

Printing as Poison, Printing as Cure: Work and Health in the Nineteenth-Century Printing Office and Asylum

In the nineteenth century, printing transformed from a handicraft into what Patrick Duffy describes as ‘a capital-intensive industry catering for the needs of the developing industrialized society.’¹ This shift inevitably affected the lives of those involved in the production of print, reshaping their professional identity and relationship with work. In this article, I will explore nineteenth-century printers’ changing experience of work using the concept of health and its relation to printing. Highlighting the stories of those involved in print production, preserved in their own words or the words of contemporary observers, I will show that industrial capitalism transformed the printing office into a high-pressure, fast-paced work environment that commentators in the press and printers themselves perceived as ‘unhealthy.’ At the same time, contemporary mental healthcare offered those who struggled to function in the new contexts opportunities to exercise their trade therapeutically. By mid-century many British and American asylums had acquired printing presses, and printing was increasingly incorporated into their therapeutic regimes as part of the popular moral treatment movement. The case of Alexander Smart, a Scottish printer and poet who was repeatedly institutionalised and who benefited from practising his trade in the Royal Edinburgh Asylum, will allow me to explore nineteenth-century printers’ complex relationship with their work, as well as broader shifts in the meaning of work in Victorian society and its functions and uses.

Undertaking this kind of discussion demands several clarifications. Firstly, ‘printer’ as an occupational label unifies an otherwise diverse and multi-layered professional group, within which circumstances and social standing could vary significantly between individuals and employments and change over time.² As my central interests are printers’ relationship with their work and the effects of the changes in the trade on their bodies and minds, I will use the term to refer to workers identifying as printers and primarily employed in printing offices.

Furthermore, the health hazards observed here were present in varying degrees, since work arrangements differed widely, depending on factors such as the type of printing press employed and the materials that were published. The experiences of workers in smaller workshops that continued to operate hand presses were markedly different from those of printers employed in larger establishments equipped with steam machinery. Far from universalising work conditions, I am interested in tracing how those employed in printing offices perceived, experienced, and were affected by their work environment.

Furthermore, the reference to health in a historical analysis begs caution. Retrospective diagnosis is a highly problematic endeavour that is the subject of ongoing debates.³ Critics of the practice insist that the ways health and illness are understood and experienced are determined by the specific cultural and historical contexts within which they occur. Thus, Peter Palmer argues, the application of current understandings of disease to bodies and minds from the past is ‘a little more than a game, with ill-defined rules and little academic credibility.’⁴ However, Osamu Muramoto’s thoughtful philosophical assessment of the disputes concludes that retro-diagnosis can be a valuable undertaking, if it is informed by several ethical, ontological and epistemological considerations. Among these is the question of purpose, and while Muramoto discusses it last, I would like to suggest it as the starting point of any inquiry into dead people’s medical histories. For my own purposes, I need not put medical labels on printers’ experiences of discomfort and illness; nor am I qualified to do so. It is sufficient to rely on contemporary medical and social interpretations of these phenomena, as well as sufferers’ own understandings of their minds and bodies. Ultimately, this article is interested in the ways in which printers themselves made sense of their work and its relation to their health at a time of great change, hope and uncertainty.

Printing as ‘Unhealthy’

National studies of nineteenth-century print production in Britain and America have already offered some insights into the organization of labour and the work conditions in printing offices, touching on their impact on printers’ wellbeing.⁵ The image of printers’ daily lives is disheartening: as a result of the heavy workload and the demand for faster printing, printers often had to spend long hours (sometimes overnight) in poorly ventilated, unsanitary and badly lit printing offices. Consumption, loss of eyesight, lead poisoning, and intemperance were health problems that became characteristic of the trade. Though printers undeniably faced fewer life-threatening hazards than miners and construction workers, illness and mortality rates among them were relatively high.⁶ And while Greenwood maintains that printers’ ‘afflictions were [...] cumulative rather than immediate,’ their long-term nature does not mitigate the impact they could have on individuals’ experience of work and life.⁷

In fact, I would like to suggest that physical strain, illness and intense work under pressure had serious consequences for printers’ quality of life. That the changes in the market and the trade structures had psychological impact on printers has been noted but not studied thoroughly. Ava Baron has shown that the deterioration of the traditional apprenticeship system destabilised printers’ sense of self and masculinity, suggesting that by the early twentieth century poorly trained and exploited apprentices often ‘suffered from periods of depression.’⁸ Duffy observes that ‘most printed matter was of an urgent nature and men had to concentrate while working at high speeds which frequently caused stress.’⁹ In this section I will explore the psychological costs of industrial printing and demonstrate how industrial capitalist publishing affected printers’ experience of work.

Nineteenth-century printers have frequently been associated with the idea of labour’s aristocracy. Though the term itself and its application to the printing trade has been disputed, workmen employed at the press tended to be literate and well-read, earn more than other

tradesmen, and live in better housing.¹⁰ Printers' elevated social status was reinforced by 'a common feeling that there was something special about producing printed work.'¹¹ While wages and housing arrangements could vary, this consciousness of their importance was perhaps the most stable aspect of their professional identity. Proud of their distinguished position, printers formed strong professional and social bonds. In the first half of the nineteenth century, these connections were consolidated by several aspects of work: printers spent significant amounts of time in the communal space of the printing office, printing firms were often family businesses transferred between relatives, and apprentices usually resided with their masters.¹²

As the last point suggests, the apprenticeship system had a central role in the maintenance of this community. During the four-to-six years of laborious training, boys did not only gain practical knowledge but 'property of skill' – the sense of owning one's work and belonging to a community united by their trade.¹³ Novices were socialised into a community of expert craftsmen which had its own professional language, rules, and traditions and which guarded its boundaries as zealously as it supported its members.¹⁴ The apprenticeship system was therefore important for promoting social cohesion within the profession and maintaining the privileged status of printers as the *literati* of the working class.

In the course of the nineteenth century, however, the system started crumbling, and communal affinity was displaced by market relations.¹⁵ As in other trades, apprentice labour was always cheaper. In Britain in 1814 the repeal of the Statute of Artificers, which in 1563 had established the legal obligations of completing an apprenticeship before entering a skilled trade, enabled employers to take advantage of untrained apprentices.¹⁶ Across the Atlantic, apprenticeship traditions had never grown deep roots in the contexts of settlement, increased geographic and social mobility, and philosophy of personal liberty.¹⁷ Not feeling obliged to complete their training to find work, apprentices would run away from their masters after a

few years and find employment with masters who paid better, though still below the minimal journeyman's wage.¹⁸ Seeing a chance to reduce labour costs, by the 1830s employers were demonstrating a preference for hiring boys over journeymen.¹⁹ Women's entry into the profession was another problem. Paid less and denied access to the unions, both runaway apprentices and female workers were unprotected and exploitable. They were perceived by journeymen as unfair competition and a threat to the traditions and the community – and not without grounds. Employers' preference and exploitation of these groups undermined journeymen's labour, leading to worse work conditions, greater competition and a spreading sense of insecurity in the printing community.²⁰

While Rule contends that printing was 'not particularly hard or especially skilled labour,' the printing workshop was nevertheless perceived as an unhealthy and oppressive work environment.²¹ According to the Boston *Liberator*, compositors were 'subject to all the diseases incident to a sedentary life,' while pressmen were 'afflicted with all the disorders produced by standing and excessive labour; for by working at the press, the whole body is violently exercised.'²² An article in Dickens's *All the Year Round* sums up the situation in London in 1864:

Of printers, the mortality is high, mainly for want of space and ventilation in the printing offices, which frequently are old houses ill suited [sic] for the work, [...] for the common want also of good drainage, and a complete separation of the water-closets from the workrooms; for want of a wholesomely regulated system of overwork and nightwork, and for want of wholesome arrangement for the taking of their meals by the compositors. Consumption is twice as common among London printers as it is among the general male population of London, and the mortality of London printers, between the ages of thirty-five and forty-five, is considerably more than double that of the male agricultural population.²³

Long hours of intensive work in an unsavoury environment were characteristic of the trade. Printing workshops often lacked the space and facilities to ensure the safe operation of the equipment they housed – dust and foul odours were problems which became more pressing with the introduction of the steam press, but which were present even in offices with hand presses. Furthermore, prior to the Factory Acts of the 1860s-70s in Britain and the end of the Civil War in America, hours were hardly regulated. Though the average workday lasted between ten and eleven hours, many printers worked at per piece rates, so their workdays were limited only by their physical endurance. Depending on the type of material that was printed, the level of the workers' training, and the specific arrangements in each firm, the average time spent in the printing office could reach fourteen to sixteen hours.²⁴

More extreme examples are also available: Charles Manby Smith describes printing emergency jobs during the opening of the Session of Parliament that required over fifty hours of intense, continuous work.²⁵ After the first sleepless night, Smith writes that 'the atmosphere of the series of black caverns in which business is carried on is become disgustingly nauseous, as well as stiflingly hot. [...] The entire building is one huge vapor-bath of dismal stench, from the rank steam of which the soot-black walls and ceilings glimmer with moisture.'²⁶ Sleep-deprived, apprentices and journeymen were likely to hide in the dark corners of the office to steal some sleep or 'stretched under their frames.'²⁷

As Smith's account indicates, the workload was not evenly distributed throughout the year. Special occasions and emergency jobs would cause sudden spells of intense work. In cities where the printing trade was co-dependent with the legal one, printers were often overwhelmed with work during the legal year, while jobs were scarce between August and October.²⁸ When work was scarce, some printers had to travel in search of jobs, and, as David Finkelstein has shown, 'tramping as a long-term activity was hard on the body and the soul.'²⁹ The irregular pace and sometimes unpredictable hours of work distinguish printers'

situation from that of other tradesmen.³⁰ The long hours spent in the unsavoury atmosphere of the office, ‘tramping,’ and the oscillation between overwork and the fear of unemployment could put a substantial strain on printers’ health.

Unsurprisingly, mortality among printers was notoriously high, as Dickens’s periodical indicates. Commenting on the miserable conditions in printing offices prior to the Factory Acts of the 1860s, factory inspector Richard Whately Cooke-Taylor stated that ‘in the trade of letter-press printing in London [...] certain houses where books and newspapers were printed, had acquired [...] the name of “slaughter-houses,” owing to the exceptional mortality prevailing there, especially among boys.’³¹ Even if this extreme comparison is seen as applying only to exploited apprentices in London, printers faced multitudinous health hazards on a daily basis, likely resulting in poor health and high mortality. In the early 1830s Charles Turner Thackrah, a founding figure in the field of occupational medicine, stated that ‘few [printers] appear to enjoy full health. [...]. We can scarcely find or hear of any compositor above the age of 50.’³²

The tight, unventilated and poorly sanitised space of the printing office was associated with the spread of various ailments. Of these, most commonly cited were chest diseases. Consumption was, in Sarah Gillespie’s words, ‘the scourge of the industry’; it was so widespread among printers that it became synonymous with the trade.³³ In 1866 14 out of 35 printers’ deaths in Edinburgh were caused by pulmonary tuberculosis.³⁴ Duffy also cites an estimate of 70 per cent of English compositors’ death in 1870 attributed to chest diseases.³⁵ Referring to the obituary columns in the annual reports of the Scottish Typographical Association, Gillespie observes that ‘fully half of the deaths recorded were due to phthisis and the majority of the victims were in their early twenties.’³⁶

Working in the printing office also posed the threat of metal poisoning from the lead type. An article from 1890 mentions printers as one of the four occupational groups that

suffered from lead poisoning most often. It observes that particles could be inhaled (as the type wore off, producing dust) or ingested when the workmen touched their mouths or ate without washing their hands first.³⁷ The poor ventilation and hygiene of printing offices heightened the risk: Smith recalls that type, ‘shining new from the foundry,’ would lie around the office alongside cooking pans and utensils.³⁸ Other ailments, such as failing eyesight, stomach complaints and paralysis of the hand (which may or may not have been related to chronic metal poisoning) were also noted.³⁹

These conditions were perceived to have a serious impact on printers’ lives: the taxing work in poor environment and the bodily illness and discomfort were associated with mental health issues. As physician William Augustus Guy put it, ‘both the mind and the body are injured; the one is in a state to be excited by slight causes, and the other to require, or to seem to require, the aid of intoxicating liquors.’⁴⁰ Around mid-century, intemperance was frequently observed among printers, and Guy saw that as a natural response to the oppressive environment of the workshops. The insecurities arising from the irregularity of work and changing occupational structures, sleep deprivation, intense work under pressure, and physical exhaustion were all potential causes of distress.

Furthermore, it is worth noting that, as a 1898 notice in *The Lancet* put it, ‘sustained exposure to the poison of lead as a condition of labour is associated with increased liability to disorders of the [...] nervous system.’⁴¹ In 1892 physician Daniel Hack Tuke listed some of its early effects on the mental state: insomnia, nightmares, and delirium not unlike that produced by alcohol abuse. In the more advanced stages of intoxication, hallucinations, bouts of melancholia and maniacal episodes of various lengths took turns tormenting the victims of chronic lead poisoning. In extreme cases, the results were paralysis of the hand, coma and death.⁴² Diagnosing lead poisoning, as Richard Gillespie and J. M. S. Pierce have pointed out, can be difficult as its symptoms overlap with those of other diseases, which might

explain why contemporary commentators and physicians did not link the condition to printing.⁴³ This does not mean that the danger was non-existent.

It is hardly surprising then that Guy's 1843 statistical account of the prevalence of various diseases among different professional groups suggested that workers in printing offices were particularly susceptible to 'nervous disorders.' Added together, the incidences of this type of pathology among all print-related occupations were the highest in number: incidence was almost eight times the average (see Tab. 1). In addition, printers were almost four times more likely to suffer from 'cerebral affections' than other occupational groups, and one of the few cases of 'mental disorders' recorded in the study pertains to a compositor. Guy's study has its limitations, such as its focus on the register of a single institution (King's College Hospital) and the lack of definitions of the categories of occupations and diseases. On its own, therefore, it cannot lead to decisive conclusions. Taken together with the accounts I have provided so far, however, Guy's figures support my argument that in the nineteenth century, the average printer appeared to be an especially distressed and troubled worker – be it due to the reorganization of the trade and the pressures and anxieties that accompanied it, or to the potential direct influences of his work on his body and mind.

Occupation	Nervous Disorders	Mental Disorders	Delirium Tremens	Cerebral Affections
Compositors	4	1	-	3
Pressmen	4	-	-	2
Printers	2	-	1	5
Printing-related jobs total	10	1	1	10
Highest number of cases for a single occupation	7	2	3	13
Total number of cases (across occupations)	65	9	15	141
Average per occupation	1.274509804	0.176470588	0.29	2.764705882

Table 1. Excerpt and analysis of Guy's data, showing the prevalence of disorders related to the nervous system among people involved in the printing trade. It demonstrates that, in comparison to the average, 'nervous disorders' and 'cerebral affectations' were respectively 7.8 times and 3.6 times more common among printers. The total number of occupations Guy considers is 53. For the purpose of determining the average incidence of each disease, I have considered compositors, pressmen and printers as a single professional group, as they were likely to operate in similar environments. The average per occupation is hence equal to the total number of cases divided by 51.⁴⁴

Printers in the Asylum

Assessing the precise consequences that working in the printing office had for employees' mental health is challenging, as the main resources for such a study are

contemporary press accounts, census reports, and mental institutions' records, which have numerous limitations. The amount of detail that census reports offer varies across years and geographical locations. American census reports offer no insight into the occupations of the 'insane.' In Britain the 1851 and the 1861 reports reveal mental patients' occupations in England and Wales, but this information is missing in subsequent decades. For Scotland a table showing the occupations of asylum inmates prior to institutionalization is available only for the census of 1871. The patchy data that is available shows that in 1851 22 out of 22,209 English and Welsh male printers were found in asylums, whereas in 1861 they were 40 out of 30,171 (equivalent to a rise from 0.099% to 0.133%). In 1871 in Scotland 0.31% of male printers were counted as insane (17 out of 5476).⁴⁵ Though suggestive of increasing proportion of insane printers over time and more frequent institutionalization among Scottish printers, these figures say little in the absence of further data – especially as on both side of the Atlantic in this period printers were a steadily increasing group of the general population.⁴⁶

Another issue is that census numbers reflect mostly mental institution inmates, but not all whose minds were troubled ended up in asylums. Care by family members was often preferred, and these experiences have rarely been recorded and preserved.⁴⁷ Households could declare whether any of their members had physical or mental infirmities – in fact, in 1871, 3847 people outside asylums were reported as 'insane' in England and Wales.⁴⁸ However, the stigma of insanity, especially at a time when the role of heredity was acknowledged, would have prevented people from openly exposing their relatives as mad. And finally, census data accounts only for those who were in institutions at the time of counting. Unlike the other three categories of physical or mental infirmity (i.e. 'blind', 'deaf and dumb' and 'imbecile'), being 'insane' could be a temporary state. Those admitted into institutions and discharged during the ten-year gap between censuses are therefore omitted.

Institutional archives are also inconsistent. A significant number of records have been lost over the years: the case books and registers of patients are sometimes damaged or missing, and one must assume that the archives contain only what the institutions' administration considered worth keeping. Asylum reports do not always include tables showing the occupations of the admitted patients, and those tables do not indicate what the reasons for each admission were. Even if printers did get institutionalised, and there is information about their mental and physical state in the case books, proving that their condition was a result of their work is challenging.

Maintaining that printing caused significant distress is nevertheless possible. One piece of evidence suggesting a correlation between the changes in the trade and increasing physical and mental strain is the introduction of printing in lunatic asylums. From the early 1840s many mental institutions acquired printing presses that were often operated by patients. For instance, a copy of a book sent to Edinburgh phrenologist George Combe, bears Daniel Hack Tuke's inscription, disclosing that the volume was printed at the York Retreat (where Tuke was a physician) 'by a deaf, dumb, & insane patient.'⁴⁹ In Hanwell Lunatic Asylum there was a press by 1845, 'at which the printer lunatics print the blank forms used in the house, and also the effusions of the mad poets.'⁵⁰ Several asylums, such as the Royal Edinburgh and the New York State Lunatic Asylum encouraged patients to produce magazines and newspapers.⁵¹ By the 1860s the presence of a press in mental institutions was common, indicating that asylums admitted enough printers to run these publishing projects.⁵²

Printing was one of the many manifestations of the moral treatment of the insane, an approach which grew popular in the nineteenth century and which advocated a gentler approach to treating madness and relying on patients' self-discipline. Many supporters of the system saw work and recreation as efficient therapeutic instruments. In his report for 1852 the Superintendent of the Royal Edinburgh Asylum wrote that 'no single agent is more

beneficial in the cure or alleviation of chronic cases of insanity than active employment.’⁵³ Occupation, especially one suited to the patient’s previous employment and skills, offered a distraction from unpleasant thoughts and healthy exercise for the body and mind. Patients could therefore be found farming and gardening, making shoes and furniture, cleaning, cooking and sewing. Likewise, writing and reading offered a diversion for the mind, while printing allowed printer-patients to apply or improve their skills, while restoring their health.⁵⁴

The emergence of the phenomenon in parallel with the intensification of print production is also significant, as a closer look at the asylum records suggests. While most of the patient-printers remain unknown, some of them have been identified, and the preserved fragments about their lives echo the concerns of occupational health accounts I referred to earlier. For instance, a printer was admitted to the New York State Asylum after having been ‘dissipated for years.’⁵⁵ Another one, in the Vermont Asylum for the Insane, was ‘a young man from the northernmost county of the State of New Hampshire, 17 years of age, by trade a printer, four weeks deranged, and laboring under maniacal excitement characterized by exaggerated personal ideas of greatness, dominant in which was the delusion that he was to be a second Franklin.’⁵⁶ The young man in question was William S. George, an ambitious printer who headed several newspapers after his discharge, eventually took over the Michigan State Printing Firm, and became ‘one of the best newspaper men in the West.’⁵⁷ He passed away at the age of 56, ‘worn out by incessant devotion to business.’⁵⁸ Given the trajectory that George’s life followed after his discharge from the asylum, it is not improbable that his early breakdown and delusion of being another Franklin were triggered by job-related pressures and anxieties.

While the evidence of George’s life is only tentative, the case of Alexander Smart (1798-1866), a Scottish printer and poet who was institutionalised repeatedly throughout his life,

presents a detailed illustration of the struggles that many nineteenth-century printers faced in their daily lives as well as of the therapeutic use of work in the asylum. In his autobiographical writing, he reflects on his 30-year-long career as a professional printer, his breakdowns in health, and his involvement in the printing office of the Royal Edinburgh Asylum in Morningside.⁵⁹ Like any other published autobiographical account, Smart's cannot be taken entirely at face value. Nevertheless, his narrative fascinates with its portrayal of the asylum as a shelter from the pressures of the print market and the bodily and mental exhaustion of printing. It also suggests that in the asylum the printing press could be transformed into a therapeutic tool, by highlighting the recreational aspect of work and employing it for healing purposes. This allowed printers to set aside the anxieties in their lives, restore their confidence and feeling of purpose, and prepare themselves for returning to the world.

Smart was born in 1798 in Montrose in the family of a shoemaker.⁶⁰ His printing career began in the 1820s, when he briefly edited, printed and published the *Montrose Chronicle*, and then worked for the *Dundee Courier*. Eventually he found a job in Edinburgh. Around 1833 he was employed at the office of the *Caledonian Mercury*, and by 1842 he was also associated with the University Printing Office on Thistle Street.⁶¹ Throughout his life, he was a highly respected member of the printing community in Scotland.

Smart was a poet, too. In the course of his life, he published two collections of verse and saw his writing on the pages of the *Caledonian Mercury*, *Hogg's Instructor*, *Tait's Magazine*, the *Scotsman*, and local titles such as the *Elgin Courier* and the *Dundee Courier*.⁶² He earned the praise of literary men such as Francis Jeffrey, Charles Dickens and Charles Mackay.⁶³ He was a principal contributor to the 1846 *Whistle Binkie* volume titled *Songs for the Nursery*, and in the 1850s he became involved with the *Scottish Typographical Circular*, which used his poems as opening pieces in each issue.⁶⁴ As a result, Smart made a name for himself as a

talented working-class poet of ‘great taste and no little genius,’ who could write entertaining and beautiful verse for both children and adults.⁶⁵ However, the profit from his literary pursuits could not support a family, so printing remained his main source of income.

Smart was also known for his ‘peculiarly nervous temperament,’ and it has been noted that he ‘more than once experienced the miseries of mental aberration.’⁶⁶ Indeed, he spent the last six years of his life in the Royal Edinburgh Asylum, and his autobiographical writing reveals that he experienced recurrent bouts of physical and mental breakdowns from around 1847 onwards, resulting in at least one previous admission into the same institution and one into the psych ward of a London workhouse. His narratives about his illness, recovery and relapse offer a detailed description of his complaints. However, neither Smart’s own writing nor his medical records indicate any specific organic cause of bodily or mental illness. His case notes from the last years of his life indicate that physicians were at a loss how to treat Smart’s burning abdominal pain, emaciation and depressive thoughts.⁶⁷ However, while the nature of his suffering remains uncertain, its source, emerging in Smart’s own account, is, quite curiously, his work.

To Smart printing was both a liberation and a burden. On the one hand, it earned him a respectable place in society and allowed him to publish his collections, which were ‘mostly printed by his own hands.’⁶⁸ Several of Smart’s poems express awe at the press. In ‘A Happy New Year’, he calls it ‘a giant of power, / That guards Freedom’s temple in danger’s dark hour.’⁶⁹ Printers were accordingly noble workmen and messengers of the press who brought enlightenment to the world:

Ours the press and ours the power,
When oppression’s shadows lower, –
Watchmen set on Freedom’s tower,
Guardians of humanity.⁷⁰

However, the price of devoting one's life to the noble art of printing was high, as Smart's ode to Benjamin Franklin suggests:

The muzzled ox treads out the corn. –
The work gets scarce, the wages scant, –
By sedentary labour worn,
The printer shrinks from age and want.

The delver, with an untaxed brain,
Fares better in the world than he
Who gave his best young years to gain
The art that crowns the great and free.⁷¹

This poem was published in 1860, when Smart was 62 years old and was still looking for employment to make ends meet. Towards the end of his life, the pride of being a printer, a 'guardian of humanity,' was mixed with the bitter realisation of the sacrifice that the title involved.

That was not the first time he complained of the strain of printing. In a series of articles titled 'Leaves from an Autobiography,' he argued that printing was not a mere trade, but an artform which required great skill and attention to detail, but which was rarely recognised as such:

The taste and beauty now displayed in typography, especially when illustrated by wood-cuts, render the services of a good pressman of much more importance in a printing office than the uninitiated are aware of. The blunders of the compositor may be corrected, however gross; but the carelessness of the press-man, when stamped in immortal print, is final and ineffaceable, save by the destruction of the sheet. In fact, his skill and laborious exertions may now

be classed among the fine arts. Literary persons are not aware how much they owe to this obscure but useful class of operatives.⁷²

While lamenting the struggles of the pressman, Smart's thoughts apply to compositors too: their work also demanded concentration and precision, even if Smart was unwilling to admit it. His statement is illustrative of the larger socio-cultural processes related to print production and the corresponding representations of print. They highlight the diminishing recognition of the printer's value, resulting from the shift of attention towards the author as the nucleus rather than a link in the chain of textual creation.⁷³ At a time when employers would choose low labour costs over quality, a reminder of the importance and the intricacies of a good printer's work was all the more necessary, especially since the stakes for printers were as high as Smart (and potentially his colleagues) perceived them. His anxiety stemming from the 'final and ineffaceable' nature of his work as a pressman resonates with the widespread contemporary understanding of print as a permanent and fixed bearer of knowledge and with printers' consciousness of their unique social role of enlighteners. The power bestowed by the press could therefore be too much to bear, especially in a setting where the competition and the supply and demand principle required great speed and efficiency.

The sense of responsibility for producing 'eternal' objects, the perceived lack of recognition, and the pressures that accompanied such a duty in a fast-paced work environment put a strain on Smart's nerves and body throughout his life. In his writing he complains about the 'anxiety of mind and physical exertion' that he had to make at the bar of the press.⁷⁴ Combined with psychological factors such as the pressures of his job and the anxieties of providing for his family, the physical effects of his work rendered Smart 'considerably depressed and fatigued with the unwonted exertion' and incapable of work.⁷⁵ He even shares that, after recovering from one of his more severe episodes of illness, he was

‘advised not to resume the laborious exertion and confinement of the press.’⁷⁶ In his desperation, at a later point he tried escaping the printing office and found temporary employment with a commercial agent and then as a collector for the City Chamberlain.⁷⁷

Smart’s dread and complaints, as well as the advice he received to change his trade, should not be taken lightly. They indicate that he and those around him recognised the detrimental effect of printing on his body and mind. He was forced to continue working to the point of collapse. On 30 November 1860, after ‘the mental anxieties connected with the production of his volume [*Songs of Labour*] ha[d] reduced him to a state of mental depression and bodily debility,’ he was admitted into the Royal Edinburgh Asylum.⁷⁸ Diagnosed with melancholia, he remained in the asylum as a pauper patient until his death in 1866, suffering from various ailments and printing no further lines of verse.⁷⁹

While Smart’s story is unique, his sentiments of his place as a printer in the changing world were shared by others. As I have already mentioned, printers took great pride in their work. In her discussion of nineteenth-century printers’ craft pride, Greenwood argues that its remarkable strength was linked to printers’ awareness of their professional history. They celebrated their famous predecessors (such as Benjamin Franklin, William Caxton and Johannes Gutenberg) and recognised themselves as heirs of their cultural legacy, especially as the periodical press came to be known as the ‘fourth estate’ in the nineteenth century: ‘Printers were proud of the pedigree of their trade largely because of its perceived significance. Printing by moveable type was, and still is, acknowledged as an invention that changed the world.’⁸⁰ Printers felt like ‘a class, on which, more than any other, the great interests and necessities of a civilized society constantly depends.’⁸¹ This sense of responsibility and glory was at odds with the reality that many of them faced: irregular employment, exploitation and poor working conditions were not the rewards journeymen and apprentices would expect or think they deserved.

As a result, many felt disappointed, even desperate. Smart's younger brother, who was also a printer, killed himself in 1862, soon after his discharge from the Royal Edinburgh Asylum, where he had been a resident for four years. The supposed cause of his insanity mentioned in his case notes was 'disappointment in business matters, and constant anxiety and vexation regarding his wife who ha[d] been addicted to intemperance for many years.' 'A short time ago,' his admission note states, 'he was lowered in position in the office where he worked[;] this affected him very much causing great depression.'⁸² Press reports of compositors committing suicide after bouts of unemployment or illness are not hard to find. A compositor called Thomas Thompson slit his throat at the age of 26 after 'ailing for over 12 months.' He had been unemployed for six months and suffered from consumption.⁸³ A 21-year-old Gloucester compositor, unemployed for three months, killed himself, his final letter stating that 'people who can't keep themselves are better out of the world than in.'⁸⁴ John Vogel of Smith & Ebbs in London drowned himself after writing that he had left the firm 'with injured hand, without any compensation, after 15 years' service.' His employers stated that his dismissal had been the result of slackening trade and not his injury.⁸⁵ Whatever the precise reason for Vogel's discharge, his disappointment with his employer and hopelessness were strong enough to induce him to take his life. Finally, a nineteen-year-old compositor and secretary of the *Labour Echo* drowned himself, leaving the following note: 'I am sick of this world of everlasting misery and monotony and hellish competition and ceaseless strife. [...] I can hear (in fancy) the jurors' verdict ("Suicide whilst temporarily insane.") Perhaps it is right. They, the clear-headed and honest English jurors should know.'⁸⁶

This untimely death is telling of the printers' grievances. His ironic prediction of the jurors' indifference to his suicide turns his statement into a broader commentary on the state of the world. Most of the aforementioned deaths were attributed to temporary insanity. Smedley, however, refused to be labelled as insane and therefore dismissed and forgotten: his

actions were the result of his despair in the face of ‘hellish competition’ and ‘ceaseless strife.’⁸⁷ Taken alongside Smart’s story, these reports mark printers’ changing attitudes to their work in the new contexts of industrial capitalist production, and the consequences of that shift on printers’ quality and duration of life.

Printing as Therapy

In the final part of this article, I would like to return to Smart’s case to explore how printing and work in general could be transformed into therapeutic tools, once removed from the competitive capitalist environment. There was a period during which the printing press did not seem as intimidating to Smart. Following a suicide attempt in the summer of 1852, he spent nine months in the same institution where he would later die. During this first stay in the Royal Edinburgh Asylum, Smart appreciated the routine of the asylum and its healing effects and took advantage of the variety of activities that were on offer. He attended the weekly balls, volunteered in the garden, and explored the asylum library. He also got involved in the production of the *Morningside Mirror*, the patients’ monthly magazine. Discussing the printer’s experience in the institution, I will argue that in the environment of the asylum, work, which for Smart had proven to be quite literally toxic, became an enjoyable pastime that earned him a high status in the asylum community and promoted his recuperation. I will use Smart’s example to show that in the therapeutic context of the asylum, where concerns about profit were absent, the meaning of work changed: printing was transformed into a source of healing and offered opportunities for creative expression.

Printing and writing for the *Mirror* was an important aspect of Smart’s residence at Morningside, as it offered him entertainment, allowed him to cultivate his poetry and printing skills, and earned him the favourable treatment of inmates and medical staff alike. He wrote:

[The *Mirror*] was a pleasant source of recreation, as, besides the pleasure of working it off at the press, and keeping my hand in use, it procured me some

small consideration and status among my friends as a literary man [...] even though it be bounded by the walls of the Asylum.⁸⁸

Smart produced his first contribution, a poem titled ‘Invocation to Hope,’ for the issue for August 1852. From that point onwards, he started working at the printing office and contributed regularly under two different pseudonyms, ‘A. S.’ and ‘Alexis.’ As a result of the powers invested in him as the printer of the publication, Smart had a lot of control over its contents and became the major contributor over the months of his stay: the issue for January 1853 contained only his writing. Throughout his stay, Smart ‘continued to job frequently in the printing-office,’ probably aiding the institution by printing documentation such as admission forms and certificates.⁸⁹ Nowhere in his writing is there a complaint of his work at the press in the asylum.

Smart’s evident enthusiasm for printing at Morningside seems at odds with his problematic relationship with his occupation as a pressman outside the asylum, and begs a discussion of the differences between the two settings. In the institution, printing earned Smart a privileged place: he could go to bed a little later than others, play billiards and read in the East House where the more gentlemanly patients resided, and walk without supervision first within and later outside the institution grounds. In the asylum, therefore, Smart found recognition of his printing skills and literary talent and was rewarded for them in a way that was meaningful and palpable in that particular setting. This was in contrast with his life outside, where he felt underappreciated despite his hard work. Smart’s own reflection reinforces the contrast:

The excitement and mental disturbance arising from overworking the brain, and from the perplexities of business and money-making in these stirring times, are generally understood to be the principal agents in filling our Asylums with the victims of brain disease.⁹⁰

Contrary [...] to what may be the general impression, I think there is fully as much happiness and enjoyment of life within the walls of the Asylum, as among any promiscuous section of the sane community, perplexed with the harassing cares and exigencies of life, from which the former may be considered as exempt.⁹¹

In these statements, Smart underlines the function of the asylum as a shelter from the pressures of daily life in a changing society and the unique position of asylum patients in relation to industrial production. Smart's words do not necessarily contradict Andrew Scull's views that the asylum was a place where 'defective human mechanisms were to be repaired so that they could once more compete in the marketplace,' but they shift the blame of oppression to the general social order rather than the institution of the asylum.⁹²

To people ruined by the pressures of competition and financial struggles, the asylum could truly be a retreat where they could recuperate and rediscover pleasure in life. John Starrett Hughes has shown that, according to nineteenth-century ideas of insanity, men 'lived in peril when they performed to excess precisely what their society expected of them.'⁹³ To fix this, the asylum 'promoted values of regularity, cooperation, and industry, albeit in an artificial, noncompetitive arena where conflict was not tolerated.'⁹⁴ Accordingly, the spread of presses in the asylums offered those with literary aspirations or printing skills like Smart a chance to indulge in their passion and feel useful. Benjamin Reiss points out that contributors of *The Opal* (published in New York State Lunatic Asylum, 1851-1860) did not 'need to concern themselves with the market pressures of the literary business', as their periodical was subsidised by the state-funded asylum.⁹⁵ A similar inference can be made about the *Morningside Mirror*: even though it was sold for profit, its price at threepence was insignificant. It was therefore independent of the competitive market of print, so contributors'

intellectual labour was largely recreational. The asylum periodical allowed patients to publish their writing without the anxieties and financial pressures of the literary marketplace.

The evidence of Smart's case extends Hughes's and Reiss's statements to the printers who found themselves in mental institutions as pauper patients. If the mental and physical exhaustion of his job led Smart into the asylum, in Morningside he was given a chance to retreat from the taxing life of a professional printer and rediscover the pleasure of practising his art in a relaxed setting, without the pressures of the marketplace. While working at the asylum press still exposed him to the lead types, the working hours were significantly less. Smart gives an estimate of six hours and a half a day – a bit over half the average hours of a printer. The volume and pace of work was also reduced. Composing the eight pages of the *Mirror* once a month, the annual report once a year, and the occasional forms for the institution seemed more manageable than his usual workload. Food and shelter were provided for and did not depend on productivity. Finally, Smart did not spend all the hours dedicated to work at the printing office. Performed alongside bits of gardening, reading, writing, socialising with other patients and strolling around the grounds, printing was one of the many ways Smart passed his time in Morningside.⁹⁶ Work and recreation could hardly be distinguished.

In the asylum Smart found an ideal model of productivity:

Morningside Asylum is a hive of human activity – a perfect microcosm, comprising, within its walls, almost every department of active industry. Here are printers, tailors, shoemakers [...] engaged at their respective vocations, with a sprinkling of *savants*, literary devotees, poets, quadnuncs [sic], and incomprehensibles, all in perpetual motion, and cheered with the prospect of being restored to their friends and the world, to combat with the active duties

of life, and to bless the day they found retreat in the peaceful hermitage of Morningside.⁹⁷

In his depiction of the buzzing life in the asylum, the idea of productivity is entirely stripped of its focus on profit: there is even a place for the less industrious. While printing outside the asylum made a martyr out of Smart, who paid for his noble occupation with his health, work in the asylum did not require a sacrifice. He came to perceive his institutionalization as God's way of 'vindicating the necessity and the blessing of labour.'⁹⁸ To Smart, work in Morningside was pleasurable and voluntary, a natural function of human existence.

Smart's account also makes a strong case for the therapeutic value of printing and work in general. In *Scenes* he argues that occupation was a central part of the healing process. This sentiment is directly expressed in his comparison between the pauper and the private patients' daily routines:

From my observation of the dreamy life of inaction in the eastern house, resulting from the higher class of patients in that department not being inured to, or capable of, manual labour, I think the chances of recovery there are much less than in the western house, where early rising, a wholesome discipline, and both out-door and in-door labour, suited to the capacity and previous habits of the male patients especially, render the whole community a perfect microcosm and hive of well-regulated industry.⁹⁹

In this description, a well-structured routine that kept patients busy was the key to recovery. Those who deemed it below their stature did not use their time in the asylum well, violated the laws of human nature and suffered the punishment of their idleness. In contrast, Smart came to rediscover the joys of life and the pleasure and fulfilment that work could bring.

The state of seeming bliss, however, could not last indefinitely. Though as a pauper patient Smart was provided for, his family outside the asylum still relied on his financial

support, as he himself recognised: ‘When the hand that provides for the daily wants of a family is paralysed by such a calamity as mine, their little all is soon eaten up, or scattered to the winds, and nothing in general but destitution and the last sad refuge of the pauper is their inevitable doom.’¹⁰⁰ Luckily, Smart recovered soon enough, and by the end of his stay at Morningside, the dread and anxiety he had grown to feel towards printing were gone. He was ready to resume his duties as a professional printer:

I forthwith commenced work at the press in right good earnest, but cautiously and by degrees at first, that I might gradually inure the muscles to the unwonted exertion [...]. I am now, after nine months’ probation in one of the largest establishments in Edinburgh, able to take my share of the work with the youngest and stoutest men in the office, though now in my fifty-sixth year.¹⁰¹

The optimism of these lines shows that Smart’s mental recovery was tightly interwoven with the restoration of his belief in the value of his work and his ability to find satisfaction in it. Thanks to his time in the asylum, Smart felt empowered rather than drained by his labour and found the motivation to resume his duties in the outside world. Though he continued to struggle with his mental and physical health, his experience and reflections are nevertheless insightful. Through his work for the *Morningside Mirror*, Smart found pleasure in his labour, which the outside world had not allowed him to derive. As the principles of profit and supply and demand came to dominate print production, asylum presses had the potential to offer struggling printers work that was both pleasurable and rewarding.

Conclusion

In the introduction to the *Historical Meanings of Work*, Patrick Joyce states that ‘as with any other human activity, work cannot be understood unless it is seen as inseparable from the discursive fields in which it is an integral part.’¹⁰² Thus, understanding printing in the nineteenth century and what it meant to those who performed it demands recognising the

plurality of discourses that particular activity was embedded in and the ways in which they interacted with each other. The press was a symbol of power, progress and enlightenment, and, as I have shown through the examples of Smart and his colleagues, those who could operate it often perceived their work as important to society and even to history. To the cultural value was added the value of skill: by the early nineteenth century, printing was a craft that required training, and competence to work was originally passed down from master to apprentice, and from father to son. Familial and professional traditions surrounding printing therefore often fused, producing a close-knit community that was emphatically male, proud of its role in the world, and hostile towards intruders.

With the lifting of the legal obligations of apprenticeship and the growing demand for print in the course of the nineteenth century, however, the emphasis shifted to profit. Market relations started displacing the traditional system, and formally unqualified workers (apprentices and women) were allowed entry into printing offices, sparking feelings of injustice, frustration and anxiety among journeymen. Fears of unemployment and exploitation were often felt in the community. The intensification of printing and the frequently inadequate and potentially toxic work environment contributed to printers' negative experience of work, occasionally driving them to desperation, insanity or death. Thus, in the context of industrial capitalism, printing came to be perceived as 'unhealthy.' In addition to a noble vocation, working in the printing office was a constant struggle for survival and an ostensible source of bodily and mental disease.

In that context of change, I have shown that the asylum could be a place where printers found a retreat from that struggle, and where work was linked to pleasure and healing from the psychological damage of ceaseless competition. As Smart's case demonstrates, the incorporation of printing in the therapeutic regimes of mental institutions allowed some printers to pursue their otherwise distressing work recreationally, free from the pressures of

competition. It also suggests that one of the major issues for nineteenth-century printers, in addition to overall bodily and mental exhaustion, was the perceived discrepancy between the importance of their work and the lack of recognition. Smart's recovery, in his own account, ran in parallel with his restored sense of usefulness and importance, as in Morningside he received meaningful rewards for his labour. By allowing workers to withdraw from the world of competition and offering them recognition of their skill, the asylum transformed printing and work more generally from a poison into a cure.

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¹ Patrick Duffy, *The Skilled Compositor, 1850-1914: An Aristocrat Among Working Men* (Ashgate: Aldershot, 2000), 98.

² The problem of generalizations based on occupation and class-based analysis of labour has been discussed in Emma L. Greenwood, 'Work, Identity and Letterpress Printers in Britain, 1750–1850' (PhD diss., University of Manchester, 2015), 13-16.

³ See Sam Kean, 'Investigating the Ills of Long-Dead Celebrities,' *Science* 337, no. 6090 (2012): 30-31. *JSTOR*, 2020 and Osamu Muramoto, 'Retrospective Diagnosis of a Famous Historical Figure: Ontological, Epistemic, and Ethical Considerations,' *Philosophy, Ethics, and Humanities in Medicine*, 9 (2014): n.p. <https://doi.org/10.1186/1747-5341-9-10>.

⁴ Peter Elmer, 'Introduction,' in *The Healing Arts: Health, Disease and Society in Europe, 1500–1800* (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 2004), xi-xxiv, xv.

⁵ The studies dealing most closely with occupational health are Duffy, *The Skilled Compositor*, 102-05 and Greenwood, 'Work, Identity and Letterpress Printers in Britain,' 50-52. General depictions of the trade and the occupational health risks associated with it can be found in Hellmut Lehmann-Haupt, Lawrence C. Wroth and Rollo G. Silver, eds., *The Book in America: A History of the Making and Selling of Books in the United States*, 2nd ed. (New York: R. R. Bowker Company, 1952); Sarah C. Gillespie, *A Hundred Years of Progress: The Record of the Scottish Typographical Association, 1853 to 1952* ([Glasgow]: Printed for the [Scottish

Typographical] Association by Robert Maclehose and Co., Ltd, 1953), 134. *Nineteenth Century Collections Online*; Richard D. Altick, *The English Common Reader: A Social History of the Mass Reading Public, 1800–1900* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1957); Bill Bell, ed., *The Edinburgh History of the Book in Scotland, Vol. 3: Ambition and Industry 1800–80*, vol. 3 (Edinburgh: Edinburgh University Press, 2007); Scott E. Casper, et al., eds., *A History of the Book in America: Volume 3: The Industrial Book, 1840–1880* (Chapel Hill: The University of North Carolina Press, 2007); S. J. Michael F. Suarez and Michael L. Turner, eds., *The Cambridge History of the Book in Britain: Volume 5: 1695–1830* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2009); Andrew King, Alexis Easley and John Morton, eds., *The Routledge Handbook to Nineteenth-Century British Periodicals and Newspapers* (London: Routledge, 2016).

⁶ Duffy has even suggested that ‘that working in printing was less healthy than working in coalmining, bricklaying and tanning.’ He, however, acknowledges the multiple variables that affect the numbers of mortality, many of which are not related to occupation. See *The Skilled Compositor*, 103–05.

⁷ Greenwood, ‘Work, Identity and Letterpress Printers,’ 51.

⁸ ‘Acquiring Manly Competence: The Demise of Apprenticeship and the Remasculinization of Printers’ Work,’ in *Meanings for Manhood: Constructions of Masculinity in Victorian America*, eds. Mark C. Carnes and Clyde Griffen (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1990), 152–163, 159.

⁹ Duffy, *The Skilled Compositor*, 104.

¹⁰ On the problematic application of the term ‘aristocrat of labour’ to printers, see Duffy, *The Skilled Compositor*, 210 and Greenwood, ‘Work, Identity and Letterpress Printers,’ 13. On printers’ privileged social position, see Seymour Martin Lipset, Martin A. Trow, and James Samuel Coleman, *Union Democracy: The Internal Politics of the International Typographical Union* (Glencoe, IL: The Free Press, 1956), 30; Bruce Laurie, ‘Labor and Labor Organization,’ in *A History of the Book in America*, 70–89, 77–78 and Lawrence C. Wroth and Rollo G. Silver, ‘Book Production and Distribution from the American Revolution to the War between the States,’ in *The Book in America*, 61–136, 97–98 (see n.4 for full references).

¹¹ Laurie, ‘Labor and Labor Organization,’ 77.

¹² See Emma L. Greenwood, ‘Chapter Four: Family Firms,’ in ‘Work, Identity and Letterpress Printers in Britain, 1750–1850,’ 117–142; John Rule, ‘The Property of Skill in the Period of Manufacture,’ in *The Historical Meanings of Work*, ed. Patrick Joyce (Cambridge University Press, 1987), 99–118, 111; Duffy, *The Skilled Compositor*, 49–50.

¹³ Rule, ‘The Property of Skill,’ 104–05; Duffy, *The Skilled Compositor*, 52.

¹⁴ Rule, 'The Property of Skill,' 107-12; Trevor Howard-Hill, 'Printing,' in *The Edinburgh History of the Book in Scotland*, 32-48, 41-44 (see n.4); Laurie, 'Labor and Labor Organization,' 77-79; Baron, 'Acquiring Manly Competence,' 153-54.

¹⁵ Rule, 'The Property of Skill,' 104; Bernard Elbaum, 'Why Apprenticeship Persisted in Britain but Not in the United States,' *The Journal of Economic History* 49, no. 2 (1989): 337-49.

¹⁶ By employers I mean master printers who owned printing equipment and hired others (journeymen and apprentices) to operate it. These printers were not admitted to typographical societies, as it was with them that these organizations negotiated in order to protect workers' rights. See Duffy, *The Skilled Compositor*, 56 and 158-65.

¹⁷ Elbaum, 'Why Apprenticeships Persisted in Britain,' 346-47.

¹⁸ Duffy, *The Skilled Compositor*, 55-56.

¹⁹ Baron, 'Acquiring Manly Competence,' 154.

²⁰ For more detailed discussions of the apprentice and women questions, see Ava Baron's 'Acquiring Manly Competence' and 'Questions of Gender: Deskillling and Demasculinization in the US. Printing Industry, 1830-1915,' *Gender & History* 1, no. 2 (1989): 178-199; Duffy, 'Workplace Control and Issues of Gender' in *The Skilled Compositor*, 126-56; Trevor Howard-Hill, 'Printing,' 43-45.

²¹ Rule, 'The Property of Skill,' 103.

²² 'Oracle of Health,' 'Diseases of Printers,' *Liberator*, July 11, 1835, 112.

²³ 'Workmen's Diseases,' *All the Year Round*, October 26, 1864, 272-75, 274.

²⁴ Howard-Hill, 'Printing,' 41-43; Worth and Silver, 'Book Production and Distribution,' 97; Laurie, 'Labor and Labor Organization,' 79.

²⁵ Charles Manby Smith, *The Working-man's Way in the World: Being the Autobiography of a Journeyman Printer* (New York: Redfield, 1854), 284. Though many of the events in Smith's account have been exposed as fabrications, there is no reason to distrust his first-hand observations of the printing trade. See Simon Nowell-Smith, 'Charles Manby Smith: His Family and Friends, His Fantasies and Fabrications,' *Journal of the Printing Historical Society* 7 (1972): 1-28.

²⁶ Smith, *The Working-man's Way in the World*, 289.

²⁷ *Ibid.*, 291.

²⁸ Howard-Hill, 'Printing,' 41; Duffy, *The Skilled Compositor*, 119.

²⁹ *Movable Types: Roving Creative Printers of the Victorian World* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2018), 39.

³⁰ Greenwood, 'Work, Identity and Letterpress Printers,' 52.

³¹ *The Factory System and the Factory Acts* (London, Methuen: 1894), 92.

³² *The Effects of Arts, Trades, and Professions, and of Civic States and Habits of Living, on Health and Longevity*, 2nd ed. (London: Longman, 1832), 42-43.

³³ *A Hundred Years*, 134.

³⁴ Andrew McDougall, *Reputation for Excellence, Volume 1: Edinburgh* (Edinburgh: Scottish Printing Archival Trust, 1990), 11.

³⁵ *The Skilled Compositor*, 103.

³⁶ Gillespie, *A Hundred Years*, 134.

³⁷ Arthur Newsholme, 'Honours Hygiene,' *The Practical Teacher*, November 1890, 393-94, 394. The other professions listed are 'earthenware makers, painters (including plumbers and glaziers) and file-makers.' See also Laurie, 'Labor and Labor Organization,' 79; Duffy, *The Skilled Compositor*, 103.

³⁸ *The Working-man's Way in the World*, 255.

³⁹ Thackrah, *The Effects of Arts, Trades, and Professions*, 42-43; 'Oracle of Health,' 112; Duffy, *The Skilled Compositor*, 103-04. In 1835 *The Lancet* reviewed a French study which challenged Thackrah's grim portrayal of the occupational health hazards associated with printing. The investigation shows that mortality among Parisian printers was not as high as Thackrah stated, and that, though the presence of metallic dust in the air made it 'almost impossible to rear up cats in these establishments,' none of the diseases Thackrah lists were as markedly prevalent among printers in Paris (see 'French Journals,' *The Lancet*, May 23, 1835, 258-60, 259-60). However, the reviewer takes the French study as unproblematically opposing Thackrah's observations, without reflecting much on the geographical differences between the two samples.

⁴⁰ 'William Augustus Guy, M.D., examined,' in *First Report of the Commissioners for Inquiring into the State of Large Towns and Populous Districts* (London: Printed by W. Clowes & Sons, 1844), 89-102, 99.

⁴¹ [John Tatham], 'Occupational Mortality,' *The Lancet*, February 2, 1898, 457-458, 458.

⁴² Daniel Hack Tuke, *Dictionary of Psychological Medicine, Giving the Definition, Etymology and Synonyms of the Terms Used in Medical Psychology, with the Symptoms, Treatment, and Pathology of Insanity and the Law of Lunacy in Great Britain and Ireland* (Philadelphia: P. Blakiston, Son & Co, 1892), 2: 745-46.

⁴³ Richard Gillespie, 'Accounting for Lead Poisoning: The Medical Politics of Occupational Health,' *Social History* 15, no. 3 (1990): 303-31, 305; J. M. S. Pearce, 'Burton's Line in Lead Poisoning,' *European Neurology* 57, no. 2 (2007): 118-19.

⁴⁴ For William Guy's original table, see William Augustus Guy, 'Contributions to a Knowledge of the Influence of Employments upon Health,' *Quarterly Journal of the Statistical Society of London* 6, no. 3 (1843): 197-211, 201.

⁴⁵ See *Census of Great Britain, 1851. Population Tables*, vol. 1 (London: Printed by George Edward Eyre and William Spottiswoode, 1854), *ProQuest: UK Parliamentary Papers*, ccxxiii and cccxxxii; *Census of England and Wales for the Year 1861. Population Tables* (London: Printed by George Edward Eyre and William Spottiswoode, 1863), *ProQuest: UK Parliamentary Papers*, xlvi and cviii; *Eighth Decennial Census of the Population of Scotland Taken 3d April 1871, with Report*, vol. 2 (Edinburgh: Murray and Gibb, 1874), *ProQuest: UK Parliamentary Papers*, 538.

⁴⁶ See also 'Occupations of the Male Inhabitants,' *The Seventh Census of the United States: 1850* (Washington: Robert Armstrong, 1853), lxxvii-lxxxv, lxxv, <https://www.census.gov/library/publications/1853/dec/1850a.html>; 'Recapitulation of the Tables of Population, Nativity, and Occupation,' *Population of the United States in 1860* (Washington: Government Printing Office, 1864), 591-680, 673 <https://www.census.gov/library/publications/1864/dec/1860a.html>; Table XXIX. Number of Persons in the United States, Engaged in each Special Occupation, with Distinction of Age and Sex, and of Nativity,' *Ninth Census – Volume I. The Statistics of the Population of the United States* (Washington: Government Printing Office, 1872), 703-15, 714, <https://www.census.gov/library/publications/1872/dec/1870a.html>.

⁴⁷ On nineteenth-century mental healthcare in Britain and America, see Gerald N. Grob, *The Mad Among Us: A History of the Care of America's Mentally Ill* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1994); Edward Shorter, *A History of Psychiatry: From the Era of the Asylum to the Age of Prozac* (New York: John Wiley & Sons, 1997); Peter Bartlett and David Wright, eds., *Outside the Walls of the Asylum: The History of Care and Community, 1750-2000* (London: Athlone Press, 1999).

⁴⁸ *Census of England and Wales for the Year 1871. General Report* (London: Printed by George Edward Eyre and William Spottiswoode, 1863), *ProQuest: UK Parliamentary Papers*, lxiv-lxv.

⁴⁹ Daniel Hack Tuke, *William Tuke the Founder of the York Retreat* (York: Printed at the Retreat, 1855). Combe.3(12), Combe Collection, National Library of Scotland, Edinburgh.

⁵⁰ 'Condensed Intelligence,' *Exeter and Plymouth Gazette*, December 6, 1845.

⁵¹ Several studies discuss periodical publishing in mental institutions, although they focus almost explicitly on patients' writing and its purposes, occasionally omitting the fact that asylum publications were printed in-house by inmates. See Maryrose Eannace, 'Lunatic Literature: New York State's "The Opal," 1850-1860' (PhD diss, State University of New York at Albany, 2001); Benjamin Reiss, 'Brothers and Sisters of Asylumia: Literary Life in the New York State Lunatic Asylum' in *Theaters of Madness: Insane Asylums and Nineteenth-Century American Culture* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2008), 23-50; Jill McMillan, 'Writer Heal Thyself: The "New Moon," Patient Agency and the Crichton Royal Institution' (master's thesis, University of Guelph, 2008); Mary de Young, 'Expressive Therapy' in *Encyclopedia of Asylum Therapeutics, 1750-1950s* (Jefferson, NC: McFarland & Company, 2015), 101-20, 118-119.

⁵² 'Our Contemporaries,' *Excelsior, the Murray Royal Institution Literary Gazette*, January 1866, 2-8, 7. The author of the article was probably Dr William Lauder Lindsay, the Superintendent of the asylum, who was also the editor of the periodical.

⁵³ David Skae, 'Physician's Annual Report of the Royal Edinburgh Asylum for the Insane for the Year 1852,' in *Annual Report of the Royal Edinburgh Asylum for the Insane for the Year 1852* (Edinburgh: Printed at the Royal Asylum Press, 1853), 13-37, 36.

⁵⁴ While cases of exploitation of patients' labour and abuse mar the humanistic portrayal of psychiatry, the fact that theory was not always applied in practice does not mean that it was not applied at all. Several recent discussions of the use of work and recreation in asylums show the complexity of asylum reality: Waltraud Ernst, ed., *Work, Psychiatry and Society, C.1750-2015* (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 2016); Benjamin Reiss, *Theaters of Madness: Insane Asylums and Nineteenth-Century American Culture* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2008); Rob Ellis, 'Asylums and Sport: Participation, Isolation and the Role of Cricket in the Treatment of the Insane,' *International Journal of the History of Sport*, 30 (2013): 83-101; Dolly MacKinnon, "'Amusements Are Provided": Asylum Entertainment and Recreation in Australia and New Zealand C.1860-C.1945,' in *Permeable Walls: Historical Perspectives on Hospital and Asylum Visiting*, ed. by Graham Mooney and Jonathan Reinartz (Amsterdam: Rodopi, 2009), 267-88.

⁵⁵ *Casebook 8*. Manuscript. Pp. 155-56, New York State Archives, *Patient Casebooks of New York State Lunatic Asylum at Utica*, quoted in Maryrose Eannace, 'Lunatic literature: New York State's *The Opal*, 1850-1860,' 78.

⁵⁶ Joseph Draper, *The Vermont Asylum for the Insane. Its Annals for Fifty Years* (Brattleboro: Printed for Hildreth & Fales, 1887), 85.

⁵⁷ 'A Prominent Journalist Dead,' *The Titusville Morning Herald*, December 28, 1881, 1.

⁵⁸ Ibid.

⁵⁹ See Alexander Smart, *Scenes From the Life of a Sufferer* (Edinburgh: Edinburgh Royal Asylum, 1855).

⁶⁰ Charles Rogers, 'Alexander Smart,' in *The Modern Scottish Minstrel; or, The songs of Scotland of the past half century, with memoirs of the poets, and sketches and specimens in English verse of the most celebrated modern Gaelic bards*, ed. Charles Rogers (Edinburgh: Adam & Charles Black, 1857), 5:71-76, 72.

⁶¹ For evidence of his career development, see Alexander Smart, 'Address, Delivered at a Convivial Meeting of Printers Connected with the Caledonian Mercury Office,' in *Rambling Rhymes* (Edinburgh: Adam and Charles Black, 1834), 177-83; 'Verses on a Similar Occasion,' in *Rambling Rhymes* (Edinburgh: Adam and Charles Black, 1834), 184-89; Letter from Alex. Smart to David Robertson, October 8, 1842, MS Robertson 19, item 246, Glasgow University Library, Glasgow; 'Death of Mr Alexander Smart,' *Paisley Herald and Renfrewshire Advertiser*, November 17, 1866, 7.

⁶² *Rambling Rhymes* (Edinburgh: A. & C. Black, 1834); *Rambling Rhymes*, 2nd ed. (Edinburgh: J. Menzies, 1845); *Songs of Labour and Domestic Life* (Edinburgh: W. P. Nimmo, 1860). For examples of his poetry in the press, see 'Stanzas for the Burns Festival,' *Dundee Courier*, August 13, 1844, 2; 'Snuff and Tobacco,' *Elgin Courier*, May 16, 1845, 4; 'Lines on the Inauguration of the Hume Statue,' *Caledonian Mercury*, September 29, 1859, 3. Quotations from Smart's poetry appear in the reviews of his collections: see 'Literature,' *The Scotsman*, September 20, 1845, 4 and 'Songs of Labour,' *Tait's Edinburgh Magazine*, October 1860, 555-56.

⁶³ Rogers, 'Alexander Smart,' 73.

⁶⁴ Finkelstein, *Movable Types*, 159.

⁶⁵ 'Songs of Labour,' *Tait's Edinburgh Magazine*, October 1860, 555-56; David Herschell Edwards, 'Alexander Smart', *One Hundred Modern Scottish Poets: With Biographical and Critical Notices* (Brechin: D. H. Edwards, 1888), 11:72-83, 75. For further details about Smart's literary career, see Finkelstein, *Movable Types*, 124-25.

⁶⁶ Rogers, 'Alexander Smart', 73.

⁶⁷ Manuscript Case Notes of Alexander Smart in Case Books, 1840-1932, vol. 14, LHB 7/51/14, pp. 334-35; 337-38. Royal Edinburgh Hospital Collection, Lothian Health Services Archive, Edinburgh.

⁶⁸ 'Death of Mr Alexander Smart,' *Paisley Herald and Renfrewshire Advertiser*, November 17, 1866, 7. The first edition of his first poetry collection, *Rambling Rhymes* (1834), was printed by the firm of Thomas Allan & Co, where Smart was employed at the time. The second, enlarged edition of 1845 was printed by Andrew Murray in Edinburgh, while the printers of *Songs of Labour* (his second collection, published in 1860) were

Miller & Fairly. It is not known whether at the time of the two later publications Smart was associated with these firms, but it is not impossible, given Smart's connections in the printing trade.

⁶⁹ *Songs of Labour and Domestic Life* (Edinburgh: W. P. Nimmo, 1860), 48-52, 49. See also Alex. Smart, 'A Song of the Press', *Scottish Typographical Circular*, March 1858, 17.

⁷⁰ Ibid, 'Welcome to Edinburgh,' in *Songs of Labour*, 52-54, 54.

⁷¹ Ibid, 'Franklin,' in *Songs of Labour*, 23-26, 25-26.

⁷² 'Leaves from an Autobiography. Chap. I,' 385.

⁷³ Jacqueline Rhodes, 'Copyright, Authorship and the Professional Writer: The Case of William Wordsworth,' *Cardiff Corvey: Reading the Romantic Text* 8, no. 1 (2002): 4-5.

<http://www.cf.ac.uk/encap/corvey/articles/cc08_n02.html> [accessed on 4 June 2019].

⁷⁴ 'Leaves from an Autobiography. Chap. I', 385.

⁷⁵ *Scenes*, 4.

⁷⁶ 'Leaves from an Autobiography. Chap. II,' *Hogg's Weekly Instructor* 7 (1851), 413-16, 416.

⁷⁷ *Scenes*, 5.

⁷⁸ 'A Relative,' 'Mr Alexander Smart,' *The Scotsman*, January 11, 1861, 3; G. H., 'Mr Alexander Smart the Poet, and His Book,' *The Scotsman*, January 18, 1861, 3.

⁷⁹ General Register of Patients, 1817-1965, LHB 7/35/2, Royal Edinburgh Hospital Collection, Lothian Health Services Archive, Edinburgh.

⁸⁰ Greenwood, 'Work, Identity and Letterpress Printers,' 69-71.

⁸¹ This statement was made in G. H. Snelling's correspondence, read at the convention of the International Typographical Union in Boston in 1859, quoted in George A. Tracy, *History of the Typographical Union* ([Indianapolis]: The International Typographical Union, 1913), 180.

⁸² Manuscript Case Notes of James Smart in Case Books, 1840-1932, vol. 10, LHB 7/51/10, pp. 602-03; 612. Royal Edinburgh Hospital Collection, Lothian Health Services Archive, Edinburgh. For more information about James Smart, see Finkelstein, *Movable Types*, 124-25.

⁸³ 'Suicide of a Composer,' *Edinburgh Evening News*, November 24, 1879, 2.

⁸⁴ 'Suicide of a Gloucester Composer,' *Gloucester Citizen*, May 7, 1897, 4.

⁸⁵ 'Composer's Suicide,' *Yorkshire Evening Post*, May 9, 1893, 3.

⁸⁶ 'Sick of the World!,' *Hull Daily Mail*, August 16, 1898, 2.

⁸⁷ See also 'Sad Suicide of a Composer,' *Sheffield Daily Telegraph*, August 16, 1881, 3;

⁸⁸ *Scenes*, 22.

⁸⁹ Smart, *Scenes*, 34.

⁹⁰ Smart, *Scenes*, 30.

⁹¹ *Ibid*, 33.

⁹² Scull, *Social Order / Mental Disorder: Anglo-American Psychiatry in Historical Perspective* (London: Routledge, 1989), 94.

⁹³ John Starrett Hughes, 'The Madness of Separate Spheres: Insanity and Masculinity in Victorian Alabama,' in *Meanings for Manhood: Constructions of Masculinity in Victorian America*, ed. by Mark C. Carnes and Clyde Griffen (Chicago, ILL: University of Chicago Press, 1990), 53-66, 56.

⁹⁴ *Ibid*, 63.

⁹⁵ Benjamin Reiss, 'Letters from Asylumia: *The Opal* and the Cultural Work of the Lunatic Asylum, 1851-1860,' *American Literary History* 16, no. 1 (2004), 1-28, 17.

⁹⁶ For his own detailed description of his daily routine, see 'Alexis,' 'A Chapter on Cheerfulness,' *Morningside Mirror*, September 15, 1852, 93-96, 96.

⁹⁷ *Ibid*, 95.

⁹⁸ Smart, *Scenes*, 22.

⁹⁹ *Ibid*, 21.

¹⁰⁰ Smart, *Scenes*, 34.

¹⁰¹ *Ibid*, 34-35.

¹⁰² 'The Historical Meanings of Work: An Introduction,' in *The Historical Meanings of Work*, ed. by Patrick Joyce (Cambridge University Press, 1987), 1-30, 12.