

## **Curran Fellowship Report 2017-2018**

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I would like to extend my thanks to the Research Society for Victorian Periodicals – and the Curran Fellowship committee in particular – for supporting my research into the print cultures of British psychiatry, c.1850-1914. The generous funding provided by the fellowship has enabled me to undertake the research necessary to develop a viable postdoctoral project. Earlier research into psychiatric print highlighted for me the complex cultural work conducted by journals in the Victorian era. Apart from their purely technical uses – as repositories of medical knowledge – periodicals created and sustained the emotional bonds necessary for the professional self-definition of proto-psychiatrists, and so were regarded as important material artefacts. The primary aim of my Curran-funded research was to survey archival holdings relating to the production and circulation of psychiatric journals, to ascertain their readership, and cultural impact. I was optimistic about the project; however, even so, I did not anticipate the richness of the archive, and the scope of surviving print and manuscript sources.

The fellowship enabled a trip to the UK in August-September 2017, to examine and obtain manuscript and print materials from a range of libraries and holdings across England and Scotland. Time spent in various repositories in London in particular (e.g. the British Library, London Metropolitan Archives, and Wellcome Library) allowed me to consult editions of early medical and psychiatric periodicals, as well as surviving manuscript correspondence relating to contributors and editors. An examination of this material, and associated marginalia and annotations, largely confirmed my hypothesis that psychiatric journals were affective objects, which produced and recreated social and professional bonds. (Indeed, an early editor to the *Journal of Mental Science*, forerunner to the *British Journal of Psychiatry*, described the periodical publication as a useful substitute for the conviviality and intimacy of ‘periodical meetings’ between medical men).

However, an examination of little-known psychiatric journals and magazines has opened up new possibilities for the study of periodical authorship, particularly by working-class writers. Time at the British Library enabled research into the entire print run of the

*Asylum News*, an obscure journal printed for the edification of mental health nurses at the turn of the twentieth century. The print arm of the Asylum Workers' Association – a paternalist organisation which aimed at raising nurses to professional status (and thus heading off trade unionism) – the *Asylum News* resembled other conservative and Evangelical periodicals, delivering moderate, pious, and jingoistic content to a primarily working-class readership. However, the print space did provide a forum for these marginal workers – and occasionally asylum patients – to display their literary talents, through periodical essays, poetry, short fiction, travelogues and literary criticism. Taken together the periodical provides perhaps the largest published body of writing by such workers from the Victorian and Edwardian eras. Moreover, as most articles are accompanied by signatures or initials, it has been possible to track the publishing histories of correspondents. During my time in the UK, manuscript collections and other contemporary periodicals (i.e. the *British Journal of Nursing*) from other archival holdings were consulted to build detailed biographies of working-class writers; this research has highlighted the important influence of social and institutional norms on the production and reception of medical literature.

Exciting, too, was the discovery of a complete publication run of the *National Asylum Workers' Union Magazine*, held at the Modern Records Centre at the University of Warwick. As with the *Asylum News*, this periodical provided a literary outlet for mental health workers, though far more militant in its aims and content. To date, little attention has been paid to the political influence of these magazines, and their literary value has been all but overlooked. This is surprising, given their rich content; wedged between syndicated Labour Party propaganda were creative works, cartoons, and illustrations, from correspondents of all backgrounds. This material has been revelatory, with the illustrations in particular highlighting the intellectual and aesthetic preoccupations of labour leaders; as with the sources relating to the *Asylum News* it has made evident the links between medical and trade union writings, and wider periodical commerce, prompting new directions for this study.

As originally planned, two articles have been submitted from this research, both of which examine the contributions made by working-class writers to Victorian-era psychiatric periodicals. Given the success of the research, it is assumed that this will be an ongoing project. Future articles are already planned and will seek to contribute to our knowledge of the financing, production, and distribution of psychiatric periodicals, as well as their reception and cultural impact, both within the medical faculty and without.