

## GENDER POLICY, THE LONDON LOCK ASYLUM COMMITTEE (1836-1842) AND THE ASYLUM REGULATIONS FOR 1840

María Isabel Romero Ruiz  
Universidad de Málaga  
mirr@uma.es

The London Lock Hospital was a charitable institution founded in the eighteenth century for the cure of venereal disease both in men and women. However, the London Lock Asylum was added with the aim of reforming prostitutes and fallen women who had been previously released from the Hospital. They were religiously and morally instructed and trained for a working-class job. The Lock Asylum Committee minutes for 1836-1842 included certain entries for patients for 1824; the Asylum Regulations for 1840 are part of a manuscript containing the Laws of the London Lock Hospital and Asylum. These regulations are particularly relevant to an understanding of the way an institution like this works, the official mechanisms established for admittance and refusal, as well as for release and provision for the future of these women. Therefore, this paper seeks to examine the role of institutional policy at the beginning of the Victorian era in the cure and reform of women who were considered sexually deviant.

Keywords: gender identity; gender policy; lock asylum; minutes; regulations; deviant women

---

### ***POLÍTICA DE GÉNERO, EL COMITÉ DEL ASILO PARA ENFERMEDADES VENÉREAS DE LONDRES (1836-1842) Y LAS NORMAS DEL ASILO PARA 1840***

*El Hospital de Enfermedades Venéreas de Londres era una institución filantrópica fundada en el siglo XVIII para la cura de enfermedades de transmisión sexual tanto para mujeres como para hombres. Sin embargo, el Asilo de Londres fue añadido con el objeto de reformar mujeres caídas y prostitutas dadas de alta en el Hospital. Eran instruidas moralmente y religiosamente y se les enseñaba una profesión propia de la clase trabajadora. Las Actas del Comité del Asilo 1836-1842 incluían algunas entradas para pacientes de 1824; las Normas del asilo para 1840 son parte de un manuscrito que contiene las Leyes del Hospital de Enfermedades Venéreas y del Asilo. Estas normas son especialmente relevantes para entender el modo en que una institución como ésta trabaja, estableciendo los mecanismos oficiales para la admisión o el rechazo de solicitudes, así como para el alta y la provisión futura de estas mujeres. Por lo tanto, este artículo trata de examinar el papel de la política institucional al comienzo de la era victoriana en la cura y reforma de mujeres que se consideraban sexualmente desviadas.*

*Palabras clave: identidad de género; política de género; asilo de enfermedades venéreas; actas; normas; mujeres desviadas*

## 1. Introduction

The London Lock Hospital was one of the specialized hospitals created in the eighteenth century and run by public subscription for the treatment of venereal disease in men and women.<sup>1</sup> Subsequently, the London Lock Asylum was established to continue with the moral cure of promiscuous women who had just been released from the Hospital and had a good disposition for reformation. These women had to go through a probationary stage before being admitted into the Asylum. After that period, they stayed for a couple of years to be religiously instructed and morally restored. They were also taught to be industrious and were trained in a working-class job. Therefore, their gender identities were moulded according to the dominant discourses of patriarchy and the middle-class. Class distinctions were very important at the time and the boundaries between them were clearly demarcated; fallen women and prostitutes were members of the working-class and were the beneficiaries of the medical treatment and the moral cure at the London Lock Hospital and Asylum;<sup>2</sup> they received the help of the members of the middle-class who devoted their time and energy to philanthropy and rescue work and reform.

Although David Innes Williams, in his 1995 book *The London Lock: A Charitable Hospital, 1746-1952*, writes a careful history of the Hospital from its foundation in 1746 to its closure in 1952, analysing different periods in relation to aspects such as the treatment of venereal disease, medical theory and practice, the patients, the staff, the governors, finance, the Chapel and chaplains, the buildings and the situation of the Hospital and Asylum at the different stages of their existence, there are other aspects which need further consideration. Those aspects concerning the female patients and penitents and the social and moral implications of the treatment of Victorian prostitutes and fallen women were especially important. Williams's work is based, as is mine, on the archives of the London Lock Hospital and Asylum that have survived and are kept at the Royal College of Surgeons of England Library in London.

Other scholars have also focused their attention on different reform institutions and hospitals. One of them is Judith Walkowitz (1980), who writes about the Royal Albert and the Royal Portsmouth, two hospitals which had lock wards for women in Southampton and Portsmouth respectively; Frances Finnegan (1979) talks about rescue and reform at the York Penitentiary. This Penitentiary had many similarities with the London Lock Asylum, regarding the running of the institution, its fund-raising propaganda and its aims in reforming and teaching prostitutes and fallen women; Linda Mahood (1990) deals with the Glasgow Lock Hospital and Asylum in several chapters as an example of a Scottish institution for the reform and cure of Victorian prostitutes. Finally, Frances Finnegan (2001) deals with the history of Magdalene institutions in Ireland; she establishes a comparison between the English and the Irish systems, highlighting the importance of the Catholic element in the latter, which made rescue work of deviant women a completely different matter. In the case of Ireland, the asylum and penitentiary system was under the control of nuns and the Catholic Church, and, in particular, the Good Shepherd Sisters "committed to the reform of fallen women, were

<sup>1</sup> The author wishes to acknowledge the funding provided by the Spanish Ministry of Science and Research for the writing of this paper (Research Project FEM2010-18142)

<sup>2</sup> There were obviously prostitutes for upper-class men but they used to go to private doctors when they suffered from venereal disease.

to dominate the Female Penitentiary Movement in Ireland” (Finnegan 2001: 10). They began to open Magdalene Asylums in the first decade of the nineteenth century and continued with their mission throughout the twentieth, when some of the asylums began to be closed after 1950. However, I have chosen to focus this article on the London Lock because, despite being one of the first institutions of its kind in Britain and one of the most important, it has systematically been ignored in the scholarly work that has been done on institutions of this type in recent decades.

The Lock Asylum Committee minutes for 1836-1842 include entries for patients for 1824, apparently written by the matron in charge; the rest of the manuscript contains the Asylum Committee minutes of the board that met regularly once a week, dealing mainly with financial matters, although there are some interesting remarks that can give important information about how the Asylum worked.

The Asylum Regulations for 1840 (revised in 1848), are part of a manuscript containing the Laws of the London Lock Hospital and Asylum, printed at Chapman Printer, Star Street, Paddington. These thirteen regulations are particularly relevant to understand the way in which an institution like this works, establishing the official mechanisms for admittance and refusal, as well as for release and provision for the future of these women who were called *Female Penitents*. Also established are the different rules to be applied to the inmates and the aims and activities connected with the Lock Asylum.

All these sources – including Annual Reports and Accounts that will be mentioned later in the text – were mostly generated by the institutions themselves. Furthermore, they constituted one precondition for a continued flow of donations. However, even such regulations are far better than nothing, as we can hardly expect many – or, perhaps, any – perspectives to survive from those who had been inmates.

Hence, following a poststructuralist approach based on medical and religious discourses, this paper seeks to examine the role of institutional policy at the beginning of the Victorian era in the cure and reform of women who were considered sexually deviant. The idea behind the latter was to mould working-class prostitutes and fallen women according to middle-class values of respectability and purity, thus shaping a gender identity associated with middle-class values. This policy was ‘unofficial’ in the sense that there was no state intervention, as the London Lock was a charitable body dependant on public support. In this respect, it had no powers of enforcement, although other mechanisms such as persuasion, brainwashing or detention were employed.

In the light of Post-structuralism, Foucault’s ideas of power and discourse to exert the control and surveillance of deviant elements in society will be used to analyse the life and work of these fallen women inside the London Lock Asylum.

According to Foucault, societies are not static structures, and power relations pervade them. The body obtains its significance within discourse, which can be defined as a way of describing, defining, classifying and thinking about people, things, and even knowledge and abstract systems of thought. Power-knowledge relations are part of spatial relations that assign a specific place to different bodies, depending on their gender, class and race, using binary codes. In his first volume of *The History of Sexuality*, Foucault asserts that power is exercised in what he calls its “capillary forms” (1990: 92-98), that is, through multiple and complex ways, and not by individuals or single groups; rather, he talks of various and shifting positions of power and resistance within a network of relations. In *Discipline and Punish* (1975), he argues that power is primarily exercised on the body and that the model has moved from physical punishment and violence to disciplining bodily actions through knowledge in the different discourses of an age, and through institutions

like prisons, hospitals, asylums, etc. Therefore, disciplinary power has become the most efficient and economical way of producing docile and useful bodies; this was the idea behind the London Lock Asylum.

## 2. The history of the Lock Asylum

The London Lock Hospital was founded in 1746 by William Bromfield, following the trend of specialized hospitals in the 18<sup>th</sup> century.<sup>3</sup> The perception of the need to establish a hospital for venereal disease can be found in many of the Annual Reports and Accounts that the Hospital produced as a way of raising money and moving middle-class minds to contribute to the running of the Institution, as the Account for 1837 shows, where the following is stated:

The malady, to the cure of which the Lock Hospital is appropriated, peculiarly requires medical assistance; and if neglected, or improperly treated, it must terminate fatally by the most dreadful progress of lingering sufferings; while at the same time, it is more generable cured than most other diseases. We may, indeed, consider the dire distemper itself, as a declaration how greatly and holy God abhors licentiousness; yet hath he mercifully provided medicines which seldom fail, when judiciously used, to eradicate it completely. We ought, therefore, doubtless to imitate his compassion to the persons of the guilty, as well as his hatred of their crimes (The Archives, RCSEng, ref. MS0022/3/8).

These lines are a clear declaration of intentions at a time when venereal disease was most despised and associated with promiscuity and lack of morals. Common elements in the medical and religious discourses of the Victorian period are found in these words. On the one hand, venereal disease, as an illness with appropriate medicines for its treatment, must be cured; on the other hand, 'the lingering sufferings' associated with venereal disease are the just punishment of God and the consequences of licentiousness. Not only were the aims of the Hospital to cure the 'undeserving poor', while simultaneously controlling the morality of the working-classes, but also to prevent the spread of a malady which was affecting various sectors of Victorian society,

As far as the religious discourse of the time was concerned, "both the Established Church and the dissenters claimed a missionary aim to make the whole population clean, healthy, moral and religious" (Nead 1988: 156). The Church supported the idea of the 'downward path' of deviant elements in general and prostitutes and fallen women in particular, and claimed its power to reform and control these individuals. In addition, through its priests and their sermons, the Church contributed to the raising of funds, as was the case with the London Lock Chapel. These sermons attracted a middle-class audience who helped with donations.<sup>4</sup> We must not forget that Evangelicalism believed,

---

<sup>3</sup> William Bromfield was one of a small group of men, the Surgeons to the Great Hospitals of London, who in the eighteenth century established a tradition of general surgery which was to dominate British surgical practice until well into the twentieth. Surgeon to HRH the Prince of Wales and to St. George's Hospital, he saw the need of a hospital to attend people with venereal disease, who could not be treated at general hospitals.

<sup>4</sup> Martin Madan (1726-1790) was appointed Chaplain to the Lock twelve years after its foundation; he was the founder of the Chapel and provided the Hospital and Asylum with the Evangelical element, obtaining substantial income from his sermons and hymns. His successors continued with his task, and the Chapel was finished in 1753 with funds coming from a separate list

according to the Bible, that women were subordinated to men socially, but, at the same time, serious Christians “firmly believed in the right of all women to salvation” (Davidoff and Hall 1992: 114) as, following the Scripture, “...there is neither male nor female for ye are all one in Christ Jesus” (Gal. 3, 28).

The London Lock Asylum for the Reception of Female Penitents was established in 1792, and the Chaplain Thomas Scott was the man behind the charitable project.<sup>5</sup> It was founded by a different appeal and list of subscribers from that of the London Lock Hospital, although “it included many of the Hospital Governors, all the medical staff and some seven ladies” (Innes Williams 1995: 57). Its first location was Osnaburgh Row, at the bottom of Grosvenor Place. Later, the Asylum moved to Knightsbridge, where it housed between 20 and 30 women. Finally, new buildings for the Hospital and Asylum were opened in 1842 in Westbourne Green and the number of Asylum inmates amounted to 80. A Ladies’ Committee was later created in 1847 to supervise the organization and management of this home for fallen women. Only women who had been cured of venereal disease and showed a clear inclination for instruction and reform were admitted to the Lock Asylum. Following the Victorian trend of definition and classification, the blame for sexual promiscuity and immorality was ascribed only to women and not to men, because according to the *Account of the Lock Hospital and Asylum of 1834*,

...while the male patients, when cured, return to their former occupations, without any peculiar obstacle to their reformation, most of the women are of that class whose misery and baneful influence have been noticed; many of them have no method of subsistence but by prostitution, and can procure no lodging but in a house of infamy. These have scarcely any alternative, but of starving on the one hand, or returning to their former practices on the other. (The Archives, RCSEng, ref. MS0022/3/8)

Prostitution became one of the Victorians’ major concerns. Many doctors, reformers and social investigators such as William Acton, William Logan, Henry Mayhew, William Tate, Arthur J.S. Maddison, Bracebridge Hemmyng, etc., became involved in the rescue of fallen women, together with such women philanthropists as Harriet Martineau, Josephine Butler, Florence Nightingale or Ellice Hopkins. Prostitutes were known as the *Great Social Evil*, but there was no clear definition of prostitute, and the boundaries between prostitute and fallen woman were also blurred. The prostitute was defined in Victorian discourses as a woman who had been seduced and abandoned with no family or friends to turn to; she then resorted to prostitution in order to make a living. There were two prevalent images of the prostitute in the medical and religious discourses: as a figure of contagion and disease that represented a threat to society and had to be controlled and contained, or as an outcast and social victim who was destined to a life of misery and a premature death and had to be rescued (Nead 1988: 106). However, apart from seduction, other causes were attributed to the prostitution of women of the low orders, like vanity and self-indulgence and poverty (Acton 1857: 21).

---

of subscribers, giving the institution an outstanding reputation for its religious and moral atmosphere (Innes Williams 1995: 35-38).

<sup>5</sup> When Rev. Thomas Scott became Chaplain, he realized that it was difficult for girls leaving the Hospital to avoid former friends, and that an Asylum should be created. The decision to found the Asylum was made at a meeting on 18 April 1789.

Prostitution was considered a form of deviancy, as these women invaded the public sphere and transgressed the bourgeois code of morality. According to this code, purity and chastity were interchangeable traits in women, but not in men, who had a natural sexual impulse which they could not control and was innate in them; woman's moral superiority was precluded by her lack of sexual appetite, and it was fallen women who had to be restored to these values (Mitchell 1981: x-xii). Following the middle-class theory of the double standard, the public sphere was assigned to men; it was the world of work, business, politics and the law. Women belonged to the private sphere, that is, the home, and their main role was that of wives and mothers. This division between men and women was seen as natural and was based on the assumption that women were dependent, inferior and subordinate to men (Purvis 1991: 2-5). Through the definition of norms of sexual and moral behaviour, the middle-class created its own hegemony and discourse of power; the clear delimitation of gender roles linked to domestic ideology was essential for the process of class definition, as in the nineteenth century gender was a crucial category for the regulation of sexuality, which was restricted to the licit frame of marriage in the case of bourgeois women (Nead 1988: 5-6). It is within this context that the work of the London Lock Asylum was carried out and fallen women were trained to be returned to the private sphere as domestic servants, since the rescue work was done by members of the middle-class, following their notions of morality and respectability.

The London Lock Asylum was based on the model of the Magdalene Hospital, which was the first refuge to be opened in England in 1758 for the reception of female penitents (Finnegan 2001: 8-9). Throughout the nineteenth century a system of homes and asylums proliferated for the reform of fallen women. This system was based on a family structure, in contrast with the penitential one which promoted incarceration and punishment, having the evangelical sense of redemption and salvation behind its spirit. Homes for fallen women were often called Magdalene homes, following the Biblical reference to Mary Magdalene as the sinner prostitute who was forgiven and redeemed by Jesus Christ in the New Testament. According to Paula Bartley, the name *home* for these institutions had implications of domesticity, woman's proper sphere, and of places of comfort and restitution, where inmates could be religiously and morally instructed in feminine virtues (2000: 30).

### 3. The Lock Asylum Committee (1836-1842) and the Asylum Regulations of 1840

According to the Asylum Regulations included in the *Laws of the London Lock Hospital and Asylum* of 1840, "The object of the Institution is to afford a refuge to such of the Female Penitents of the Lock Hospital, as appear sincerely desirous of quitting their evil courses" (The Archives, RCSEng, ref. MS0022/5/2). In the 1830s and 1840s, this meant about one quarter of the girls who had been discharged from the wards (Innes Williams 1995: 70). Nothing is said in the sources about the remaining three quarters, but we know that middle-class philanthropists classified their objects of reform according to their malleability, where we can see again the Victorian inclination towards classification and binary oppositions. Later in the Regulations we can read:

No females shall be admitted into this Asylum, but those of the Patients of the Lock Hospital, whom the Chaplain, after careful examination, shall report to be proper objects of the Charity-- and such will be considered only admissible *immediately* upon their discharge from the Hospital. (The Archives, RCSEng, ref. MS0022/5/2)

There were two clearly established conditions to be admitted into the Asylum: these women had to be free from venereal disease after having been discharged from the Lock Hospital, and they had to have a proper inclination towards reform which was evaluated by the Chaplain of the Institution; the word *immediately* left no room for moral or physical contamination. No pregnant woman was accepted either; if she applied, she was sent to the workhouse and was only later accepted if she left her baby in the poorhouse after confinement. Most girls admitted were under the age of 24, because they were more easily reformed and were not hardened prostitutes, although on a few occasions the inmates were so young that they could hardly be called women. They could be admitted only once, and the idea of the Asylum as a refuge for fallen women is present throughout these regulations, and goes beyond their being released. Many of them were homeless, with no family or friends.

Among the papers that form the manuscript of the *Lock Asylum Committee (1836-1842)*, some entries for patients for 1824 can be found, written by the Matron in all probability, which constitute one of the very few instances where real information about the Penitents can be read, although their voices are never directly heard in the sources. There are entries for nine women, with ages ranging from 10 to 24 – the younger, the easier to mould, according to middle-class ideas –, but they all have many aspects in common connected with their behaviour and daily work. In these entries, only needle-work is mentioned, but laundry work was one of their most important activities by the mid-nineteenth century apart from housework. One of the Asylum Regulations establishes for Penitents that “The design of their being thus received is that they be maintained, religiously instructed, and trained to industrious occupations until they can be restored to their friends, or sent out to respectable service” (The Archives, RCSEng, ref. MS0022/5/2).

The aim behind this training was to produce a “highly-skilled and well disciplined industrial workforce”, together with domestic servants for middle-class households (Mahood 1990: 86). Also, with their housework inside the Asylum and the needle-work and laundry work they did, they were able to contribute to their maintenance and not be a burden on the Institution. As a result, discipline was imposed to produce useful and docile bodies and to exercise power in a Foucauldian sense. On a spiritual level, laundry work served a moral function, and through it “women could do penance, for their past sins and purge themselves of their moral contagion” (Walkowitz 1991: 221). In other words, it was a cleansing ritual with the aim to reform and instruct these young women.

Regarding instruction and education, the inmates were taught through the Bible their position in the social hierarchy and to accept it and respect their superiors, with an emphasis on “female inferiority, abnegation and duty” (Mahood 1990: 83). Many of the Penitents were illiterate, and in the entries for 1824 expressions such as “ignorant of every kind of useful knowledge”, “weak understanding”, “slow improvement” or “exceedingly ignorant” were applied to the inmates (The Archives, RCSEng, ref. MS0022/1/4). For this reason, they received lessons in reading and writing, and later in the century, in geography, arithmetic, music and other subjects, which meant a break from routine. However, from the description the Matron makes of them, they could not have been very clever and must have lacked all basic principles and knowledge. This information can shed some light on the way the lower orders were seen as ignorant and immoral by the middle-classes; they even saw them as indolent and responsible for their own situation. The economic position in which many working-class families found themselves, where all the members had to work in order to survive was not considered a determining factor by many social

reformers. Furthermore, the fact that many children of the poor did not have access to education was ignored. Another important aspect of Victorian middle-class discourses on sexual deviancy is the connection that was established between lack of morals and imbecility and, as a consequence, many young girls who were mentally retarded were secluded in these institutions, and these might be the cases in some of the examples in the entries. In any case, the identity of these girls was subjugated by a process of “ritual humiliation” that destroyed their femininity. The domestication of these fallen women was also seen in their uniforms, which represented their belonging to a community of “reforming penitents” who had abandoned their past existence and had suppressed their sexuality (Bartley 2000: 37-39). In the London Lock Asylum regulations no uniform is mentioned; however, we know that they wore it in the York Refuge and the Glasgow Magdalene Asylum, as well as in the Irish Magdalene institutions.<sup>6</sup>

The Matron was a crucial figure in the London Lock Asylum and the most important reference for inmates. A Sub-Matron helped her in her tasks and they both had to live on the premises. Matrons had to be single and mature, and with strong religious convictions; they had to be educated and have a hard constitution for such a time-consuming and demanding job. They were poorly paid, so it was difficult to find a person suitable for the post. The Matron and her Assistant superintended the work done by the girls and were in charge of the running of the Asylum, the instruction of Penitents and the family worship, and had to report to the Asylum Committee (Finnegan 1979: 170, 182). In the minutes of the Lock Asylum Committee several Matrons and Sub-Matrons were appointed between 1836 and 1842, such as Mrs Dell, who was appointed Matron at the Committee meeting of 26 April 1838, and Mrs. Smith was appointed Sub-Matron. On 27 December 1838 a new Matron, Mrs. Denny, and a new Sub-Matron, Mrs. Headway, were appointed, the latter being substituted by a Mrs. Douglass on 28 of February 1839 (The Archives, RCSEng, ref. MS0022/1/4). The work of the Matron was in the hands of the Sisters of Mercy in the case of the Irish asylums.

The Board of the Lock Asylum met regularly once a month. The members of the Board were the Governors of the Asylum, and there was a Chair. Admissions, dismissals and the evolution of the inmates were discussed as well as financial matters (The Archives, RCSEng, ref. MS0022/1/4). One of the rules of the Lock Asylum establishes that “all the resolutions and proceedings of the Committee shall be entered in a Book provided for that purpose”, with the names of all the members present and signed by the President or Secretary. The rules also establish that an Annual Meeting of the Friends of the Institution must be held, with information about the funds and, to fill the vacancies in the

---

<sup>6</sup> Irish Magdalene institutions started to work with rules similar to the English ones: silence and prayer were imposed on inmates, who had to wear a uniform and short hair and their daily routine consisted in sewing and laundry work; however, they adopted new names and did not suffer the classification that English institutions exerted on girls (Finnegan 2001: 22-23). In contrast with English asylums, after a period when only prostitutes were admitted, as the nineteenth century progressed, many other types of women were retained on their premises, like single mothers, promiscuous women or even those who were mentally deranged. Inside Irish asylums, nuns represented the authority and the model to follow, whereas in English institutions it was the Matron who had that role. In many instances women penitents who had had an outstanding behaviour became Consecrated Penitents, and decided to remain in the asylum for life; their main function was to help the Sisters with the other inmates, becoming intermediaries and surveillants. Finally, and in opposition to English institutions, Ireland’s Magdalene asylums admitted the same women several times (Finnegan 2001: 130-31, 145).



Committee, starting with a prayer – the Evangelical spirit being always present (The Archives, RCSEng, ref. MS0022/5/2).

All asylum inmates had to go through a probationary period that lasted for about two months. During this time, the conduct of the applicant was carefully watched and she was isolated. She had to behave with propriety and if she showed insolence or discontent, her full admission was suspended (The Archives, RCSEng, ref. MS0022/1/4). When the probationary period was over, the Penitent had to remain in the Asylum for about two years. This was the length of time that middle-class reformers considered adequate for the restoration and indoctrination of these girls to make them decent working-class members of society. In this sense, it is interesting to consider the declaration that inmates were required to sign to enter the York Refuge:

I am wishful to abandon my sinful life  
 And by God's grace lead a better.  
 I am willing to remain two years in the Home.  
 I will do my best to conform  
 To the rules and discipline of the Home.

(Finnegan 1979: 207)

The York Refuge worked in a very similar way to the London Lock Asylum and other institutions of the same kind throughout the country. In both institutions, discipline was certainly very important and the girls' behaviour was closely monitored by the Matron. Discipline started with a daily routine, which was the same in all the asylums and refuges: they had to get up very early, start work and then do family worship before breakfast; they resumed work till dinner and again after it, and when supper was finished, there was family worship again. There was always a time of the day devoted to lessons and Bible reading, and the working day lasted no less than ten hours (Finnegan 1979: 79-80). An example of the meals that Patients used to have in the Lock Hospital can be found in the diets included in the Rules for 1814:

A Table of Diet for the Patients

Low Diet	
Breakfast	Water-gruel, Sage or Balm Tea
Dinner	Broth 1 Pint
Supper	Milk Pottage 1 Pint
Milk Diet	
Breakfast	Water-gruel or Balm Tea
Dinner	Pudding
Supper	Milk Pottage 1 Pint
Full Diet	
Breakfast	Milk Pottage, Water-gruel, Sage or Balm Tea
Dinner	Sunday                      Pudding
	Monday                      1 Pound of Meat each
	Wednesday                " " " " "
	Friday                        " " " " "
	Tuesday                     1 Pint of Broth each
	Thursday                    " " " " "
	Saturday                    " " " " "
Supper	Milk Pottage, Butter or Cheese
	A Loaf of Bread 14 Ounces, and a Quart of Small Beer

(The Archives, RCSEng, ref. MS0022/5/3)

There was a division between 'Low Diet', 'Milk Diet' and 'Full Diet'. Fish and chicken were absent from the table; however, there was an indication that these could be included in any patient's diet if it was required "at the expense of the Charity", but none of them were varied or abundant at all (The Archives, RCSEng, ref. MS0022/5/3). No direct references can be found in the sources to the Penitents' meals, but it can be inferred that they were similar. For instance, in the Glasgow Asylum we know that breakfast consisted of porridge; and in the Edinburgh Magdalene Asylum meals were elaborated following the suggestions of the Ladies Committee, who recommended cheap dishes and made suggestions like "substituting rice and barley porridge for bread", following the advice of a recipe book published by the Society for Bettering the Condition of the Poor (Mahood 1990: 79).

Acts of insubordination were not infrequent among these women. If a woman wanted to abandon the Institution, she had to give a month's notice, during which time the Matron and other authorities tried to convince her to remain (Mahood 1990: 80). She was left in isolation to think about her decision, so persuasion was employed. Although seclusion was voluntary, the idea was for the women to remain in the Asylums, sometimes for life, as happened in most Irish institutions (Finnegan 2001: 3-4). The riotous behaviour of the working-classes was another matter of concern for those governing these places of confinement. In the Penitents' entries for the Lock Asylum for 1824, we can read about Mary Sparks as a young woman of 18 who "is inattentive to instruction, disobedient and insolent, for which behaviour she has been put under punishment but has not yet submitted", or about Sarah Gibbon, a girl of ten who "when first received into the House possessed a perverse temper with many improper habits, some of which it is to be hoped and in a great measure eradicated". Also Sarah Gibbs, aged 20, "possesses a sullen temper and is rather inclined to idleness than industry", according to the Matron. She is also described as "very impertinent", "refractory and disobedient", and even "insolent" (The Archives, RCSEng, ref. MS0022/1/4). Words like *ignorant*, *insolent*, *idle*, *riotous* or *bad-tempered* were frequently used by the middle-class to describe the lower orders of society; it can be also presumed that ignorance and rebelliousness are mentioned in these entries because they were an internal document of the institution and did not have any propagandist aim, so these appreciations must be more realistic than those found in the Accounts and Reports. The popular press and sensational newspapers similarly talked of working-class men being violent and intemperate, of women and children using bad language, and of a lack of habits of personal hygiene and cleanliness in the homes (D'Cruze 1998: 179-84). Therefore, their behaviour and habits had to be checked.

For instance, in *An Abstract of the Rules and Orders for the Government of the Lock Hospital* for 1814, in the 'Rules concerning the Patients', we can read in Rule VII "That there be no swearing, playing at cards, or gaming of any kind, quarrelling or any incidences committed during the time they are under cure", while Rule VIII establishes "That no Patient do not presume to send for victual or drink of any sort into the Hospital, during the time they are under cure, but to adhere strictly to the House diet" (The Archives, RCSEng, ref. MS0022/5/3). In the same way, in *The Rules for the Conduct of the Women* of the York Refuge, in Rule III it is stated that "Lying, swearing, dishonesty, repeated disobedience, and gross misbehaviour, shall be punished by the Committee with expulsion, unless circumstances should induce them to mitigate the punishment" (Finnegan 1979: 172). From these rules, we can certainly infer that the behaviour of the men and women of the working-classes could be defined in many respects as inappropriate on many occasions

and that bad habits such as intemperance, dishonesty or bad language were associated with them. However, it is difficult to discern to what extent these bourgeois ideas about 'the poor' were not biased. It has been contended by some scholars that working-class people had their own values and behaved according to their own morality. Not all of them were so depraved, and, in fact, members of the rescue movement described their objects of charity and reform as the 'deserving poor', but most middle-class people had a different image of working-class life, which identified it with bad habits and lack of principles.

Because of this, silence was imposed in many of these institutions at work, and misbehaviour was punished with public reprimands, physical chastisement, isolation or even expulsion (Mahood 1990: 89). The control of the Asylum over its inmates was so strict that, apart from incarceration, disruption from family and friends was also practised. Thus, girls were discouraged from keeping in touch with former acquaintances, and to see relatives they had to count on the Matron's permission for the appointment (Mahood 1990: 82). Their correspondence was even supervised by the Matron both "from and to the house", according to the rules (Finnegan 1979: 172).

The control and protection of Penitents went even beyond their release as "No inmate shall be dismissed from the Asylum after good conduct, without being provided with a respectable situation and a home", according to the Rules of the London Lock Asylum (The Archives, RCSEng, ref. MS0022/5/2). They could even return if, after three months, they could not adapt to their new situations. Most of them were sent to service, but some were sent to the colonies, where they could start a new life, to workshops or factories, or even married, as we can read in many of the Annual Reports of the different institutions. Their good conduct after leaving the Asylum was significantly rewarded with one guinea after twelve months in service, two guineas for remaining two years in the same situation, or even three guineas if they stayed and behaved properly for three years as domestic servants in the same household (The Archives, RCSEng, ref. MS0022/3/8).<sup>7</sup> Sadly enough, there were a few of these women who did not enjoy their reward as they had a weak constitution and had to be returned to their families or died on the premises. This set of rules and regulations were just part of the bigger machinery of state and middle-class intervention to exert disciplinary power and make 'docile bodies' out of deviant members of society, through constant surveillance.

However, rebellion can be read between the lines in many of the Annual Reports and Accounts, where sentences like "requested to leave the Asylum", "received again by the Lock and other Hospitals", "eloped", "desired to leave the house", "dismissed for bad behaviour" or "sent to the parishes and discharged for bad conduct" can be read when the results of the Institution are put forward (The Archives, RCSEng, ref. MS0022/3/8). All these statements are witness to the lack of success of these places of incarceration and are euphemisms to hide the reality of reform work, as many Penitents did not want to remain on the premises despite the attempts to convince them, or simply left; others were unmanageable, had deplorable behaviour that Matrons could not control. A considerable number returned to their old ways, contracting venereal disease again.

---

<sup>7</sup> MS0022 stands for the "London Lock Hospital and Rescue Home (1746-1948)" Fonds MS0022/3 stands for Sub-Fonds 1 to 8 entitled "Finance 1765-1948)" MS0022/3/8 means Sub-Fond 8 entitled "Printed Annual Reports of the Lock Hospital and Asylum in loose format for 1824, 1832-1839 and 1841. Additionally, there are some loose pages which possibly form the Accounts of 1840"

#### 4. Conclusion

To conclude, and in clear contrast with the results that the Annual Accounts and Reports intended to show, the success of these Institutions was conspicuously limited. These places had been established almost as an informal branch of the criminal justice system; they had the socially sanctioned authority to detain women for sexual misconduct. The idea behind their workings was to protect these women from themselves and to protect the rest of society from them. Simultaneously, these young women's identities were demolished and reshaped according to moral and social values different from those of their own class. An inmate was considered to be morally reformed when she had converted to middle-class standards of feminine propriety and felt ashamed and regretted her past sinful life. According to reformers and philanthropists, two years was a period of time long enough to transform these social outcasts into decent working-class members of society, avoiding the influence of family and friends that could be an obstacle in their reformation, and to learn new habits. Also, their removal from society was a guarantee to avoid the corruption of other women and men by these sexual deviants.

Nonetheless, these women were returned to society and were given work situations which were considered by them even worse than working in prostitution; the working conditions were poor and tedious, they had low wages and suffered exploitation. For these reasons, many of the women cured and released from Asylums returned to their old ways, became pregnant and resorted to prostitution again. The intention behind these reformers was good, but middle-class philanthropists did not understand the moral values and the ways of living of the working-class, and particularly of their women, who had their own gender identities and moral codes. The job of these rescue workers was hard, and their task was thankless and unrewarding, but 'chastity' had different connotations for working-class women. Premarital sex and pregnancy as well as prostitution were seen as something normal by their communities, where courtship and marriage customs were different; occasional prostitution due to economic reasons was quite common among women with previous sexual experience. Therefore, many of the 'failures' of these institutions did not see themselves as 'immoral' or 'sinners' and did not identify with the Magdalene discourse of medicine and law, although their superiors categorised them as fallen women and interpreted their behaviour as acts of resistance to moral reform.

At the same time, these middle-class men who did philanthropy work supported the theory of the double-standard by making only women responsible for the moral corruption of society, punishing and secluding them – apparently voluntarily – for sexual promiscuity while ignoring men's guilt and sanctioning their immorality and hypocrisy in sexual matters. In addition, middle-class women, as subscribers of the values of domesticity and respectability, gave their support to these institutions as members of the Committees, by employing former Penitents as domestic servants or sending their laundry to be washed in these Asylums.

This is what can be read in the sources used to support my arguments throughout this paper concerning the role of the London Lock Asylum in the reproduction of the social and moral treatment of prostitutes and fallen women in the early Victorian period. This institution and its inmates had not been discussed till now by scholars in the field. Although we do not have direct testimonies on the part of the Penitents, it is clear that these sources are valid to support the Foucauldian arguments that establish the existence of discourses of power within Victorian middle-class institutions like asylums, which reproduced the binary oppositions of deserving/undeserving, public/private,

decent/fallen that were prevalent in medicine and religion. As a consequence, they complied with the Victorian preoccupation about morality and deviancy by the classification, surveillance and intervention through a gender policy applied to fallen women. This ‘unofficial’ policy was based on the domestication of their bodies which had to express the notions of propriety and morality that were attributed to the female sex. Men and women of the middle-class tried through different forms of ‘capillary powers’ like asylums, prisons, workhouses, hospitals, schools, etc., to exert their hegemony as a class and to regulate the sexual and social behaviour of the poor, keeping them within their status but outside the knowledge that produced that social power, and sanctioning notions of femininity and sexuality inside the norm. But, in spite of all this, these sources simultaneously and subtly express the existence of alternative discourses of power that belong to the working-class and also contributed to the production of knowledge that made these women rebel against this method of transformation and control. This process was outside the values of their own class, and their testimonies would have made their accounts of what happened inside these places of detention a completely different version of the asylum experience.

#### Works Cited

- Account of the Lock Hospital and Asylum, 1834.* The Library, Royal College of Surgeons of England, London, MS0022/3/8.
- Account of the Lock Hospital and Asylum, 1835.* The Library, Royal College of Surgeons of England, London, MS0022/3/8.
- Account of the Lock Hospital and Asylum, 1837.* The Library, Royal College of Surgeons of England, London, MS0022/3/8.
- Acton, William 1857: *Prostitution Considered in its Moral, Social and Sanitary Aspects in London and other Large Cities with Proposals for the Mitigation and Prevention of its Attendant Evils.* London: John Churchill, New Burlington Street.
- An Abstract of the Rules and Orders for the Government of the Lock Hospital, near Hyde-Park Corner, Instituted July 4, 1746, for the Relief of Venereal Patients only,* 1814. The Library, Royal College of Surgeons of England, London, MS0022/5/3.
- Bartley, Paula 2000: *Prostitution: Prevention and Reform in England, 1860-1914.* London and New York: Routledge.
- Davidoff, Leonore and Catherine Hall 1992: *Family Fortunes: Men and Women of the English Middle-class 1780-1850.* London: Routledge.
- D’Cruze, Shani 1998: *Crimes of Outrage: Sex, Violence and Victorian Working Women.* London: UCL P.
- Finnegan, Frances 1979: *Poverty and Prostitution: A Study of Victorian Prostitutes in York.* London: Cambridge UP.
- 2001: *Do Penance or Perish: A Study of Magdalene Asylums in Ireland.* Piltown: Congrave P.
- Foucault, Michel 1979 (1975): *Discipline and Punish: The Birth of a Prison.* Trans. Alan Sheridan. London: Penguin Books.
- 1990 (1976): *The History of Sexuality: Volume I, An Introduction.* Trans. Robert Hurley. London: Penguin Books.
- Innes Williams, David 1995: *The London Lock: A Charitable Hospital, 1746-1952.* London and New York: Royal Society of Medicine P. Ltd.
- Laws of the London Lock and Asylum, Revised* (1840) 1848. The Library, Royal College of Surgeons of England, London, MS0022/5/2.
- Lock Asylum Committee (1836-1842).* The Library, Royal College of Surgeons of England, London, MS0022/1/4.
- Mahood, Linda 1990: *The Magdalenes: Prostitution in the Nineteenth Century.* London and New York: Routledge.

- Mitchell, Sally 1981: *The Fallen Angel: Chastity, Class, and Women's Reading 1835-1880*. Bowling Green Popular UP.
- Nead, Linda 1988: *Myths of Sexuality: Representations of Women in Victorian Britain*. London: Blackwell.
- Purvis, June 1991: *A History of Women's Education in England*. Milton Keynes: Open UP.
- Walkowitz, Judith 1991: *Prostitution and Victorian Society: Women, Class and the State*. Cambridge: Cambridge UP.

Received 25 April 2011

Revised version accepted 12 October 2011

María Isabel Romero Ruiz (MA U. of Southampton, PhD U. of Granada) is currently a Lecturer in Social History and Cultural Studies at the University of Málaga (Spain). She has specialised in the social and cultural history of deviant women and children in Victorian England, although her research interests have since expanded to contemporary gender and sexual identity issues. She was a research visitor at the Royal College of Surgeons of England Library in London in the summer of 2008. Her publications include the co-edited volume *Identity, Migration and Women's Bodies as Sites of Knowledge and Transgression* (2009) and *Cultural Migrations and Gendered Subjects: Colonial and Postcolonial Representations of the Female Body* (2011). She is also the author of an entry for the *Encyclopaedia of Global Human Migration* entitled 'Trafficking, Sex-work and Migration' (forthcoming) and is currently editing a volume entitled *Women's Identities and Bodies in Colonial and Post-colonial History and Literature* to be published in 2012.

Address: Departamento de Filología Inglesa, Francesa y Alemana. Facultad de Filosofía y Letras. Universidad de Málaga. Campus Teatinos. 29071 Málaga, Spain. Tel.: +34 952 131830. Fax: +34 952 131843.