orchid>

Roots and All (May 26, 2025)

- <https://rootsandall.co.uk/podcast/orchid-obsession/>

Late Night Live, Australian Broadcasting Corporation (May 8, 2025)

- <https://www.abc.net.au/listen/programs/latenightlive/plant-hunters-the-19thcentury-orchid-mania-craze-sarah-bilston/105267544>

Colin McEnroe Show, CT Public Radio (April 1, 2025)

- <https://www.ctpublic.org/show/the-colin-mcenroe-show/2025-04-01/a-look-at-cultural-manias-from-liszt-and-orchids-to-the-beatles-and-beyond>

### **Selected Conference Papers and Presentations**

“The Lost Orchid: Hunting an Icon in the Linnean Society Archives.” Linnean Society of London, Picadilly. November 2025.

“‘Suburban Gardens Are Many Kinds’: The Growth of the Suburbs and Victorian Environmentalism.” NAVSA, Washington D.C. November 2025.

“The Lost Orchid.” American Horticultural Association [Zoom]. October 2025.

“Hunting The Lost Orchid.” Grace Hopper College, Yale University. September 2025.

“Caring for Orchids?” Victorian Plants: Imperial Networks and the Affordances of Care Roundtable. MLA, New Orleans, LA. January 2025.

“Sarah Grand, Matilda Betham-Edwards, and an Awkward Event in Tunbridge Wells.” NAVSA, Boston MA. November 2024.

“Revising Victorian Botany: Letters from Beyond the Garden.” Revising/Revising Victorian Science Panel. NAVSA, Bloomington, IN. November 2023.

“The Selborne Society and *Nature Notes*: Shaping Conservationism, 1885-90.” Victorian Environments I: Round Table. NAVSA, Bloomington, IN. November 2023.

“Old Species, New Variety?: Redefining ‘The Lost Orchid.’” NVSA, New York, NY. March-April 2023.

“‘Now I’m So Upset I Can Not Write Anymore’: Plant-Hunters’ Letters and the Pursuit of Justice.” NAVSA, Bethlehem PA. September 2022.

“The Hunt for The Lost Orchid: Painting a Plant.” INCS, Salt Lake, UT. March 2022.

“Mapping the Sociable Suburbs: Women and Literary Networks.” NAVSA [Zoom]. March 2022.

“On Beholding ‘The Lost Orchid.’” Victorians Institute Conference, Charlotte, N.C. October, 2021.

“Form and Collaborative Fiction: *The Fate of Fenella*.” NAVSA, Columbus, Ohio. October 2019.

“An Unlikely Friendship? Sarah Grand, Matilda Betham-Edwards and Late-Victorian Literary Celebrity.” VSAWC, Calgary, Canada. May 2019.

“Women and Creative Opportunity in the British Victorian Suburbs.” “Suburban Nowheres,” University of Antwerp: Centre for Urban History & Urban Studies Institute. April 2019.

“Dickens and Dombey.” Invited Speaker: Friends of Dickens NYC. November, 2018.

“Looking Out Across a New Landscape: Suburban Problems and Women’s Design Solutions.” NAVSA, St. Petersburg, Florida. October 2018.

“New Directions: Women and the Suburban Margins.” British Women Writers Association Conference, Austin, TX. April 2018.

“Understanding Queen Victoria.” Invited talks. Wallingford Historic Preservation Trust, C.T. March 2018; St. Mary’s Women’s Guild, Farmington C.T. April 2017; Simsbury Historical Society, C.T. January 2017.

“Gertrude Jekyll and The Idea of the Garden.” Trinity Institute for Interdisciplinary Studies, Trinity College, Spring 2013.

“Desperate Housewives? Victorian Women and the Literature of Suburbia.” Salon, English Department, Trinity College, Spring 2010.

Panel Chair, “Anthology Reading Audiences.” Anthologies Conference, Trinity College, March 2010.

“Domesticity and Community in Victorian Suburbia.” NEMLA, Boston, March 2009.

“Writing and Publishing ‘Mommy Lit’: One Author’s Perspective.” NEMLA, Buffalo, April 2008.

“Queens of the Garden: Victorian Women Gardeners and the Rise of the Gardening Advice Text/The Literature of the Victorian Villa.” Salon, English Department, Trinity College, September 2007.

25 Radio Interviews, UK and USA, on Bed Rest, 2006-7; featured appearance on local NBC TV channel, June 2 2006; featured appearance on Marketplace, NPR, October 2009.

### **Selected Professional Work & Memberships in Academic Organizations**

Linnean Society of London (Fellow; elected 2023).

Manuscript reviewer for *Nineteenth-Century Contexts*, *Nineteenth-Century Studies*, *Victorian Review*, *Women’s Writing*, *Irish University Review*, *Romance*, *Revolution & Reform*, *H-Environment*, *ISLE*, Yale University Press, U of Toronto Press, Anthem Press.

Board Member, *American Short Fiction*.

NAVSA (North American Victorian Studies Association); V-Cologies.

### **Courses Taught at Trinity College**

First-Year Seminars, “Queen Victoria’s England,” “Harry Potter’s Literary Past,” “Fairy Tales & Children’s Literature”

English 220, “Crime and Passion: Studies in Victorian Literature.”

English 222, “Victorian Short Fiction.”

English 259, “Victorian London: Literature of a Changing City.”

English 1/260, “Introduction to Literary Studies.”

English 264, “Victorian London: Center and Suburbs.”

English 298, “Fairy Tales.”

English 327, “Reading and Writing Women’s Fiction.”

WMGS/English 343, “Women and Empire.”

English 315, “Girls Growing Up in Victorian Literature.”

English 358, “Victorian Literature and Social Crisis.”

English 421/821, “British Literature of the 1890s.”

English 424/824, “Studies in Victorian Narrative.”

English 464/863, “Feminist Approaches to Literature.”

English 496, “Literary Creativity” (Senior Seminar).  
English 498, Senior Thesis Colloquium.

### **Service at Trinity College**

Faculty Research Committee, Spring 2026.  
Committee Member, Mid-Career Research Award Committee, 2024-5.  
Chair, English Department, July 2023-June 2026.  
Chair, Search Committees, English Department, 2023-4 and 2025.  
Chair, Curriculum Committee, 2021-22.  
Curriculum Committee Member, 2020-22.  
- Wellness Requirement Subcommittee. 2020-1.  
Search Committee Member, Registrar Search Committee, 2021-2.  
Faculty Conference Member, 2019-2021.  
“Supercommittee,” 2019-2021 [Faculty Conference & CC Representative].  
Chair, Jury Pool, 2019-20; Vice-Chair, 2017-18 & 2020-21.  
Brownell/Hughes Prize Committee Member, 2018.  
Jury Pool Member, 2016-17; 2021-22.  
Faculty Research Committee Member, 2015-16.  
Chair, Senior Thesis Committee, English Department, 2014-18; 2020-22.  
Graduate Studies Committee Member, English Department 2014-16.  
Co-ordinator, AK Smith Visiting Scholar Series, 2010-2013; 2014-8; 2019-20.  
Search Committee Member, History Department, 2012.  
Search Committee Member, Athletics [Men’s Lacrosse Coach], 2011.  
Faculty Liaison, Men’s Lacrosse Team, 2010-13.  
Advisor, Office of Study Abroad, 2010-20.  
Financial Affairs Committee Member, 2007-10.