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DOMESTIC SERVANTS, MIDNIGHT MEETINGS, AND *THE MAGDALEN'S FRIEND AND FEMALE HOMES' INTELLIGENCER*

By Scott Rogers

I

PUBLISHED MONTHLY FROM APRIL 1860 until 1864,[1] *The Magdalen's Friend and Female Homes' Intelligencer* was a periodical with a very specific mission. Launched at the height of the mid-Victorian concern with prostitution – when institutions devoted to the reclamation of penitent prostitutes began to emerge across Britain – it only ceased publication after the sudden death of its editor, the Reverend William Tuckniss.[2] In its opening issue, the editors describe their explicit purpose: "Christians and Philanthropists who are now labouring single-handed [in the cause of reclaiming prostitutes and fallen women[3]] will here find a rallying point, where they may exchange words of encouragement and advice, and confer with others who are their Fellow-labourers in the same cause" ("Opening Address" 1.1 1–2).[4] It was, then, a trade publication for a movement that had grown remarkably – seven years after its founding in 1853, the Society for the Rescue of Young Women and Children (commonly known as the "Rescue Society") was operating twelve houses of reclamation in London.

A report on the Rescue Society in the first issue of the *Magdalen's Friend* notes that "It would be difficult to overrate the importance and beneficial effects of a Society, which forms the nucleus of twelve distinct Homes; but, when we consider the restraining and purifying influence, which these several establishments must exercise upon society, we arrive at an aggregate which is most encouraging. We are glad to see, that in a financial point of view, the society is prospering, having increased its funds, in five years, from £250 to upwards of £5000" ("The Society for the Rescue of Young Women and Children" 1.1 25–26). The proliferation of such institutions explains the need for the *Magdalen's Friend* as a facilitator of communication among the reform movement's various branches.[5]

Because of its mission, the *Magdalen's Friend* is of particular use in attempting to understand efforts to address prostitution during the middle of the nineteenth century. Its entries record the wide range of perceptions missionary workers had of their work, of the women they encountered, and of the problems associated with their efforts. Its reports from the field show reclamation workers attempting to reconcile their preconceptions about

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prostitutes with the actual women they came into contact with. As a result, the *Magdalen's Friend* provides insight into the internal debates, the individual reactions, and the institutional problems associated with efforts to "reclaim" prostitutes and fallen women between 1860 and 1864. More specifically, the reports from workers provide a special insight into the reclamation community's attempts to construct, as Linda Mahood rightly puts it, "a cultural model that would make a poor woman's move into prostitution comprehensible within the terms of her social and cultural world" (Mahood 69). These reports therefore provide a wealth of information about the perception of fallen women by those who worked most closely with them, and in their manifold reactions to the women they encounter, the *Magdalen's Friend* provides remarkable insight into their various intellectual conflicts as these workers tried to reconcile their individual and cultural understandings of the fallen woman.

II

ALTHOUGH AN EXHAUSTIVE HISTORY of the reclamation movement will almost certainly never be written, several studies have mapped its perimeter. Edward Bristow's *Vice and Vigilance: Purity Movements in Britain since 1700* (1977) provides a remarkable picture of the range and scope of anti-vice movements from the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries. Judith Walkowitz's landmark study of the Contagious Diseases Acts, *Prostitution and Victorian Society* (1980), explores how the Acts provide insight into class, gender, and the state. Linda Mahood's *The Magdalenes: Prostitution in the Nineteenth Century* (1990) focuses on the Contagious Diseases Acts in Scotland, offering a particularly useful discussion of both the penitentiary/reformatory system and the Midnight Meetings, calling into question the normative category of "prostitute" and suggesting that this system was not only an attempt to impose middle-class domestic behaviors, but was also broadly aimed at "remaking working-class culture" (Mahood 118). Paula Bartley's discussion of reform efforts in *Prostitution: Prevention and Reform in England, 1860–1914* (2000) traces with remarkable clarity the outline of the reform movement and notes succinctly the "gradual, and somewhat imperceptible, shift from holding prostitutes responsible for prostitution to thinking of them as the victims of masculine sexual profligacy and social injustice" (Bartley 5). It is important to note that most of these studies focus on the prostitute's relationship to either the state or to the preferred social order. This is unsurprising, since many of the studies follow Foucault's attention to Victorian discourses of prostitution and the institutions associated with it in *The History of Sexuality*. Foucault's focus on medical discourses paved the way for new analyses of formerly ignored institutions associated with Victorian sexuality – including those devoted to its suppression.

In this study, I am less concerned with the institutions themselves, or with their relationship to the state, than I am with the individuals who worked within those institutions – and with the women they sought out. Perhaps the closest analogy to the present study is Françoise Barret-Ducrocq's *Love in the Time of Victoria* (1989), which attempts to apprehend the narratives of the women who deposited their children at the London Foundling Hospital. It seems that few, if any, archives contain an equivalent set of records to those studied by Barret-Ducrocq; the records of the Rescue Society, one of the largest and most long-lived of these reclamation efforts, contain no admissions information. The Magdalen Trust holds no admissions records for the Magdalen Hospital beyond *The Histories of some of the Penitents in the Magdalen House as supposed to be related by Themselves* and William Dodd's *The*

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Magdalen.[6] Even if such records existed, they would undoubtedly prove problematic. These institutions only accepted women with very specific qualities. They had to be childless, free from disease, and within a specific age range, and so they tended to admit only those women who met the type expected or desired by popular perception. Writing about the London Foundling Hospital's admissions records, Jenny Bourne Taylor explains that the narratives taken "are inevitably contrived within the Hospital's own entrance rules and expectations: in order for her child to be taken in, a woman needed to tell the story that the Hospital wanted to hear" (Taylor 318). For these reasons alone, any narratives provided by such institutions should be viewed with a degree of suspicion.

Early in her study, Barret-Ducrocq describes how in "Case after case, year after year, couple after couple, the Foundling Hospital committee tried to grasp the truth of a sexual and love experience that was always the same, always a repetition of the last case, but somehow original each time" (Barret-Ducrocq 42–43). The problem with attempts to "grasp the truth," she explains, is that there was no single "truth" to grasp about the individuals these workers encountered, and so the records provide neither "the full, literal truth about popular sexuality" (Barret-Ducrocq 43) nor "two opposed, equally misleading images, with the truth hovering somewhere in the middle" (Barret-Ducrocq 43). Despite this, rescue societies tended to look for very specific narratives in the women they targeted: typically, missionaries seem drawn to domestic servants who had been seduced under promise of marriage and then abandoned.

For instance, in its final year of publication, the *Magdalen's Friend* published an essay entitled "How Do They Get Here," describing various opinions on the origins of the prostitute: "Public opinion says of the fallen, 'they adopt their mode of life from choice.' The moralist thinks they are such 'from the force of circumstances, over which they have little or no control.' The Christian philanthropist affirms, 'They have become what they are because they were more sinned against than sinning'" ("How Do They Get Here" 4.11 301–02). Despite the similarities between the moralist and the Christian philanthropist, who both imagine the fallen woman as a kind of victim, "public opinion" often remains in the sentiments of those involved in the work, and precludes imagining the prostitute in this way. For reclamation workers, these competing notions of the prostitute's origins often kept them from fully comprehending the prostitute's social, moral, and economic world.[7]

One of the dominant narratives describing the prostitute maintained that she was brought to prostitution through a combination of seduction and vanity. We can trace this narrative at least to Hogarth's *A Harlot's Progress* in 1738, which describes the trajectory of the fallen woman from virtue through seduction, abandonment, prostitution, disease, and inevitable death. The fallen woman, the conventional narrative tells us, is reviled by society and dies in isolation.[8] Despite its entrenchment, as Barret-Ducrocq explains, such a narrative stands in direct contrast to the Victorian response:

> We happen to know that although sexual transgressions are often treated in this way in the novel, the real Victorian society, and the real individuals within it, dealt with them altogether differently. Civil society created and financed, through private philanthropy, refuges and hospitals which were dedicated to moral reform, but also provided aid and relief for mothers and children. Support also came from individuals, for example the employers of these child-mothers whose sexual conduct had slipped into heresy; masters and mistresses who kept the girls in their service and sometimes entreated them to stay on. And the Foundling Hospital did everything in its power to ensure that the "child of sin" would receive an upbringing, to enable the mother effectively to "rebuild her life," remarry,

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> and perhaps one day take her bastard child back, raise it with the others and melt into the crowd. (Barret-Ducrocq 184)

There were, indeed, marked differences between fictional depictions of social conventions about the treatment of fallen women and prostitutes and the way these women were actually treated, and the fictional notion that the only recourse was isolation and eventual death is at odds with the emergence over the course of the century of an increasingly large number of institutions designed to provide assistance to such women. This conflict between the fictional representation and the very real presence of an emergent social outreach suggests a cultural confusion about the fallen woman.

A second source for the image of the prostitute came from the reclamation movement itself. Between their appeals for funding – which often contained romanticized descriptions of the fallen woman – and their own reports from the field, the reclamation movement created a number of images of the prostitute which, in turn, informed the workers' notions of what they were to expect of their encounters. In the first issue of the *Magdalen's Friend*, "A View from the Streets" provided several such images. The author describes prostitutes as "living phantoms of sin, flitting before you at every step, speeding to their deadly mission-field, and taking up their position in that terrible phalanx of crime," describing their behavior as "wanton jest . . . obscene merriment, and the reckless oath, which has made your very flesh creep and your blood curdle within your veins" ("A Voice from the Streets" 1.1 5). These, then, are prostitutes – purveyors of sin, degradation, and crime, characterized by a disturbing immodesty. Such an image contrasts with the author's later description of applicants to the house of mercy. These women, the author claims, lack wantonness and merriment – the idealized applicant, instead, is a "poor, weary, outcast, bowed with grief and shame, who stands craving admission to a Home of Mercy" ("A Voice from the Streets" 1.1 8). When considering the relationship between "real" interactions with fallen women and the fictions created *from* those experiences, it is important to remember that representations of the reclamation of these women might be just as romanticized as fictional damnations. Despite the array of representations – traditional narratives, progressive social workers, case histories, and mission reports – each is equally fictive.

A third source for the creation of the fallen woman identity came from the emerging social science and medical discourses, of which William Acton's landmark study, *Prostitution*, is the most famous. Acton challenged many assumptions about prostitution, and as Peter Fryer explains, he was the "first . . . seriously to challenge the conventional parable that prostitutes necessarily rotted in ditches, died miserable deaths in workhouses, or perished in hospitals" (Fryer 12). Acton's revolutionary idea was that prostitution was, by and large, a transient or supplemental occupation. But his claim that many "women who live by prostitution lead apparently respectable lives in the lodgings or houses which they occupy" (Acton 36) also suggests the difficulty of differentiating prostitutes from respectable women. Acton exposed the inadequacy of these categories, noting that "'the dirty, intoxicated slattern, in tawdry finery and an inch thick in paint' – long a conventional symbol of prostitution" (Acton 60) – was hardly universally representative. Difficulty identifying prostitutes presented a potentially serious epistemological problem, for if the women cannot be easily identified, moral or social categorization – which is itself a placement of the figure into a narrative – becomes impossible.

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Acton does, sometimes, fall back upon the moral narratives his study challenges. The most glaring example of this occurs in his chapter on "Causes of Prostitution," where he describes the prostitute:

> What is a prostitute? She is a woman who gives for money that which she ought to give only for love; who ministers to passion and lust alone, to the exclusion and extinction of all the higher qualities, and nobler sources of enjoyment which combine with desire, to produce the happiness derived from the intercourse of the sexes. She is a woman with half the woman gone, and that half containing all that elevates her nature, leaving her a mere instrument of impurity; degraded and fallen she extracts from the sin of others the means of living, corrupt and dependent on corruption, and therefore interested directly in the increase of immorality – a social pest, carrying contamination and foulness to every quarter to which she has access. (Acton 118–19)

The notion here that the prostitute is half woman and half "instrument of impurity" who is "corrupt and dependent on corruption" transforms her from the economic figure of Acton's general analysis into a purely moral creature who "suggest[s] evil thoughts and desires" (Acton 119), entices the young to "discover unknown mysteries" (Acton 119) leading to the contamination of thousands who would otherwise remain pure (Acton 119), and who ought to be purged from society. But even Acton, who most strongly challenged the "conventional parable," could not escape its influence on his understanding of the prostitute. Like the reclamation movement workers recorded in the *Magdalen's Friend*, Acton cannot reconcile popular narrative with reality.

III

THE RECLAMATION MOVEMENT emerged in response to a perceived increase in prostitution in industrial cities in England. While the numbers are almost universally unreliable – varying from a few thousand to tens of thousands in London alone – there was general acceptance that the number of prostitutes was on the rise.[9] Commentators identified a wide range of causes, but after the 1851 census returns were publicized, there was little doubt that demographics were a major factor: a four percent demographic imbalance between women and men in Great Britain meant that out of a population of nearly 18 million, roughly 750,000 women were unable to marry simply because there were not enough men (Census 4). Women caught in this imbalance came to be known variously as "superfluous,"[10] "redundant,"[11] or, finally, "our single women,"[12] and the question of how best to deal with them preoccupied many during the mid-century.[13] Massive numbers of women flooded the limited job markets available to them. Many turned to philanthropy (or even the convent) as an outlet for their energies. In addition to the untold numbers of volunteer workers involved in such efforts, a number of high-profile individuals took part. Charles Dickens was deeply involved in the establishment, organization, management, and recruitment of the girls at Urania Cottage.[14] Christina Rossetti volunteered at Highgate Penitentiary for many years.[15] William Gladstone founded the Church Penitentiary Association and worked for years to reclaim fallen women and prostitutes.[16] This philanthropic outpouring and, specifically, the attention it drew to the problem of prostitution, was therefore hardly a fringe movement.

During this period, large numbers of women who would otherwise have married or been employed as domestic servants were forced to take to the streets. This choice is exemplified

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in the cry of the Rescue Society: "Sin or Starve." The mantra, despite its clear moral component of "sin," suggests that women often enter into prostitution only after being left no other material options, but the presence of both options together suggests the competing narratives describing the fallen woman. Like Acton, many contributors to the *Magdalen's Friend* recognized the material reasons for prostitution, yet still maintained a belief in largely moral causes for such "falls." In one of the only critical studies of the periodical, Deborah Logan describes how one contributor's monthly installment "demonstrates a progressiveness indicative of the period's increasing tendency to separate moral ideology from social sciences methodology. The resulting unevenness of this series conveys mixed messages due to the author's conflicting scientific and ideological value systems, a quality true of the publication as a whole" ("An Outstretched" 371–72).[17]

Just as there were differences in the ways in which the prostitute was depicted, so, too, were there differences in approaches towards reclamation. In its fourth issue, the *Magdalen's Friend* published "The Social Evil," which offered a noteworthy critique of the methods employed by some institutions. The author complains that some (no doubt those penitentiaries modeled on the Magdalen Hospital) are "misnamed, being more adapted, by construction and system, for criminals than penitents" ("The Social Evil" 1.4 108). Such complaints about the structure of these institutions are fairly common in the *Magdalen's Friend*.[18]

The rules of the more stringent houses were often a point of contention in the reclamation movement. Arthur J. S. Maddison's *Hints on Rescue Work: A Handbook* (1885) is particularly useful, for it contains detailed descriptions of the rules of several institutions, including rules for workers, descriptions of diet, and reproductions of the various forms associated with the work of reclamation. One home demanded that an inmate "will, if [her] conduct is satisfactory, be allowed to see [her] parents, or very near relations, if [her] parents are dead, once in three months, or at other times with the special permission" (Maddison 212). Another allowed inmates to "see their relations on the first Monday in each month, between the hours of 2 and 4 o'clock" (Maddison 212). A third did not limit visits from relatives beyond insisting that they be conducted within the presence of a Matron of the home (Maddison 213). Some institutions, such as the Magdalen Hospital, were more stringent and insisted upon a set period of confinement of two full years (Skene 8). Many institutions followed the Magdalen Hospital's penal model, and there was much debate in the *Magdalen's Friend* about the period of confinement.

Complaints about these approaches were not merely philosophical. Rumors about the houses' harsh methods often predisposed potential applicants to reject overtures by missionary workers. One *Magdalen's Friend* essay from 1860 argued that some institutions' methods worked against the goal of reclamation:

> Many a young creature, whose early life has been one of domestic quiet, unused to drudgery, applies for admission; and even if it should be reception-day, is it right to subject the trembling girl to a committee of severe-looking matrons, to cut off her hair, put on her a prison-dress, and condemn her to hard tasks for a period of two years? Is such a treatment likely to lead to repentance, when she has little leisure for thought, reading, or communion? . . . Such a system is a great obstacle to the peaceful institution, which seeks to win by love, and to point to the goodness of God as leading to repentance; for we are often, when pleading in the streets, met with bitter exclamations against the penitentiaries; and many poor girls, not discerning the difference, refuse to accept the invitation. ("The Social Evil" 1.4 108)

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Beyond the larger point that homes with too-stringent rules ran the risk of frightening away potential applicants, the image of the fallen woman here is notable. The "trembling girl" invokes the image of the penitent, young prostitute – the reclamation movement's ideal inmate. As I have discussed, many houses of reclamation established admissions procedures effectively designed only to admit women who met (or who pretended to meet) this image. This idealized image reveals the movement's interest in girls of a specific age range (loosely between 16 and 24), which their admissions procedures in turn reified. Such women, the writer fears, are ill-prepared for the treatment they would receive at homes such as the Magdalen Hospital, which would transform them from penitents to prisoners, "condemned" to "hard tasks" out of keeping with her former experience of a "domestic quiet" free from "drudgery." Considering the large numbers of these women who once worked as domestic servants, the image implies a relatively middle-class existence more accustomed to "leisure for thought, reading, or communion," and likely reveals more about the reclamation workers' image of the applicants than it does about the women themselves.

Other comments reveal similar tensions. A remark from 1861 implored some institutions to reconsider their methods:

> May I ask the heads of our penitentiaries and refuges to give a more homish, and less dry, routine-like aspect to their internal economy; to modify the change of costume from the smart and gay dress of the street-walker and the utter plainness and ugliness of the penitential garb, from which there is no escaping; to let them keep their hair uncut . . . to allow them, young as they are, to have times for natural mirth and quiet enjoyment; not to impose the stealthy step, and solemn look, and unsmiling eye as needful accompaniments of a life of penitence; and that word leads me just to the root of the whole matter – our present penitential system for fallen women presupposes all who come in to be anxious about their souls. ("A Few Words on Discipline" 2.1 28–29)

The writer's assumption here that the inmates' former lives were characterized by the "smart and gay dress of the street-walker" stands in stark contrast to the earlier description of applicants accustomed to "domestic quiet [and] unused to drudgery." Even the notion that the young inmates should be allowed opportunities for "natural mirth" and "quiet enjoyment" suggests an image of applicants somewhat at odds with streetwalking prostitutes with their "smart and gay dress." We have at work here two strikingly different assumptions about the fallen woman and the world she inhabits.

The writer's request for a "more homish" structure for reclamation institutions is significant. The *Magdalen's Friend* openly approved houses of reclamation based on what the Rescue Society called the "family system," which dispensed with the Magdalen Hospital's penal atmosphere in favor of allowing inmates significantly more freedom. They could come and go as they pleased. Their dress was not changed. Their hair was not cut. The goal, one reporter noted, was to make the homes indistinguishable from any of the surrounding residences. The 1877 annual report of the Rescue Society claimed that the system preserved the "Home character and the smaller [the institution] the better – the houses used for the purpose being in no way distinguished from private dwelling-houses" (Society 8).

In the end, differences about the most effective way to reclaim former prostitutes stem largely from differing notions of who, precisely, these women were. Institutions whose founders believed the women they admitted were morally depraved and in desperate need of strict discipline were likely to adhere to a penal model of reclamation, while those based

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on a philosophy holding that these women retained some element of middle-class ideals or morals, despite their socio-economic condition, were likely to be based on an attempt to nurture that remaining kernel.

IV

LIKE THE DESCRIPTIONS OF applicants to houses of reform, the reports of the Midnight Meetings allow us to see Victorian reclamation workers confronting the inadequacy of the narratives that informed their ideas about fallen women and prostitutes. The meetings originated with the work of Lieutenant John Blackmore, who established the first "Moonlight Missions" (also called "Midnight Meetings") in England and documented his experiences in *London By Moonlight Mission* (1860). Missionaries approached prostitutes, or even women *suspected* of being prostitutes,[19] and invited them to attend late-night meetings where tea or coffee would be served and a sermon preached. In its second issue, the *Magdalen's Friend* devoted considerable space to the movement, printing a prayer request, an article about the meetings, and a report from the field, in which the writer described the women in attendance:

> their very existence at all is contrary to nature, and, consequently, it is not recognised by any physical or social laws. Nature herself, which has beneficently provided for every other exigency, has left this class unprovided for, and, as it were, isolated from the fellowship of other mortals. Their mode of life is simply a defiance of nature's tenderest laws. Soul and body have been deliberately bartered for the 'wages of iniquity.' Everything revolting to humanity, destructive to religion, and brutalising in its influences, is compressed into the narrow limits of their sphere. ("The Midnight Mission" 1.2 33–34)

The vacillation here between the prostitute as something horrible (she is "contrary to nature," in "defiance of nature's tenderest laws," "revolting to humanity [and] destructive to religion") and as a victim ("unprovided for" and "isolated") clearly echo what Barret-Ducrocq describes as an alternation between "the image of woman-as-victim" and the image of women as "hard, brutal and deeply depraved" (Barret-Ducrocq 31). This wavering is part and parcel of the workers' attempts to comprehend the prostitute by cobbling together narratives already available to them. The problem, as these reports reveal, is that the available narratives tended towards two extremes, while the typical woman fell somewhere in between.

Later in the same issue, a reporter seems astonished by the women in attendance at the Midnight Meeting:

> Are these the 'gay' and the 'unfortunate' – the dashing courtesans, or the starveling outcasts of the West End? They differ very little in appearance and demeanour from as many women of 'the middle and lower middle class.' . . . With few exceptions there are no extravagant dresses – still less are there any symptoms of levity or indecorum. ("The Midnight Meetings" 1.2 59)

This concern with demographics indicates an anxiety about determining precisely who and what these women were. The reporter's preconceptions about prostitutes are clear: there are two spheres which these women may occupy – those of "the dashing courtesans, or the starveling outcasts of the West End." What the reporter finds, however, is another category of fallen women. These women, who "differ very little in appearance and demeanour from . . . many women of 'the middle and lower middle class,'" formed the largest segment of

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women at the Midnight Meetings, and the degree to which the missionaries seemed surprised by this suggests that even as they were creating policies, both public and private, to contend with "The Great Social Evil," there was still significant confusion about *who* those policies were meant to affect.

Later in this same report, after "at least fifty more have entered" the meeting ("The Midnight Meetings" 1.2 59), the writer describes the latecomers' behavior as possessing "an air of social outlawry not so marked before, and bold-faced women in silk" ("The Midnight Meetings" 1.2 59) sitting alongside "fellow-sinners in humbler raiment" ("The Midnight Meetings" 1.2 59). This juxtaposition of the two types of women prompts the reporter to comment on the range of ages in attendance:

> The disparity of age strikes one now more than before. Here are mere girls – girls of sixteen or seventeen – girls who, if seen in pure and happy homes, would have recalled the poet's image of innocent white feet touching the stream that divides childhood from womanhood – girls on whose fair faces paint and drink have not yet replaced the natural bloom with streaks and patches. Here are women of the age at which wise men seek loving helpmates, and children are born early enough to be the pillars of household happiness. And here, too, are women in their ripening prime – women who should be rejoicing . . . in the strong arm of a husband's trust, and the golden girdle of sons and daughters – but women whose still healthful frames and comely features speak but of a physical vigour invulnerable to twenty years of dissolute pleasure and precarious livelihood. ("The Midnight Meetings" 1.2 59)[20]

Here we can see the conflict between the narratives and the realties of the fallen woman. These were hardly angels in the house gone wrong. Instead, the complaint here is primarily about their failure to perform expected roles: the girls, the marriageable women, and the "women in their ripening prime" do not conform to the conventional expectations of female domesticity. They are, at once, examples of potential feminine ideals and creatures of "dissolute pleasure"; they are young and old; they are virtuous and inexorably fallen, but most importantly, they often do not look like the type of women the reporter expects. Even those exceptions (the "mere girls") can be absorbed into the Hogarthian narrative of inevitable descent – they will eventually find that "paint and drink" replace the "natural bloom with streaks and patches" ("The Midnight Meetings" 1.2 59).

A later reporter seems overjoyed upon finally seeing the class of prostitute he expected:

> Here, however, to-night, was to be found the real *mulier formosa* in abundance . . . no fairer specimen of English female beauty could be afforded than in the case of the 250 young women thus heterogeneously brought together. On many a surpassingly fair face did I gaze as I threaded my way through the crowded saloon that night; but, alas! to how many had their very charms proved a snare and a source of ruin. ("The Midnight Meetings" 1.4 119)

Unlike the domestic servants and young girls attending the earlier Midnight Meeting who had exhibited no "symptoms" ("The Midnight Meetings" 1.2 59) of their fall, these women resemble conventional Victorian discourse. Unlike the "many women of 'the middle and lower class'" of the earlier report ("The Midnight Meetings" 1.2 59), which had identified the fallen women as a majority, this second group of fallen women are exceptional. Their "charms" (denoting both female attractiveness and a capacity for magical enchantment) on display in "the crowded saloon" perform a double duty, serving at once as an advantage

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in securing a lover and as "a source of ruin," a common motif in literary treatments of the fallen woman.[21] Even more, their beauty is specifically English, and female, in nature, which marks these women as specifically connected to English social problems.

Other accounts are similar. According to a report from a meeting at the Newington Causeway

> The greater part of the women present were young, one or two being mere children. Some few were tending to middle age, and had the appearance of miserable and degraded wretches. The faces of some told unmistakably the story of shame. The husky voice, the bloated countenance, and the restless eye, all proclaimed the melancholy fact that you were in the presence of outcasts. Others had fine intelligent faces, probably manifesting a lesser degree of depravity, and leading one to entertain a hope that they were not hopelessly irreclaimable. Some few were flashily dressed; the remainder being of a lower class, or of the very lowest. ("The Midnight Meetings" 1.2 61)

Like the earlier report, the emphasis here upon the range of women reveals the difficulties of defining the fallen woman in terms of age, class, or physiognomy. The observer attempts to categorize the women first in terms of age – "young," "mere children," and "tending to middle age" – and later associates character traits or behaviors with those ages. The women "tending to middle age" are "miserable and degraded"; those with "fine intelligent faces" demonstrate a "lesser degree of depravity." A later report further comments on the age of the women, describing how the observer "was at first struck with the extremely youthful appearance of many who came in. It was most painful to notice that many of them were girls whose age could not be more than fifteen or sixteen years, but the majority might be from nineteen to twenty-five or twenty-six years old" ("The Midnight Meetings" 1.3 84). The emphasis here on the "youthful appearance" reveals, again, the difficulty in reconciling expectation and reality. The reporter's construction seems to seek a balance between the expected demographic ("but the majority") and the anxiety of the unexpected ("struck with the extremely youthful"; "most painful to notice") as if to claim that even though some of the women in attendance were unexpectedly young, this inconsistency was remedied by the attendance of women who fell into the expected age range.

This is not to say that the younger women are ignored. Despite the fact that so many reporters mention them, their typically quick dismissal as an anomaly in favor of editorial attention to the expected demographic suggests that these writers were deeply interested in the typification of the prostitute. Just as the houses of reclamation instituted admissions procedures designed to admit the type of penitent prostitute they expected, the reports of the Midnight Meetings also work to reinforce a certain image of the prostitute.

Other reports reveal that the notion of the fallen woman's type was so deeply embedded that the reclamation movement as a whole failed to account for remarkably practical obstacles to many women's admission to house of reform. The *Magdalen's Friend* published a number of pieces of advice to workers who might encounter recalcitrant women. Often, this advice focused on how to explain to the women that the Rescue Society's homes were not like the Magdalen Hospital. Homes operated by the Rescue Society often generated income by providing laundry services, using inmates for labor (Figures 11 and 12). There were, however, instances where potential inmates' resistance came from unexpected quarters. Describing one woman's refusal to enter a house of reclamation, a reporter notes that children often posed problems:

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women and girls have been welcomed to this "door of hope," not—be it remembered—for a mere temporary stay as in a Refuge, but to receive many months' food, clothing, and shelter, and to be trained for an honourable livelihood. Of this number 8,752 have been placed in situations. Countless are the testimonies from mistresses to the exemplary conduct and satisfactory work of the

PREPARING FOR DOMESTIC SERVICE—GIRLS IRONING.

Figure 11. "Preparing for Domestic Service — Girls Ironing." Photomechanical illustration from *From Darkness to Light. The wonderful record of the Rescue Society* (London: George Newnes and *Sunday Strand*, 1901). Courtesy of London Metropolitan Archives.

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13

IN THE WASH HOUSE.

to the Committee and Staff of this Christ-like Charity, to know that the work commenced in the middle of the Nineteenth Century is, at the dawn of the Twentieth, as bright with hope as it is blessed in its memories. It is remarkable what a tenacious hold the work takes upon those who once come under the spell of its glorious possibilities. Daniel Cooper died in harness after thirty years' work.

Figure 12. "In the Wash House." Photomechanical illustration from *From Darkness to Light. The wonderful record of the Rescue Society* (London: George Newnes and *Sunday Strand*, 1901). Courtesy of London Metropolitan Archives.

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> One young woman regretted that she could not accept the offer of a Home, as it would involve a separation from her child, who was 'as dear to her as life itself,' and added, the 'the mother who would forsake her child was a disgrace to her sex.' There is nothing extraordinary in the utterance of such a truism as this, but it came home with new force when proceeding from such a source. It is to be hoped that before long something will be devised to meet such cases as these, and some judicious endeavours be carried out for the rescue of such of these unfortunates as are mothers; for the most helpful cases are to be found amongst them, and the maternal feelings of themselves could be used as a great lever for uplifting these sunken ones. ("The Midnight Meetings" 1.4 118)

The reporter's surprise here indicates that he did not expect such a response from these women, and raises significant questions about how it is possible for a reclamation worker – who would presumably have been convinced of the fallen woman's capacity for redemption – to be surprised at such a reasonable expression of maternal sentiment. To a degree, it is possible to assume that the reporter might have expected the woman's sentiments to be hardened in general and her feelings about her child to be somehow conflicted. It is possible that the reporter might have expected the woman to view her child as a kind of curse. It is also possible that the reporter did not expect a child at all, which would allow him to maintain an image of the fallen woman as simultaneously fallen yet somehow *nearly* virginal.

Children were one of the primary markers of fallen women, and so the reclamation movement's failure to provide for mothers suggests that they were envisioning a different sort of woman. Women entering homes of reclamation needed to be childless in order to meet both the requirements of the institutions and, as this reporter's surprise indicates, the presuppositions of the missionary workers, as well. This is understandable; these homes were, in part, "designed to socialise women into the social and sexual mores of the middle class as well as to create an industrial workforce of domestic servants" (Bartley 13). The homes' insistence upon reclaiming only certain types of woman suggests that the institutions perpetuated traditional notions of the prostitutes' origins that aligned neatly with preconceived notions of the figure.

It is important to note that the houses of the Rescue Society did not, generally, allow women to bring their children into the homes, and this failure to provide resources for what should have been a predictable and expected condition suggests a number of shortcomings on the part of the reclamation movement. Paula Bartley describes how such institutions' admissions procedures often worked. The admissions process

> categorised [applicants] into those worth saving and those who were not – often the women's age was the determining factor in this. A sliding scale of morality operated in most institutions: at one end of the sexually dissolute spectrum stood the older, irredeemable prostitute whereas at the other stood a much younger, impressionable and compliant woman who could be saved. (Bartley 36)

Bartley notes that "Management committees tended to accept younger women in preference to those who had been on the streets for some time as 'they had come to the conclusion that it was useless to receive any woman over 30 years of age'" (Bartley 36). As a result, institutions tended to focus their efforts on "women in their twenties" (Bartley 36), and almost exclusively on women who met specific demographic criteria. The result is that the women they reclaimed reified the narrative that had determined their placement in the home in the first place.

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Children were not the only obstacle preventing women from entering a house of reclamation. Potential applicants often had debts, rents, and family obligations, and when we consider that the reclamation movement expected them to quite literally abandon all their responsibilities, refusals are not surprising. Despite the movement's efforts to help them, its policies allowed assistance to only specific types of women, and so only those women – who matched the predefined narrative fantasy – were eligible for admission. By refusing entrance to those who did not match the desired type, the reclamation movement reified their expectations by simply ignoring any exceptions.

V

A SIGNIFICANT PART OF THE reclamation movement's narrative about their applicants was that these women would be trained for work as domestic servants. Domestic service was by far the most popular form of employment for women in urban areas: the 1851 census records a staggering 273,327 women under the age of 20, and 401,984 over 20, working as servants (Census 141). But when we consider the sheer number of fallen women who emerged *from* the ranks of domestic service, there is tremendous irony in the movement's reclaiming women only to send them back into the same job market. This did not escape contributors and editors of the *Magdalen's Friend*.

By its third issue, contributors began to point out that large numbers of the prostitutes they encountered came from the servant classes. The presence of so many women from the ranks of domestic servants challenged simplistic moral narratives about fallen women, forcing reporters to attend to the economic dimension of prostitution. There were, perhaps, certain practical issues that made other options for these women impossible. One article from 1860 discusses what to do with the women after they had been "reformed" in one of the homes and warns against wishful thinking about employment outside domestic service:

> Experience has proved that a vast majority of the fallen are from the ranks of domestic servants, and to domestic service they must return, after quitting the friendly shelter of the Homes. In vain do we cast about our eyes for other remunerative branches of labour. Every door is closed – every market stocked. To employ them as needlewomen, at present starvation prices, would be the surest method of entangling them again in sin, and making their last state worse than their first; and yet, with that indelible blemish upon their characters, we can be no advocates for their indiscriminate admission into every private family. ("The Duty of Providing Situations and Employment for the Rescued" 1.9 267)

The clear recognition of exactly where these women were coming from is significant. While other reporters had noted the presence of large numbers of these women, they had done so in the context of mounting a complaint about their (sometimes extreme) youth or by way of expressing surprise about their general presence. This reporter, however, identifies the crucial problem facing the reclamation movement as a whole: these women largely came from domestic service and, for wholly economic reasons, "to domestic service they must return." Too many women flooding the job markets meant employment opportunities were limited even for women without "that indelible blemish upon their characters," and so with no other options available, as the reporter notes with sadness, they found themselves back in the same circumstances that led to their initial fall. This recognition of the difficulty of

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the situation seems to suggest a realization that the narrative of the fallen woman's complete reclamation was deeply troubled by the material conditions from which they came and to which they must return. In short, neither the women nor the conditions from which they came matched the workers' narratives.

Seemingly in response, reporters from the *Magdalen's Friend* returned to the narrative of the woman-as-victim and began to identify domestic service as a particularly treacherous position for young women. In 1861, one writer explained that prostitutes were "often corrupted by the man-servants with whom they are compelled to associate. . . . For the sake of a momentary amusement to themselves, and for the folly of gratifying the vanity of a foolish girl, they will, by an unguarded familiarity, destroy the purity of an innocent mind" ("A Few Words to Fathers" 2.4 140). Reclamation workers came to believe firmly that modes of employment such as domestic service and needlework functioned as gateways to prostitution. Discussing the annual report from the London Female Preventive and Reformatory Institute in 1861, the writers exclaimed that out of

> No fewer than one thousand applications. . . . only a fourth of this number could be admitted. Of the 254 thus received, 165 were domestic servants, and 89 were needlewomen. These two classes evidently constitute the main feeders of social vice. . . . There is evidently something radically defective in our domestic relations, when we consider the frightful proportion of fallen women who claim to belong to the rank of servants. When will masters and mistresses learn to consider their domestics as a sacred trust, reposed in them for higher ends than the promotion of their own comfort, ease, and independence, and feel constrained to watch for their souls as they that must give account? ("The London Female Preventive and Reformatory Institution" 2.4 155)

While the numbers here are remarkable, the magazine's emphasis upon the failings of the masters and mistresses who do not "consider their domestics as a sacred trust" suggests a movement away from commentary on the moral failings of the fallen woman and towards a discussion of the conditions of domestics' employment. When exploring why such a number of fallen women came from the servant classes, the editors conclude that many who hired domestics tended to treat them as disposable commodities. With the markets flooded by women looking for work, employers were free to dismiss their servants for even the slightest infraction without fear of being unable to find a replacement. Here we see the woman as a victim of economic, rather than sexual, violence.

This attention to the relationship between domestic servants and fallen women would characterize the *Magdalen's Friend* over the last years of its publication. Despite its brief run and abrupt end, the publication recorded a significant amount of contemporary thinking on prostitution during the Victorian era, providing a record of how the fallen woman was perceived by those working in the reclamation movement and, more importantly, how those perceptions changed – or did not.

In it, we find workers capable of recognizing the difference between the actual women with whom they were working and the fictions that surrounded them them, and yet we see again and again that even these more open-minded types return to those fictions in order to understand these women. The reports of the "Midnight Meetings" provide a remarkable record of challenges to a traditional way of thinking about the figure. The editors sought to combat the "Great Social Evil," but they quickly found their assumptions inadequate to the task. Where they expected to find drunken women addicted to finery, they found young

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domestic servants unable to find work. Where they expected to find the worst examples of corrupted femininity, they found traditional expressions of middle-class, maternal sentiment. Where they expected to find women willing to abandon all responsibilities and save their souls by entering a house of reclamation, they found women with children, debts to pay, and family obligations that prevented such flights. In these reports, we can see the authors of the *Magdalen's Friend* working to understand the women they encountered, but what emerges is the clear sense that even among those who worked most closely with fallen women, there was tremendous confusion about who these women were, how they came to be, and how best to alleviate their condition.

Weber State University

NOTES

1. Because the British Library's copy of the *Magdalen's Friend* is a bound edition, dating monthly installments is difficult. However, the magazine's organizational conventions allow us to surmise where most issues began and ended, even if not otherwise indicated. The final issue of the *Magdalen's Friend* likely appeared in June 1864. While its initial volume of nine issues, which ran from April 1860 through December of that year, was published by J. Nisbet (who published a large number of similar texts), from 1861 until it ceased publication, printing was handled by Wertheim, Macintosh, and Hunt.
2. Tuckniss served as chaplain to the Society for the Rescue of Young Women and Children, but is best known for contributing an essay on "The Agencies at Present in Operation Within the Metropolis for the Suppression of Crime" to Mayhew's *London Labour and the London Poor* (1861); later, he served on the board of the Society for the Prevention of Child Murder. A 16 December 1863 advertisement from the *Times* lists Tuckniss as a member of the committee for the National Society for the Prevention of Child Murder ("National"). Tuckniss's involvement with the Rescue Society is explained in his eulogy, published in the final issue of the *Magdalen's Friend*.
3. "Fallen women," broadly construed, described any woman who had engaged in sexual relations outside of wedlock. Although prostitutes would be contained under this umbrella term, not all fallen women were prostitutes.
4. References to articles in the *Magdalen's Friend* will be cited by title, volume, issue, and page number, and listed individually in the works cited. Where a month of publication is clear, I will indicate so in the works cited.
5. I will refer to it as the "reclamation movement" to avoid confusion with the Reform movement, which was primarily concerned with penal and educational issues of the London poor.
6. What records remain of the Magdalen Trust are housed in the Lambeth Archives, and while the Trust contains much interesting information about the history of the institution, no admissions records remain.
7. There are a number of Victorian examples of this narrative. See, for instance, Augustus Egg's trilogy of paintings, *Past and Present* (1858).
8. Acton commented on the difficulties involved in recording the number of prostitutes: "To attempt to reconcile or construct tables upon the estimates I have met with would be a hopeless task. I can merely give a few of the more moderate that have been handed down by my predecessors. Mr. Colquhoun . . . rated them at 50,000 some sixty years ago. The Bishop of Exeter spoke of them as reaching 80,000; Mr. Talbot, secretary of a society for the protection of young females, made about the same estimate" (Acton 32).

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9. See Boucherett, "How to Provide for Superfluous Women" and Livermore, *What Shall We Do With Our Daughters? Superfluous Women, and Other Lectures*.
10. See Greg, "Why Are Women Redundant."
11. See Greenwell, "Our Single Women."
12. For a contemporary discussion of this issue, see Greg's 1869 essay, "Why Are Women Redundant."
13. Johnson describes how "Dickens chose the [location for the] house, on Acton Road. He selected the Matron from a series of candidates whom he interviewed. He took great pains to find out all he could about the nature and history of the women admitted. . . . He insisted that there must be cheerful variety in their lives in the home. . . . He ordered books for them to read, and arranged . . . for them to have lessons in part-singing" (Johnson 621).
14. For discussions of Rossetti's work at Highgate, D'Amico's "'Equal Before God': Christina Rossetti and the Fallen Women of Highgate Penitentiary" is the seminal study. In her biography of Rossetti, Marsh ties her involvement with Highgate Penitentiary to feminist writers such as "Anna Jameson, Harriet Matrineau, Barbara Bodichon and others – many in the pages of the *English Woman's Journal* [who] argued forcefully for professional employment for ladies" (Marsh 218).
15. Gladstone's founding of the CPA in 1848 with Bishops Wilberforce and Blomfield and his efforts to found the House of Mercy at Clewer have perhaps been overshadowed by his habit of "night walks" (Jenkins 105), in which he engaged in "systematic late-night encounters with identifiable women, several of whom he saw many times over, occasionally accompanying them back to their rooms for long conversations" (Jenkins 104).
16. Thomas's essay was published as ten-part series, with installments appearing more or less monthly over the course of the year.
17. Over the course of its publication, the *Magdalen's Friend* published no fewer than twenty pieces in which it commented on the length of an inmates' stay or the harsh discipline of some homes.
18. In "Female Missionaries to the Fallen," published in the second issue of 1861, the author describes how the Reformatory and Refuge Union warned its workers that "It will occasionally happen (especially when a missionary first engages in the work) that a tract may be offered to one for whom it is not intended. But a kind word even to such a one, met at that time, and under those circumstances, may be useful, and not out of place" ("Female Missionaries to the Fallen" 2.2 44). An installment of "Missionary Sketches" from 1861 describes how one worker, while talking to a group of prostitutes, was accosted by two men who attempted to give him a tract – they were performing the same work and had mistaken him for a "john," a potential patron of prostitutes ("Missionary Sketches No. IV" 2.8 278). It is worth noting here that not only are these workers incapable of distinguishing prostitutes from the merely poor, but that they cannot tell the "johns" from the missionary workers.
19. This report was originally printed in the *Star* on 2 February 1868.
20. This sentiment is expressed clearly in Webster's fallen woman poem "A Castaway," in which the speaker describes her beauty as "my own curse at once and tool" (Webster l. 40).

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