

CROSSING THE LINE: AFFINITIES BEFORE AND AFTER 1900

Regenia Gagnier

(University of Exeter; President, British Association for Victorian Studies)

It is with great pleasure that I write the Preface to this special issue of the AHRC-funded *Victorian Network* journal, as the President of the British Association for Victorian Studies, with its over 700+ international membership, and as the keynote speaker at the conference from which the papers were selected, "Crossing the Line" of 28-29th January 2010 at the University of Liverpool. My keynote lecture, "Individualism, Decadence, and Globalization: on the Relationship of Part to Whole: 1880-1920," was in part subsequently published as an Appendix on J. K. Huysmans to my book *Individualism, Decadence, and Globalization: on the Relationship of Part to Whole 1859-1920* (Palgrave Macmillan, 2010), and I owe the conference organizers and Professor Mark Llewellyn a debt for their comments and criticisms after the lecture. With Llewellyn, I also gave a plenary round-up talk after the conference, reflecting on both the content and the mission of the AHRC-funded conference intended to professionalize research students in the cross-disciplinary fields between Victorian and Modernist Studies.

The conference had two objectives: to explore the natural and cultural affinities and repulsions between the two periods, simultaneously exploring how our perspective on them both is affected by the passage of time; and to professionalize graduate students in this key event of our field, the academic conference, and its core activities, such as publication and grant-writing. So "Crossing the Line" had at least two main meanings, one having to do with the continuities and disruptions between the Victorian and Modern periods and within Victorian/Modernist Studies, and the other with the rites of passage of students crossing into the profession as conference presenters. In our support of both these aims, Llewellyn and I were aided by the wonderfully informed and intellectual Commissioning Editor for the Humanities of Manchester University Press, Matthew Frost, who gave an exceptionally helpful publisher's lecture on scholarly publishing and a welcome invitation for consideration of advanced projects by MUP. Both conference aims now culminate with the publication of selected papers in *Victorian Network*, which is dedicated and funded to publish the best work by postgraduates in Victorian Studies. The journal is therefore warmly commended by BAVS, whose founding mission includes post-graduate professionalization and support, especially during economic hard times when there are more noteworthy Ph.D.s than academic posts.

The conference did indeed showcase some of the best international postgraduate and post-doctoral research in Victorian and Modernist studies. I attended half the sessions—Llewellyn and I dividing them between us as far as was

practical—and heard some stunning papers on domesticity or heteronormativity, as well as Queer Theory and homoeroticism, and feminine and feminist voices; Science, Medicine, and Literature, one of the fastest growing areas in the discipline and one familiar to *Victorian Network*; changing idioms in the visual arts and architecture, from sculpture to painting and illustration to cinema and cityscape; the representation of nature and re-association of sensibility in forms of ecological and pastoral thought; the modern metropolis from the industrial revolution to modern media; poetic traditions from Victorian verse to *vers libre*; and there was one whole panel devoted to the modern Victorian Walter Pater. In these topics, as in the papers selected here, we were able to see more crossings, between genders and gender roles; the two cultures of science and arts; between the sister arts and their respective geographies, indoors and outdoors, urban and rural; between nature, culture, and technology; between literary forms of epic, lyric, novel, short story, and drama; and between psyches such as Pater's, moving between Victorian and modern convention and disruption. I discuss such trends in more detail and in professional context in "Whither Victorian Studies" in the inaugural issue of the journal *Victoriographies* (University of Edinburgh, 2011), but it should be noted here in *Victorian Network* how, with their presentations, submissions and blogs, the graduate students are themselves driving the field in new directions, with work equally strong in theory and the archive.

I personally never publish anything without presenting it publicly for comment and criticism at least once and usually more than once. We should acknowledge the University of Liverpool, the AHRC, and *Victorian Network* for giving research students this opportunity to present their research for comment and criticism before it goes into the books that will establish their reputations for posterity.