In November 2011, Birkbeck was delighted to welcome award-winning author Sarah Waters to read from and discuss her novel *The Little Stranger*, which was shortlisted for the 2009 Man Booker Prize. The event was organised as part of the Booker Prize Foundation’s Universities Initiative, which aims to introduce undergraduate students from all disciplines to high-quality contemporary fiction. Prior to the event, all first-year undergraduates were offered a free copy of *The Little Stranger*.

Sarah, whose novels include *Fingersmith*, *The Night Watch* and *Tipping the Velvet*, read extracts from the novel, which is set against a backdrop of the crumbling English post-war class system and provides the evocative thrills of the haunted house genre.

Sarah and Professor Russell Celyn Jones, creative writing lecturer at Birkbeck and former Man Booker judge, then entered into a wide-ranging discussion of her work processes and the influences in the novel. They covered her interest in historical writing and how she came to be especially interested in periods of great social change, such as the late 1940s. They also discussed gothic influences, and works which had preceded hers and to which she alluded throughout the novel.

Sarah then took questions from the enthusiastic audience, made up of over 800 Birkbeck students and alumni.

Professor Hilary Fraser, Executive Dean of Birkbeck’s School of Arts, said: “I see many similarities between the Man Booker Prize and Birkbeck, in that they are both about making the very best intellectual and cultural experience accessible to a wide audience. This is the basis for an excellent collaboration. We are delighted to have been able to welcome Sarah Waters to Birkbeck and participate in this fantastic initiative. The discussion was illuminating and enriching and allowed our students to gain a deeper understanding of the novel and Sarah’s writing processes.”

Following on from the enormous success and popularity of the inaugural Man Booker event, Birkbeck will continue this collaboration with the Booker Prize Foundation, and we look forward to welcoming other distinguished authors to these events.

For more information and a video of the event, visit: www.bbk.ac.uk/sarahwaters

By Bryony Merritt