

VICTORIAN OTHER WORLDS: A VICTORIAN NETWORK CONFERENCE

Sarah Crofton, Melissa Dickson and Fariha Shaikh
(King's College London)

The first *Victorian Network* conference, held at Senate House in December 2012, took 'Other Worlds' as its theme. Across a day of rich papers and thought-provoking exchanges, delegates explored the multifaceted ways in which nineteenth-century society responded to ideas of alterity, and the new real and virtual horizons towards which the Victorian spirit of exploration turned its ever-extending reach. Our speakers responded to the call for papers on the Victorians and their 'elsewheres' with that diversity and depth of interest that makes ours so rewarding a field in which to work.

In the midst of this thematic sense of expansion and an imaginative diaspora, the conference itself was underpinned by a sense of what was held in common. 'Other Worlds' was itself a shared world, where researchers from across the Victorian period, from across a multiplicity of institutional and career experience, and from across the world came together to explore our own sense of the realm of 'Victorianism' as a communal space.

The proceedings collected in this special conference-inspired issue of *Victorian Network* represent only a partial glimpse into the event which we, as a committee, were proud to host. *Victorian Network* is dedicated to publishing and promoting the work of early-career researchers working on all facets of Victorian studies, and the papers in this issue are an eloquent testament to the diversity of such research. We are pleased to be able to present in the pages of our journal papers which provoked interest and discussion at the 'Other Worlds' conference. Yet conference proceedings are always a strange mirror of the event from which they emerge. The pages of our journal are a print world of their own; and these proceedings we might consider, in the words of Conrad's Marlow, not as the kernel of the conference, but as the glow that brings out the haze.

One of the most satisfying and striking facets of the day itself was the sense of community among those who came to speak and listen at our conference. Early-career researchers and academics more advanced in their careers or working in fields outside of the university circuit, intermingled indiscriminately to share insights, questions, advice, resources, new ideas and unexpected connections, creating bridges between their worlds in every direction. Throughout the day we were asked many times whether there were some formalised way in which one might become an official member of 'The Victorian Network'.

To the committee as a whole, 'Victorian Network' has been a descriptive, rather than proscriptive choice of moniker for our project. It began as the name of our

journal, and an apt one, to describe a pre-existing community of collaborative co-existing researchers. *Victorian Network* as a journal sought to fill a gap in recognising the valuable role of early-career research in adding to the conversation of Victorianism as a whole. Yet throughout the day at 'Other Worlds' there was a very clear sense that what Victorian Network was describing was more than that.

The written research work that we produce is our lifeblood, and the editorial board are proud and privileged to have had the chance over the past four years to publish work of the highest calibre and make it available in a peer-reviewed, publicly accessible form. In the wake of 'Other Worlds' we wish to take this further: to find a way to also use the online and offline spaces we have to foster the communal world of the early-career researcher in Victorian studies. In conjunction with the publication of this conference issue we are also rebuilding our website. The *Victorian Network* committee will use our webspace to share resources, highlight ongoing events, offer a platform for researchers wishing to reach the wider community, promote exchange of information, review new publications, and plan future collaborative events. Please keep an eye to victoriannetwork.org and the Victorian Wire over the coming months, and contact us if you wish to become involved in any of our projects.

It remains to thank those people who have formed the community which has made *Victorian Network* a success and whose work provides the impetus for our ongoing desire to expand our own horizons. We are grateful to all our contributors, our guest editors, our peer-reviewers, our copy-editors and those who helped to make the 'Other Worlds' event possible through their enthusiasm and diligent work.