CHAPTER 6

Family Matters
Building Real and Imagined Communities through Periodical Publishing in Asylums

Whatever conflicts seeped through in the pages of asylum periodicals were counteracted by the publications' attempts to represent the institution as a unified community of current, as well as former, patients and staff. This tendency has been evident in all titles studied to date.[1] Even internally circulated periodicals such as *Chronicles of the Monastery* and the *Gartnavel Gazette* participated in such exchanges. Though launched over ten years after John Reid Adam's *Chronicles*, the *Gazette* was started with the knowledge of the previously existing periodical. Asylum periodicals thus allowed patients to connect across both physical and temporal distances. This was especially important, as asylums were structurally divided along the lines of class, gender, and race, and as their populations grew exponentially, making it harder for the inhabitants to know each other.[2] Benedict Anderson has famously argued that to read a newspaper was to participate in an 'extraordinary mass ceremony: the almost precisely simultaneous consumption ("imagining") of the newspaper-as-fiction'.[3] Even when reading silently on their own, readers of periodicals participated in a regular, repetitive act of information sharing within an imagined community of other readers.[4] Asylum periodicals had a similar unifying function. They often refer to connections between patients, their relatives, staff, and former residents of the institution. These mentions brought members of the asylum population closer together and often blurred the lines set by the hierarchical structures of institutions.[5] In fact, as Sarah Chaney observes, asylum periodicals bear witness to a 'type of familiarity [that] was rarely, if ever, recorded in casebooks and other clinical records'.[6] While offering a unique glimpse into asylum reality, asylum periodicals also exaggerated or idealised connections in order to construct and maintain these imagined communities.

This chapter brings together insights from the accumulated case studies to date and offers new evidence from unstudied titles to outline general patterns of community building. This function of asylum periodicals has

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been explored mostly in relation to generating copy and reading, but the first part of this chapter will focus on printing.[7] Publishing is usually a collaborative project that involves multiple actors, so the work in the printing office brought inhabitants of asylums together and potentially encouraged them to bond. However limited, the evidence about the operations of asylum printing offices reveals continuous collaboration between different groups of people, which coexisted with and subverted institutional and social divisions and tensions. Though patients' motivation to participate in publishing could be related to improving their position in the asylum and self-expression, patients and physicians could form genuine friendships in the process and pursue mutual benefits. As a result, producing periodicals cultivated a sense of belonging to a literary and institutional community of producers and readers within and beyond the asylum. In doing so, they supplanted medical models that envisioned the asylum as a domestic space under the paternalistic governance of the superintendent and matron. However, these publications did not merely replicate medical discourses. They also subverted, contested, and modified the therapeutic family model. A significant revision was the expansion of the metaphor into an 'extended family': asylum periodicals embody former patients' continuous engagement with asylum life. Truly, patients' desire to stay, return, or continue interacting with the institution could indicate that they were unable to adapt to the world outside. However, for many the asylum became a home, a place for forming important and dear relationships, and a source of support in their lives beyond discharge.[8] Asylum periodicals are therefore the products of successfully construed imagined families.

Publishing as a Collaboration

The publication of asylum periodicals promoted cohesion within the patient population, which tended to be physically divided by class and gender within the institution. In his reflections on the therapeutic potential of recreation, John Minson Galt claimed that:

> for several reasons, there is a disposition in the insane to have their attention withdrawn to their own mental operations, rather than to enter into any intimate fellowship with each other. Amusements tend to break down this wall of separation, and by arousing social feelings, they wean the morbid spirit from so hurtful an introspection.[9]

The healing effects of entertainments in nineteenth-century asylums were not stemming only from the distraction they offered, but from their social

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function – from their capacity to unite people and to counteract patients' isolation and loneliness.[10] Amusements' potential to encourage healthy socialising was powerful enough to bridge existing social divisions. Dr Lauder Lindsay of the Murray Royal Asylum stated that:

> An indirect effect [of recreations] has been . . . to throw more together the various classes of our community – to produce a greater degree of social, friendly, and harmonious feeling among them – and to give them more the characters of a happy family group, than of a miscellaneous assemblage of unruly natures.[11]

Asylum periodicals, especially those produced entirely in-house, were powerful instruments for uniting the disparate and divided inhabitants of asylums. Their publication involved both skilled manual tasks (composing, operating the press, and, more rarely, engraving) and the intellectual labour of writing and editing. This aspect of their production is reflected in Dr Rockwell's report about the Vermont Asylum, which describes the *Asylum Journal* as the work of patients with various professions: 'Those of our patients who have been students, we employ to write and select for the Journal, and those who have been merchants and business men we employ to fold and direct the papers.'[12] Though allowing for some social mingling, this depiction still suggests a rather rigid distribution of work and an exclusively masculine space. Arrangements in other institutions, however, tended to be more flexible, as patients from different backgrounds performed both the artisanal and the intellectual tasks. Composition and printing were usually performed by working-class patients who had been printers by occupation, though people of higher social standing occasionally took charge of the printing office. Two examples were merchants James Buchanan of the *Gartnavel Gazette* and John Reid Adam of *Chronicles of the Monastery*, both of whom have been referred to as 'gentlemen'.[13] In terms of gender, however, the printing office in the asylum remained a predominantly male space. At this stage, there is no evidence that female patients were employed there. This is hardly surprising, considering that the printing trade at the time was particularly resistant to admitting women.

While composing type and operating the press demanded both technical skills and sufficient literacy, writing for the periodicals required only the latter, which enabled greater transgression of class and gender divisions. As Christopher Holligan argues in his study of the *Morningside Mirror*, the average asylum periodical contributor was a middle- or upper-class man.[14] However, exceptions were far from rare and were not restricted to printer-

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patients. An unnamed carpenter-patient in the Royal Edinburgh Asylum, for instance, became 'one of the poetical contributors to the [*Morningside*] *Mirror*'.[15] Writing was also considered a suitable occupation for the women in the asylum, making periodical production a rather unique type of work, defying the usual gender-based division of labour in mental institutions. Most asylum periodicals originated in the male wards of asylums, likely due to the understanding of printing as an 'unwomanly' type of occupation. But there is evidence that the launching and editing of some periodicals was partly or entirely undertaken by female patients. Eannace has suggested that the 'fair issue' of the *Opal* of the New York State Asylum (which appeared a few months prior to the official launch of the periodical) had an 'Editress'. Later numbers also explicitly credit the ladies in the asylum as the originators of the publication.[16] Another American periodical, the *Friend* (1872–1874) of the Pennsylvania State Asylum at Harrisburg, was 'conducted by an Association of Ladies', though its printing was likely outsourced, and its contents allegedly consisted solely of reprints.[17] While social divisions within institutions inevitably affected access to participation in publishing, asylum periodicals demonstrate that these boundaries could be fluid.

In fact, since male and female patients lived mostly separately in the asylum, periodicals were an exciting opportunity for communication. Even when run by men, they warmly welcomed contributions from the women's ward. Earlier I have discussed John Reid Adam's urgent call for ladies' writing in the introductory poem of the *Chronicles of the Monastery* and Joseph Goree's inclusion of communications from the women's wards in the *Meteor*, even when the original letters had been lost or hidden away by staff. 'Olivia', one of the ladies whose original writing made it to the pages of the *Meteor*, stated: 'You request the ladies of the Hospital, through our Matron, to contribute original articles . . . and just to prove to you that we ladies can *write* as well as *talk*, I intend to gratify you, or rather myself, by making the attempt [emphases in original].'[18] This excerpt confirms that the editor of the Alabama newspaper actively sought contributions by female patients. Likewise, the second issue of the *Gartnavel Gazette* included 'selections taken almost at random, from a goodly number of contributions, kindly furnished us, by the Ladies'.[19] Responses to calls to the women's wards highlight asylum periodicals' ability to facilitate connection across institutional divisions. The statement of 'Olivia' also hints at the key role that staff had in these exchanges: the matrons, physicians, attendants, and nurses carried the messages across the different wards of the institutions.

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The inclusivity of periodical publishing in asylums, however, was largely driven by necessity. Though editors' class-rooted aesthetic views filtered the contents, the limited pool of contributors potentially pushed demanding editors to be less strict in their selection. Similarly, invitations addressed to female patients could be seen as a strategy to secure enough content. Admission of women's writing was also driven by the male editors' yearning to communicate more with the female inhabitants of the institutions. In fact, one of the motivations that Goree listed for continuing the *Meteor* was flirtation, or, as he put it, a 'desire to curry favor with the females of the establishment by printing their effusions'.[20] Asylum periodicals' inclusivity was therefore likely driven by the needs of the publications or of their male editors.

The transgression of institutional boundaries that asylum periodicals enabled was circumscribed by various factors. Printers, editors, and contributors had to be educated enough to participate in literary production, which left out a significant number of the patients in nineteenth-century asylums. With the exception of a single Jamaican patient whom I have recently identified as a contributor to the *Morningside Mirror*, writings by non-white residents appear to be absent from asylum periodicals, even in institutions like the Alabama Insane Hospital, which certainly housed such patients.[21] This absence is reflective of the general 'invisibility' of patients of colour in contemporary mental healthcare: 'staff doctors wrote few detailed case histories for blacks'.[22] In America, Black patients were often physically hidden out of view, kept in basements or in separate buildings. Beyond race, patients' position in the asylum depended on their mental state and behaviour, the privilege of contributing could be earned with convalescence and obedience and lost with relapse and confrontation. This correlation should not be overemphasised, however. Most of the patient-contributors and editors I discuss in this book were unhappy with their confinement and rebelled against the institution in various ways, so misbehaviour and hostility towards staff did not automatically result in patients' silencing. While the unique settings of asylum publishing encouraged some inclusiveness and diversity, the line was pushed only as much as was necessary to satisfy the publication's needs and the editor's desires. Exclusion ran in parallel with the processes of collaboration and inclusion.

Even when a publication was driven by a single individual, its production involved complex interpersonal interactions and some collaboration. Indeed, as publishing involved various types of labour and resources, asylum periodicals demanded the involvement of multiple agents with different skill sets. Asylum periodicals embodied both individual and

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communal interests, as their production had benefits for single patients, physicians, and the whole institution. Their multipurpose nature further encouraged collaboration, the overcoming of conflicts, and the trespassing of social and institutional boundaries.

Though the organisation of production unquestionably varied across time and between different institutions, it is important to recognise that the publication of each asylum periodical required the joint work of patients and staff. In some titles, there is evidence that staff members contributed their writing. As Turner observes, this practice 'could serve to validate and support patients' contributions, and could also, – in a more practical sense – ensure the survival of the magazine'.[23] The superintendent of the Murray Royal Asylum was a major contributor to *Excelsior*, while signatures such as 'Medicus' in the *Meteor* could belong with equal certainty to physicians, as well as patients with medical training.[24] As the preserved papers related to the publication of the *Moon* show, physicians and patients could work together closely in the preparation of issues. The anonymity of most contributions prevents us from ascertaining the ratios between staff and patient contributions in each title.

Even if physicians did not contribute copy for the periodicals, they acted as facilitators, providing the equipment and materials necessary for publishing. They could be motivated by their desire to add a novel type of therapeutic activity, to reduce the administrative printing costs, or to promote themselves and their institutions. I have also discussed their complex role as regulators of content, suggesting that censorship over 'unsuitable' content could be enacted not only in the interests of the institution but to protect patients from stigma, overexposure, and humiliation. Staff's involvement did not end there. In the Alabama Insane Hospital, 'employees of the Hospital' worked in the printing office, 'in intervals of leisure from their regular duties'.[25] The printing office is represented in the *Meteor* as a space for social mingling and joviality, as this recollection published in 1873 shows: 'On a day in December last we were busily engaged in our printing office. Several other persons, patients and employees, happening in, a lively conversation was for a time maintained.'[26] At a point when the editor was struggling to fulfil all his duties, a nurse temporarily took charge over printing: 'One of the nurses of the Hospital being a good printer, the Editor has secured his services in getting out this edition.'[27] While the distribution of work among patients and staff varied between institutions and over time, asylum periodicals should be treated as products of the joint efforts of differently positioned actors.

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The Family Model and Representations of Closeness

Though the asylum population remained mostly divided, nineteenth-century asylums were determined to represent themselves as united, harmonious, and well-ordered communities. This vision was embodied in what Michel Foucault termed 'the half-real, half-imaginary dialectic of the Family', which structured institutional relationships between patients and staff.[28] In that framework, Shawn Phillips observes that the superintendent and the matron acted as 'symbolic parents ... who guided the inmates, symbolically viewed as children, to the plane of the sound mind through moral care and labour therapy'.[29] Asylum architecture, furnishing, and interior decoration reinforced this notion by replicating of middle-class domesticity.[30] The two recent discussions of *Under the Dome* conducted by Turner and Curlic have argued independently of each other that the periodical was another powerful instrument that promoted a sense of home life and familial closeness within Bethlem Hospital.[31] Asylum periodicals presented their readers with opportunities to participate in a close-knit type of imagined community (an imagined family) and to engage with the family metaphor and symbols of domesticity. They also offered patients opportunities to interrogate their role as unruly children in need of care, discipline, and comfort.

The metaphor of the family was far from an artificially imposed construct, sustained by physicians to control patients. Neither was it always successfully implemented. As Chaney has argued, the image of the discipline-imposing father/physician could be disrupted by factors such as social class and age. Sometimes 'patients considered themselves to be the superiors of their alienists', and alienists accepted their own inferior position without an objection.[32] Nevertheless, several characteristics of asylum life promoted the emulation of family-like relationships. As the length of patients' stay in asylums ranged between a few months to dozens of years, mental institutions served as secondary, if not primary, homes. This is especially evident from recorded instances of patients returning as voluntary boarders.[33] In addition, as Phillips observes, the superintendents and matrons, especially in the early years of asylums, were usually a married couple without medical expertise. Their role in looking after the residents and the moral dimensions of the new system of treatment naturally inspired their representation as symbolic parents.

The depiction of the asylum population as a family was not necessarily negative. In fact, the metaphor was used mostly positively by patients and

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their relatives. For example, an 1836 letter from a patient's relative to the superintendent and matron of the Royal Edinburgh Asylum stated that:

> it was most gratifying to all her [the patient's] friends who saw her towards the close of her life, to hear her express herself so warmly sensible and grateful, for the great and *parental* [my emphasis] tenderness with which she had been treated while under your charge.[34]

A mother sent a grateful letter and a dress 'as a small token of [her] respect and esteem for [the matron's] truly motherly attention to [her] dear departed son'.[35] These examples show that the metaphor of the family could also signify patience, tenderness, and support during times of adversity and distress. Dismissing these possibilities as insincere or exceptional neglects the asylum's potential to become a home away from home.

The closeness that the continuous coexistence of patients and staff promoted is also expressed through direct references to the family metaphor in asylum periodicals. In its fourth issue, the *Gartnavel Gazette* hailed the 'motherly care' of the matron, Mrs Mapleson. It referred to her as 'Lady Superintendent', further emphasising familial relations even though her connection to the physician superintendent, Dr Alexander Mackintosh, was purely professional. Amidst the exalted praise of her role in 'dispensing comfort and happiness to all around', the article did not miss to hint at the annoyance her excessive scrutiny and 'care' inspired among the 'domestics' who could 'not generally [be] blamed for speaking in too flattering terms of their Mistress'.[36] Emily Clark has observed another use of the family metaphor. A contributor to the New York State Asylum's *Opal* addressed readers as 'brothers and sisters of Asylumia', emphasising the solidarity emerging from their shared fate in the institution.[37] This employment of the metaphor is also subversive: it excluded the staff of the asylum, either as readers of the periodical, or altogether as members of the symbolic family, as the implied condition of affiliation was the experience of mental suffering and institutionalisation. Discussing patient Henry Francis Harding's writing for *Under the Dome*, Chaney observes that 'although keen to describe Bethlem as a "happy family," he was something of a patient advocate, responding in his writings to popular stereotypes of asylum patients and stressing the importance of patient representation at official functions'.[38] Such complex nuances of meaning tend to accompany every reference to the family-like community of the institution in asylum periodicals, no matter how subservient to institutional authorities they seem.

Another example of such subversion is the *Meteor* of the Alabama Insane Hospital. As shown in Chapter 5, the editor's views expressed in the

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newspaper tended to align with the institutional discourses on treatment. Accordingly, the publication contains the following reflection: 'As regards the patients, the discipline best adopted to Insane Hospitals is unquestionably the paternal, for to no class do the insane bear so close a resemblance as to children.'[39] Another article reveals that the editor and another patient named the asylum's corridor with workshops 'Innocent Row', as 'the term innocent, used in some countries to denominate idiots, was in all employed to characterise children'.[40] Goree explains further that 'between insane persons and children there are many points of resemblance. Both are not unfrequently whimsical, passionate, having little self-control, and while but little amenable to pure reason, wonderfully susceptible to the influences of kindness and a mild, firm discipline'.[41] While this self-representation could be entirely ironic, it does not negate my argument about the editor's confidence in the benefits of the family model. The *Meteor*'s stance was that, as long as the physicians' authority was exercised gently, the approach could reap benefits. Goree, however, recognised the role of patients in treatment. Referring to Innocent Row as 'a fountain of Health' providing therapeutic employment, the editor concludes that: 'while it is easy to lead a horse to water, his own volition must determine the act of drinking'.[42] Despite patients' vulnerability and susceptibility to the physician's influence, their agency and choice remained a key aspect of treatment. The physician's role was that of a parent who should only offer guidance, provide opportunities, and encourage patients on their way to recovery. Asylum periodicals therefore indicate patients' recognition of power imbalances within the institution and their attempts to renegotiate them. Though employing the metaphor of the family in positive terms, patient-contributors could simultaneously adapt it to reflect their own views on treatment.

The use of the family metaphor in discourses related to mental institutions hints at a more general aspect of asylum life: the line between staff's professional and personal lives was often blurred.[43] Staff tended to live in the asylum, and the superintendent usually lived on the grounds of the institution with his family – arrangements that created opportunities for non-professional interactions with patients. Friendships and familial relationships could form between staff and patients, as well as between members of staff. For instance, after his discharge from the Glasgow Royal Asylum, John Reid Adam self-published his *Gartnavel Minstrel*, where he expresses appreciation of the physicians who treated and those who certified him.[44] Usually, such praise should be treated with caution. However, as I have already

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discussed in Chapter 3, Adam was not eager to leave the institution when he was discharged and seems to have been on mostly good terms with the physicians during his stay. Adam's special position as an entertainer in the asylum and largely positive experience suggest that his gesture and words were indeed sincere.

While descriptions of such connections tend to be absent from medical records, asylum periodicals bear witness to these peculiarities of institutional life. Upon the untimely death of an eighteen-year-old nurse 'at the home of her parents on the grounds of the Hospital', the *Meteor* published an announcement that a grateful lady patient had written a poem dedicated to the deceased, which was printed as a supplement due to the lack of space in the newspaper itself. It also remarks that the nurse 'loved to make them [patients] happy, and was in consequence beloved by them all'.[45] Chaney has shown that *Under the Dome* recorded patients' acquaintance with the superintendent's family.[46] There is also evidence that informal interactions between patients and staff were regular, as the superintendent's relatives could be actively involved in the cultural and religious aspects of the community's life. The *Meteor*, for instance, reveals that Nellie Bryce, the superintendent's wife, was the institution's organist, and that she would often be found sewing alongside patients.[47] Her vital importance to the asylum community is demonstrated by the naming of the water spring that supplied the asylum Nellie Falls, 'in honor of the beautiful, accomplished and universally beloved wife of our Superintendent'.[48] The periodical mentions another relative of Dr Bryce's, who entertained patients with a performance:[49]

> Miss Julia Bryce, during her visit to friends at the Hospital, gained quite a reputation in amateur histrionics, by her presentation of the character of Magaret [*sic*] in 'Love's Sacrifice' .... Some weeks later, when the time came to bid the Hospital world adieu, a veritable sacrifice of love was enacted. We sympathised deeply with the profound grief which her adieu to the Hospital brought her. May all the happiness be her's that would seem the right portion of a blooming young woman with so noble an intellect and so generous a heart.[50]

While the overly flattering epithets could be interpreted as a mark of servility rather than genuine affection, these examples show that the superintendent's family could be characters of the asylum community, actively involved in patients' lives.

Asylum periodicals also demonstrate patients' awareness of and interest in staff's personal lives. The *Meteor* mentions the marriage of nurses

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Mr Webster Smith and Miss Julia Fike, who resigned from their jobs to go on a honeymoon.[51] Even more interesting is a notice in *Excelsior*, stating that 'two young married couples, – or four persons, – three of whom were at one time on the staff of this Institution, and the fourth an inmate thereof, now hold office in the Provincial Lunatic Asylum of Otago, at Dunedin'.[52] These pieces of news add a gossipy quality to asylum periodicals, which Curlic sees as 'a way to formalise the limits of an institutional community through collective knowledge'.[53] This type of information was unlikely to be preserved in the official documentation of institutions. Its publication in periodicals transformed it into an important record of asylums' social life, reinforcing the sense of imagined community united by familial closeness. Furthermore, the sharing of gossip about staff offered brief moments of reversal of power. By reproducing information about staff in print, consuming it, and talking about it among themselves, patients were in the position of knowing and discussing those who usually examined, interrogated, and studied them. The evidence of romantic relationships between patients and staff in *Excelsior* further shows that in the asylum family, the lines between the personal and the professional realms, between patients and staff, and symbolic parents and children could be blurry, changing, and negotiable.

This fluidity of boundaries evident from and reinforced by asylum periodicals also manifested itself in the very distinction between the sane (staff) and the insane (patients). The prolonged existence in close proximity within mental institutions meant that, from society's point of view, the positions of patients and those employed in asylums were not that different: 'psychiatrists were trapped in their custodial institutions every bit as much as their patients, and they also shared in the stigma heaped upon the mentally ill'.[54] And while physicians could still aspire to social recognition and could receive encouragement at least within their own medical circles, non-medically trained attendants and maintenance staff of institutions were at more disadvantaged positions, all the more since, as Jennifer Laws states, 'conceptions of work in moral therapy did not draw a harsh distinction between the therapeutic work of patients and the (paid-for) work of staff. Patients and staff worked alongside one another in the farm and kitchens and . . . recovered patients were not only permitted to stay on as employees in the retreats, but were actively selected for such positions due to their perceived sensibilities in dealing with newer admissions.'[55] The perceived isolation of the asylum from the rest of society therefore affected staff members too, naturally bringing all inhabitants of institutions, regardless of their sanity, together.

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Asylum periodicals also demonstrate the obscuring of boundaries between staff and patients. Turner has shown that the literary work for *Under the Dome* was divided between Bethlem Hospital's officials and inmates, and in Chapter 7, I will show this to be the case of *Excelsior* too. I have also shown that in the office of the *Meteor*, nurses helped out Goree with the printing of the newspaper. Another striking example of this erosion of the line between patients and staff is offered in *Excelsior*. The January 1870 issue contains an obituary for Adam Smith, 'the Asylum Postman'. The article reveals that, as a reward for his diligent work throughout the years, Smith had been sent to the International Exhibition of 1862 'at the expense of the Institution' and had soon after been

> superannuated, *on full pay*, in consequence of the growing infirmities of age, (he being then upwards of 70). Permission was likewise granted to reside and board in the Institution, as before; a privilege he valued above all others. The Institution had been so long to him an *Asylum*, in the truest sense of the word, that to have separated him from *it*, would have been a rupture of his affections that might have proved fatal, both to his peace of mind, and health of body. He lived to the last in the room to which he had been so long accustomed; ever fearful that medical or sanitary reasons would lead to his transfer to some airier, larger, healthier dormitory, in the upper part of the building; a change that, to his simple conservative nature, seemed worse than death itself [emphases in original]![56]

Smith's obituary brings up several parallels between the postman's experience as an employee of the institution and some of the patients' stories I have discussed so far. Like John Reid Adam and Alexander Smart, the postman too seems to have valued the sense of appreciation of his labour in the institution, to the point of not wanting to depart from it after his retirement. However, the key moment in this excerpt is its engagement with the term 'asylum'. By describing a sane employee's perception of the Murray Royal as 'an *Asylum*, in the truest sense of the word', the article attempts to counteract existing prejudice against mental institutions. It emphasises their function as shelters and promotes their idealisation as safe, harmonious, beautiful places that no patient or staff would ever want to leave. Without a doubt, this message should be taken with a pinch of salt – especially the claim that Smith lived in fear of being moved to a better room. However, in its attempt to portray the institution as a desirable and healthy accommodation and shelter even for those not suffering from madness, the statement unambiguously erodes the line between the asylum's sane and insane inhabitants.

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The very nature of the asylum as an institution and its structure and operation encouraged patients and staff to interact in various capacities, form different types of relationships, and feel as part of one symbolic family. Asylum periodicals reflect these connections, but they also potentially amplified them to cultivate a feeling of belonging. It is possible that the representation of connection was hyperbolised, construing an image of the asylum as a unified community in the eyes of both its inhabitants and outsiders.[57] However, regardless of the actual degrees of familiarity among the inhabitants of the asylum, the representation of closeness itself shaped the reality of institutional life. By informing readers about the participation of the superintendent's family in events and activities and the personal matters of staff and patients, asylum periodicals shortened the distance, whatever it was, between the different groups, making them more involved in each other's lives.

Beyond Discharge: The Role of Former Patients

The 'family' that asylum periodicals constructed and maintained extended beyond the institutional grounds, and asylum periodicals diligently recorded exchanges involving former patients. That patients often stayed in touch with their institutions after they regained their liberty has been observed in most existing studies of these publications. Eannace observes that the *Opal* 'sometimes carried news or correspondence from former patients and often sent greetings to those who had departed the confines of the asylum'.[58] For instance, a letter of a former resident of the New York State Asylum was quoted in the editorial column: 'I am very much obliged to my brother and sister Lunatics, for the words of wisdom which drop from their lips (through the Opal,) . . . No. 1, North, was my home. How pleasant the memory of those months, embittered as they were by my own waywardness.'[59] The letter shows that belonging to the 'brotherhood'/'sisterhood' of patients continued beyond discharge and that the asylum wards could be perceived as spaces of domestic comfort, marred by the malady of mental illness. Eannace mentions another patient who tried to reconnect with the asylum by requesting a copy of the *Opal* eleven years after his discharge, further supporting the notion that asylum periodicals produced lasting relationships between patients and institutions.[60] In the Crichton Royal Asylum too, 'all Crichtonians past and present were actively solicited [to contribute to the *New Moon*]; kept in contact with doctors and staff, evident in letters written to Dr. Browne and published in the *New Moon*; and were welcomed as visitors'.[61] All recent work on *Under*

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the Dome has highlighted former patients' involvement in the magazine of Bethlem Hospital.[62] These studies suggest that asylum periodicals did not only reflect durable connections across the institutional wall. They motivated patients to stay in touch through contributing to the periodicals directly, reading them, or sending letters and gifts. Examining a broader range of titles, I will show that former patients were crucial to the history of periodical publishing in asylums. Some of the titles owe their existence to patients who chose to remain or stay involved in the life of the institutions. Moreover, asylum periodicals attracted former patients' involvement by offering not only a welcoming community but also publicity that could potentially aid patients' reintegration into society.

As previously discussed, former patients were often directly involved in the production of asylum periodicals, and a few of the titles depended on people who had formerly resided in the institutions. John Reid Adam was at least partly responsible for the acquisition of a press in the Glasgow Royal Asylum. The purchase enabled the publication not only of his own *Chronicles of the Monastery* but also of the *Gartnavel Gazette* nearly ten years after he left the institution. William S. George, the original printer of the *Asylum Journal* at the Vermont Asylum, and a printer of the *New Moon* at the Crichton Royal Asylum, William Shields, were also former patients who found employment in their respective asylums after discharge. Shield's last case note of 19 May 1852 states that 'he has solicited permission to remain & to be installed in the office of Printer of the New Moon on condition that he is regarded as a voluntary boarder who does not pay his board'.[63] He was discharged as a patient and continued producing the periodical in a solely professional capacity. His name appears in the imprint of the *New Moon*, with some interruptions, until 1860, though by then he had been readmitted as a patient and stayed as such until 1869.[64]

Former patients could also be loyal contributors. *Loose Leaves* explicitly stated that its contents were the work of current patients and 'gentlemen who at one time resided in Church Stretton House'.[65] In the first months of running the *Morningside Mirror* of the Royal Edinburgh Asylum, the editor received 'articles written by one, who, although, no longer an inmate of the Institution, has thus shown that he has not ceased to feel an interest in its welfare'.[66] Alexander Smart's 'Reminiscences' were serialised in the same publication for a few months after he was officially discharged.[67] Similar continuity can be observed in *Excelsior* of the Murray Royal Asylum. Dr Lindsay wrote in a report: 'A patient, who recently left us, expressed an anxious desire that his contributions should

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appear in future numbers, though he is no longer an inmate'.[68] A few years later, *Excelsior* published a detailed account of the Christmas celebrations at the asylum, by a former patient who had been invited to join in.[69] At Bethlem, Sarah Chaney shows, *Under the Dome* continued to feature the writings of 'Kentish Scribbler' after she left the institution, until her death.[70] The persistent interest in asylum periodicals of people who had already recovered reveals that these publications produced long-lasting relationships that sustained a therapeutic community extending beyond the institutions.

Indeed, asylum periodicals could operate as forums where people with shared experience created lasting connection and supported each other. Current patients could exchange advice for their ailments, as was the case of 'Jacob Somnium' who wrote to the editor of the *Gartnavel Gazette*, complaining of insomnia caused by troublesome, embarrassing dreams (likely of a sexual nature). The letter ends with a plea for help to understand whether he himself 'must be considered responsible for their continuance':

> If you can do nothing more for me yourself, will you at least have the goodness to give publicity to my letter, as I may have a fair chance of getting a useful hint from one or other of your readers? 'In the multitude of counsellors, there is wisdom.'[71]

This letter indicates that patients generally shared their experiences and exchanged advice, offering each other care supplementing the one provided by default in the institution. It also shows that asylum periodicals could serve as the platform for such mutual support.

Former patients also participated in this process. For them, reading and writing for asylum periodicals was, as Eannace argues about the *Opal*, a 'way of "catching up" on the news of the place'.[72] The publications also offered opportunities for current patients to learn about their fellows who had departed and communicate with them, extending the mutual support system beyond the institutions. The *Asylum Gazette* contains an obituary of the wife of a former patient, reprinted from another newspaper and introduced it thus: 'As a mark therefore of our respect and affection we republish the notice alluded to, and should these few lines meet his eye, we beg leave to tender unto him our heartfelt condolence in his sad bereavement.'[73] This expression of grief and care shows that current patients could be as interested in former residents' lives as the latter were in theirs. It confirms McMillan's claim that 'attachments made within the asylum could endure outside of it'.[74]

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Inserting the writings of those who had recovered, however, could hide risks, such as eroding the publications' claims on authenticity. When the editor of the *Asylum Journal* included a letter from 'A Friend of the Insane', he found it necessary to explain his decision:

> The following communication, tho' coming from one whom the 'majority of mankind do not consider insane,' still as she has formerly been an inmate of this institution, the 'board of Censors' have unanimously decided that it is worthy a place in our Journal.[75]

As communication from discharged patients served to demonstrate the efficacy of the psychiatric project, most periodicals, however, welcomed contributions and intelligence from former residents of the institution. Dr Lindsay, the unnamed editor of *Excelsior*, wrote that:

> one of the most delightful, and withal profitable, of our editorial privileges is the receipt, from time to time of friendly letters from those who, once members of our quiet community, are now again mixing with the busy, bustling, struggling throng called 'the world.' Our halls and galleries, – 'Excelsior' and its editor, – would appear to be – 'Though lost to sight, to memory dear.'[76]

The physician-editor's joy at the reception of grateful letters reminds us that, after all, the publication of former patients' correspondence in asylum periodicals served as proof of the institution's humane and, more importantly, successful means of treating insanity. While the humanity and success of asylums were contestable, asylum periodicals encouraged other sufferers, gave hope to their friends and relatives, and inspired donations and future admissions.

In fact, asylum periodicals occasionally mention former patients as benefactors of the institution. Dr Lindsay's article continues thus:

> But such correspondence, gratifying though it be, does not consist of mere narrative letters, of simple good wishes, of the empty 'compliments of the season': it is accompanied, in many cases, by more substantial tokens of friendship and gratitude. Two very chaste and beautifully executed groups of wax flowers ornament our sideboard; a handsome cushion, brilliant with roses and lillies [*sic*], lies on the sofa; anti-macassars [*sic*] cover our chairs, and d'Oyleys [*sic*] are scattered over our tables, while pen-wipers and other sundries bring up the rear of the et ceteras we are constantly receiving at the hands of our lady-correspondents alone. To each and all of our kind benefactors we take this public opportunity of expressing our heartfelt gratitude, and of assuring them of our unchanged, and unchanging, interest in their present and future welfare.[77]

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The description of donations from happy former patients is purposefully detailed, representing benefactors as generous and the institution and its physician-superintendent as effective in the treatment of insanity. The success of the psychiatric project is suggested not only by the discharge of the patients and their evident positive sentiments towards the asylum but also in their capacity to perform their gender roles embodied by former female patients' handcrafted gifts. A significantly more concise notice of 'a grateful ex-patient' sending gifts to patients and staff appeared in the *Meteor*:

> We will not undertake to enumerate them. There were some of everything that men or women wear, from stockings to dress-combs. Special and valuable presents were sent to the officers of the Hospital. Every patient will get a handsome and useful gift.[78]

These acts of generosity were not only gestures of gratitude but also performances of Victorian charity culture.[79] McMillan has observed that some patients in Crichton Royal Asylum often engaged in philanthropic work themselves, enacting conventional behaviour of the middle and the upper classes they came from.[80] I have also noticed the initials of *Excelsior*'s patient-contributors, such as William Gilbert Christie (discussed in Chapter 7), in the lists of benefactors to the Murray Royal Asylum usually included on the last pages of the issues. Donating to asylums after discharge was a similar practice through which those who had recovered aided their less fortunate fellows.

Some donations had additional functions. In 1848, John Carfrae, a former patient of the Royal Edinburgh Asylum who had written for and edited the *Morningside Mirror* under the signatures of 'J. C.' and 'Mr Punch', sent his poetry collection, *The Pilgrim of Sorrow*, to the institution.[81] At least seven of the poems included in the volume had previously appeared in the press: Carfrae's initials are present under over a dozen pieces published in between July and November 1841 in the *Weekly True Sun*.[82] In July 1853, the periodical also acknowledged, 'with many thanks, the receipt of a volume of poems, entitled Rambling Rhymes, as a donation from the author, Mr Alex. Smart, Printer, Edinburgh'.[83] This happened three months after Smart, who had formerly fulfilled the duties of editing and printing the *Mirror*, had left the asylum. It is tempting to see these gestures as purely philanthropic. Aware of the importance of having something to read in the asylum but likely unable to afford donating much, Carfrae and Smart gave the

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fruits of their own literary efforts back to the community. Smart's and Carfrae's gifts were at least partly motivated by gratitude. In the preface to his volume, Carfrae writes that

> he must not for one moment be thought capable of ingratitude towards those among whom his lot was cast, who did everything in their power to alleviate the painfulness of his situation, and with all of whom he hopes that he has formed the ties of firm and abiding friendship.[84]

Smart's autobiography describes him leaving the asylum with 'the concurrence of [his] medical friends' and 'a large debt of gratitude'.[85]

However, these gifts were likely driven by an additional motivation. The *Morningside Mirror* did not simply note the reception of Carfrae's volume but also reviewed it: 'We recommend "The Pilgrim" earnestly to our readers .... We cannot more strongly recommend this work than by saying that some portions of it formed the brightest gems of our own little periodical during the past year'.[86] This brief review suggests that the mentions of Smart's and Carfrae's works in the *Mirror* achieved several tasks simultaneously. They advertised the authors to the periodical's readers within and beyond *Morningside*, cultivated pride in their achievements as representatives of the asylum community, and highlighted the role of the institution in their recovery and literary success. Therefore, these donations were also opportunities for the former patients to use the asylum as a source of support during their transition back to the world. Both Carfrae and Smart had demonstrated poetical aspirations prior to their admission to the asylum. Reaching readers in Edinburgh, Scotland, and beyond, these advertisements offered the authors publicity that they needed for their successful reintegration in society and the advancement of their literary careers.

The continuous involvement of former patients evident from asylum periodicals can also signify their struggle to return to their regular lives. Some patients found reintegration difficult, either due to their experience of stigma and discrimination in the outside world or as a result of getting used to the asylum and finding it preferable to their regular lives.[87] John Reid Adam's refusal to leave the Glasgow Royal Asylum in order to avoid dealing with his financial difficulties is a case in point. Eannace has detected a general change of tone in the later volumes of the *Opal*, a growing sense of 'bitterness that is fuelled by the newly-expressed futility of ever being allowed to be "normal" again'.[88] If former patients' keenness to participate in the cultural activities of institutions is interpreted as a manifestation of this experience of ostracisation and failure of

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reintegration, asylum periodicals' role was all the more significant. The publications were a source of security, validation, and encouragement much needed by those who had left the institutions to re-enter a potentially hostile world.

The institutional community is therefore not merely an illusion perpetuated by selective representations of the asylum as a happy family. Asylum periodicals embody the joint efforts of different actors with different skill sets and institutional roles, as well as the lasting connections formed between patients and staff. While there was a degree of artifice in their portrayal of the asylum as a family, they nevertheless promoted social cohesion within their respective establishments. Their complex production and the limited resources of the institutions (including the pool of potential contributors) demanded the occasional transgression of the class and gender divisions that were otherwise enforced. Asylum periodicals also reveal that institutional hierarchies were not rigid, and in their pages the voices of staff and patients could be nearly equalised. Finally, former inmates' continuous interest in the institutions demonstrated in the publications challenges negative representations of the asylum. It suggests that it could also be an invaluable resource, offering a sense of belonging, appreciation, and support during patients' transition back to society.

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