LEFT ON THE SPINDLE: CORRESPONDENCE FROM UNWED MOTHERS TO THE LONDON FOUNDLING HOSPITAL, 1857-1872

by

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THESIS APPROVAL

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Acknowledgements

> As all historians know, the past is a great darkness, and filled with echoes. Voices may reach us from it; but what they say to us is imbued with the obscurity of the matrix out of which they come; and, try as we may, we cannot always decipher them precisely in the clearer light of our own day.
>
> — Margaret Atwood, *The Handmaid's Tale*

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THESIS ABSTRACT

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Title: Left on the Spindle: Unwed Mothers to the London Foundling Hospital, 1857-1873

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1. *Statement of the Problem or Issue*

   Unwed mothers in Victorian London had very few options for how to care for their children. Women who had children admitted to the London Foundling Hospital (FH) agreed to sever their biological ties to the child for the benefit of both parties, so the mother could work again, and the child could be raised to be a responsible citizen of London. Despite relinquishing the parental role, some mothers continued writing letters inquiring about the health of the children they surrendered. These letters express an agency and command over their lives unseen in most working-class women of the time. All previous academic writing about the Foundling Hospital Mothers barely touches on the letters they sent to the charity's secretary, while this study employs the letters to examine what mothers' lives looked like after they had left the hospital empty-handed. This study provides an extraordinary glimpse at working women, motherhood, agency, that is unlike any other project, because their stories are told through their own words.

2. *Brief Summary of the Literature*

   The literature previously produced on the FH went through three phases: histories of the institution written by participants, histories focused on the children, and histories looking at the mothers. Scholars such as Gillian Pugh, Anna Clark, John

Gillis, Jessica A. Sheetz-Nguyen, Françoise Barret-Ducrocq, and Ginger Frost have all produced studies on the Foundling Hospital's archives. The earliest studies covered the structure of the charity while the charity was still running. The next phase looked at how the children went through the charity, were treated and cared for. And finally, in the last thirty years, (as the archives have opened to the public) professional historians have examined the mothers who surrendered children, focusing mostly on the descriptions of sexual activity found in their petitions.

3. *Thesis Statement*

The FH mothers found agency, or a capacity for individual action, through their interpersonal relationships and the letters that communicated their needs and fears, as well as their stories. Through their letters we can see the mothers actively seeking the institutions best able to help mother and child. In addition, the correspondence gave women a voice and an opportunity to tell their story in their own words.

4. *Statement of the Research Methodology. Examples of Qualitative Analysis, most applicable to studies of small groups, whole populations, or non-repetitive or non-repeatable phenomena include but are not limited to: Case study, participant observation, narrative, biography, focus group, textual and contextual, qualitative theory, philosophical and artistic. Examples of Quantitative Analysis, most applicable to studies of population samples and to repetitive or repeatable phenomena include but are not limited to: Scientific survey, quantitative theory, statistical, and predictive.*

The thesis develops from a qualitative analysis of over 800 women and their letters to Secretary Brownlow. The research draws on the London Metropolitan Archives' Foundling Hospital Collection, specifically the Correspondence from Mothers of Children, 1857-1872. This file is comprised of about three thousand letters from women asking about the health of their surrendered children to those asking permission to visit, thereby challenging the by-laws. Jessica Sheetz-Nguyen described them best: "The secretary kept them on a spindle. Archivists tied up the letters with red ribbon; they were dusty with coal soot and unlikely to have been touched, as many stuck together until the 1990s."[1] Many letters in the collection are not numbered, just tucked into boxes and labeled at risk. The letters that populate this file were photographed, digitized, and organized for purposes of this research project. The petitioner mothers with the most letters were selected for transcription, although in the long term all will be transcribed. Original petition paperwork (a mother's application) was pulled for those women because they required signatures, so the signatures on the letters could be compared and verified to prove authorship. Proxy writers wrote occasionally, but those cases are easily determined. While this was the official response form for the hospital, on some occasions, John Brownlow would respond with a personal letter, based on what some mothers would say. "Your last letter alarmed me a little but I was glad

[1] Jessica A. Sheetz-Nguyen, *Victorian Women, Unwed Mothers and the London Foundling Hospital* (London: Continuum, 2012), 170.

to hear she was better and hope by this time she is quite cured."[2] Mothers might occasionally write at length in response to their conversation with Mr. Brownlow.

This study is unlike most studies of letters, because these documents are distinctly different. The letters are raw, manuscript, stream-of-consciousness notes. They are not well thought-out, privileged words of business, but rather desperate notes begging for information from people who were not given the highest, best educations, but rather whatever they could get. For this reason, transcriptions of letters have been left in their original state - misspellings, lack of punctuation, and all. If there is a question of the accuracy of a transcribed word, it will be noted. This is an effort to preserve as much as possible the tone, grammar, and voices of the mothers who wrote and poured their hearts out onto the page in the best way they could.

5. *Brief Summary of Findings*

This project provides evidence of agency in Victorian working-class women in their letters. Individual cases such as mentions of financial status and wages, an exceptional case involving incest, and connections to a Charles Dickens play are a few of the specific new findings, and overall the letters show the agency these extraordinary women possessed and how they operated within the system of the foundling hospital to keep a line of communication open about the child they gave up. Women actively participated in their choice to give up the child, they actively chose to disclose their emotional upheaval, and they utilized whatever skills they

[2] Correspondence from Mothers of Children, A/FH/A/09/019/008 Box 1, LMA. Letter from M. Hall, 1866.

had to exercise some level of control over their relationship with John Brownlow and the foundling hospital.

6.Confirmation, Modification, or Denial of Thesis

The research confirms the thesis that the mothers possessed agency over their lives. The choice the mothers had to make between their livelihood and their baby, the tension with Victorian norms, and the emotional struggle they continued to endure all reflect this. Their interpersonal relationships (with Brownlow, female employers, and friends or family) were key to their agency. Victorian society provided the women with few options and the interpersonal relationships they forged provided the capacity for individual action (agency). They accomplished this living in a time and place in which Victorian norms were inimical to their interests as working-class, unwed mothers.

7.Statement of the Significance of the Findings

In a time when women had little, if any, control over their lives, these mothers forged voices for themselves. In their attempts to share their lives with, and forge a relationship with, John Brownlow and the FH, they used letters to tell their story, to create a sense of themselves, to validate their struggle, and to assert their desires for the life of their child, as well as their own lives. They occasionally broke social protocol in letter writing, but for the most part they forged a way to operate within the system and express their own needs and concerns while living under Victorian social norms. This collection of letters, of agentic voices of Victorian women, is exceedingly rare and its value lies within the stories it contains.

8.Suggestions for Future Research

Much more work can be done with these letters, and will be, in the form of a doctoral dissertation. Further work will include more quantitative analysis on the mothers' addresses before and after the child was admitted, the occupations they held, the secretary's responses, and the records of the matrons and wet-nurses who worked for the charity.

INTRODUCTION

At the end of a long day in 1864, a young woman named Martha climbed the rickety, cramped staircase at the back of a grand house in West London, to her bedroom up in the attic. She had sped through all her duties that evening to get to this point, to write out the desperate words she had been running over in her mind that day. They had weighed on her chest like a millstone. Carefully and quietly, she ducked under her bed, pulled up the loose floor board, and grabbed the box full of correspondences from the man she wanted most to hear from. Many in the house thought she had a sweetheart, and Martha let them think that. It was better than the truth. She arranged her tiny desk carefully: the scrap of stationery, her ink and pen, and the paper that told her what she could ask about crowded together in the small pool of light the guttering candle gave off. She must write casually, avoid sounding too desperate or sad about her request although she was both. She had already bought the stamps, as she had been thinking about this day for weeks. She steeled herself, and wrote to John Brownlow (1800-1873), secretary of the London Foundling Hospital: "22nd April, Dear Sir, I write this to ask you if my child is well/ received on the 7 day of July 1860 the letter V Tomorrow is her Birthday. From your humble servant, Martha Downs."[1]

Although the circumstances described above in which Martha Downs wrote this letter are imagined, the letter is quite real and is part of a collection of correspondence to the London Foundling Hospital (FH) now housed in the London Metropolitan Archives (LMA) in England. The repository holds over three thousand letters like Martha's, all from unwed mothers who had children taken by the FH to be raised by the charity rather

[1] Correspondence from Mothers of Children, A/FH/A/09/019/007/1-632, LMA.

than starve on the streets with a disgraced mother. These instances of letter writing raise questions about agency in the working class in Victorian London, as well as questions about the mothers themselves: who were they? Where had they worked? How literate were they? What emotions could they discuss, if any? How had their lives changed after surrendering their out-of-wedlock children? The FH mothers found agency, or a capacity for individual action, through their interpersonal relationships and the letters that communicated their needs and fears, as well as their stories. Through their letters we can see the mothers actively seeking the institutions best able to help mother and child. In addition, the correspondence gave women a voice and an opportunity to tell their story in their own words. They were not merely conforming to societal expectations in the letters they wrote, but rather were working within the system of rules laid out for them by the FH, through letters and through interpersonal relationships, in agentic ways.

Agency, in this study, means primarily an account of the capacity for individual choice and action in Victorian England despite social values and norms inimical to those of the unwed mothers' interests. "Feminist theories of agency stress deliberation, judgement, and action of historical actors."[2] These women actively participated in their lives and chose the outcomes of their unplanned pregnancies.[3] Judith Butler theorized in her 1988 article "Performative Acts and Gender Constitution," gender is a performance,

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[2] Virginia L. Grimaldi, "Single, Unwed, and Pregnant in Victorian London: Narratives of Working Class Agency and Negotiation," *Madison Historical Review*, 14, Article 3 (2017): 13. (Hereafter: Victoria L. Grimaldi, "Single, Unwed, and Pregnant")

[3] The mothers chose the outcome of their unplanned pregnancies by making the choice between prostitution and/or poverty in workhouses or having their entire moral character publicly examined and corroborated by family and employers. While some of the mothers may have been pressured into petitioning more than others, for other mothers this was more of a choice than a last resort.

or stylized repetition of acts, and not a locus of agency or stable identity.[4] Butler, rather than embracing the language of choice and self-determination to define agency, explains it instead as "the subject who is produced in and through discourse can act by articulating words in contexts that invest them with new meaning. Through such linguistic performances, the subject can 'resist' the pre-established social order that not only circumscribes her, but which penetrates her very being."[5] Irene Oh rebuts in her 2009 article "The Performativity of Motherhood," that "motherhood should be understood as performative, that is, entailing self-reflective agency but not entirely separable from women's bodies."[6] Oh goes on to use Butler's theories of performance to explain her own theories of motherhood, including that because Butler uses Michel Foucault's concept of the paradox of subjectivation to argue that the very condition of subordination generate agency, therefore "possibilities for agency lie not outside of but within existing power structures."[7] This is exactly what the mothers of the FH had. In their subordination to the power structure of the charity, they operated within the system with agency. As philosopher and bioethicist Hilde Lindemann Nelson masterfully explained, these women, by narrating their own stories through letters, created "counterstories," or stories that differ from the master narrative history recorded about working women in Victorian

[4] Judith Butler, "Performative Acts and Gender Constitution: An Essay in Phenomenology and Feminist Theory," *Theatre Journal* 40, no. 4 (1988): 519.
[5] Kathy Dow Magnus, "The Unaccountable Subject: Judith Butler and the Social Conditions of Intersubjective Agency," *Hypatia* 21, no. 2 (2006): 83.
[6] Irene Oh, "The Performativity of Motherhood: Embodying Theology and Political Agency," *Journal of the Society of Christian Ethics* 29, no. 2 (2009): 4. (Hearafter: Irene Oh, "Performativity of Motherhood")
[7] Irene Oh, " Performativity of Motherhood," 6.

London.[8] This gave them an identity different from what society told them to be. They should have been fallen women, shamed, demure, and silent, but instead they spoke up, made choices, and expressed themselves through letters and relationships that broke social protocol. Philosopher Nancy Hartsock also established that women gain agency through acts of solidarity with others, which is touched on here in chapters two and four.[9] The agency defined here required knowledge of stepping outside of social norms and acting individually, and all the women herein described did exactly this. These subjects recognized their own desires and values and they are distinguishable from the norm. Agency is revealed when records show those who should have been powerless were able to exert some level of influence on those with power.[10]

The FH had a long history in England's capital. Thomas Coram (1658-1751), a sea captain and boat builder, established in 1739 the FH, the first children's charity of its sort in England since the Reformation. He addressed the need for relief of children of unwed mothers after seeing many babies abandoned on dung heaps.[13] Inspired by public foundling hospitals in Europe, the London institution ran privately for most of its existence and worked to not only prevent the deaths of infants, but also to care for the children of working-class unwed women so the mothers could get reputable work again

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[8] Hilde Lindemann Nelson, *Damaged Identities, Narrative Repair* (Ithaca, NY: Cornell University Press, 2001), 36.
[9] Nancy Harstock, *Money, Sex, and Power: Toward a Feminist Historical Materialism* (Boston: Northeastern University Press, 1985), 45.
[10]Grimaldi, "Single, Unwed, and Pregnant,"13.
[13] Gillian Pugh, *London's Forgotten Children: Thomas Coram and the London Foundling Hospital* (London: Routledge, 2007), 16.(Hereafter: Gillian Pugh, *London's Forgotten Children*)

instead of their pregnancy burdening them the rest of their lives.[14] It operated until World War II when the orphanage system and other homes for surplus children were closed and at which time the Thomas Coram Foundation for Children came into existence, which runs to this day, standardizing good practice in foster care and adoption proceedings.[15]

Brownlow's tenure as secretary of the hospital is pivotal to this study, as he wrote the first history of the charity, was the man to whom all these letters were written, and was the most prominent figure of the FH in the nineteenth century. Brownlow himself started as a foundling – number 18607 – and began working in the hospital as soon as he reached the age of majority in 1828, as the treasurer's clerk.[16] By 1849 he had made his way to the highest administrative position within the charity, secretary, which he served as until 1872.[17] Working to prove the efficacy of the FH, Brownlow took it upon himself to write the first history of the institution and utilized the extensive records kept by the administrators before him, as well as interviews to tell his narrative of how the charity started and how it had been run since. Brownlow's esteem for the charity is not only present in his publications, but throughout his professional career. Rather than feeling vindictive towards the women who had been careless enough to fall pregnant, Brownlow felt sincere sympathy for them in their despair. "For the error of a day, she was punished

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[14] Gillian Pugh, *London's Forgotten Children*,16.
[15] Gillian Pugh, *London's Forgotten Children* , 6.
[16] Jessica A. Sheetz-Nguyen, *Victorian Women, Unwed Mothers and the London Foundling Hospital* (London: Continuum, 2012), 61. (Hereafter: Jessica A. Sheetz-Nguyen, *Victorian Women*)
[17] Jessica A. Sheetz-Nguyen, *Victorian Women* , 61.

with the infamy of years," he stated.[18] He went on, and phrased the plight of the mothers applying to the hospital in the most poignant terms written about them:

> Surely the woman who would make so great a struggle to preserve her reputation, as to break the natural ties which bind parent to offspring, who is willing to forego the endearments which are the fruits of her situation, by either sacrificing or deserting her child, cannot, with justice, be charged as habitually lewd!- a lewd woman has no shame to hide – she makes a show of her guilt, and claims, in open day, the protection which she knows has been provided for her by the poor-laws.[19]

Brownlow went on to say that a truly honorable woman, victimized by the treachery of a man, could in her despair take out her anguish on the consequence of her despair: the child she had been left with.[20] Brownlow regularly spent time with these women in their most desperate hours and he turned to them in compassion. His hesitation to condemn women who would rather undergo the painful experience of petitioning the FH than rely on the welfare system of the time is clearly a result of his relationship with so many of these women. Being a Foundling himself, he easily could have been hardened toward this group of women who (like his own mother) chose to sacrifice maternal instinct for what they hoped could be a better life. Serving as the Inquirer before being promoted to Secretary, Brownlow had most likely heard every trick in the book and knew well the difference between a woman trying to scam the system and a woman who truly needed the FH's charity. His experience personally and professionally should have created a character of disdainful superiority, but the letters the mothers wrote to him show how truly they appreciated him. If anything, however, his experiences made Brownlow the

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[18] John Brownlow, *The History and Design of the Foundling Hospital with a Memoir of the Founder* (1858; repr., Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2014), 2.(Hereafter John Brownlow, *History and Design*)
[19] John Brownlow, *History and Design* 2-3.
[20] John Brownlow, *History and Design*, 3.

best person for the job of secretary of the FH, as his compassion for their troubles meant changes in policy considerate of their emotional needs.

Despite his sympathy, Brownlow was still a staunch Victorian with strict, straight-laced definitions and a concrete moral code. Brownlow's time at the hospital, especially before he became secretary, shaped this. "In the wake of the new poor laws, the institution combined sympathetic understanding with a stringent no-nonsense approach to the petitioners."[21] His time serving as under-secretary taking notes and investigating testimonies probably strongly influenced his regard for petitioning mothers.[22] Brownlow became intimately familiar with how women might try to get around the rules of the hospital, and could quickly discern when a woman told him something other than the truth. Throughout the files of rejected petitions he processed as under-secretary, notes are scrawled on them revealing why petitions were rejected without further inquiry. A few examples of Brownlow's reasons for rejection are as follows, in his exact phrasing:

> Her employer worked with the father, she had known him 7 years, they courted for 18 months, she went to his lodgings repeatedly.
> The father of this child is not married- but when the petitioner was living with him as servant, he kept a woman in the house who acted as his wife.
> The father in this case is a married man. She knew it at the time of connection. They were living with the same family.
> This petitioner was living with the father of her child in a state of concubinage for a period of 17 years! - She had 10 children by him, 5 of which are now living!!
> Father was a married man and petitioner knew it.[23]

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[21] Jessica A. Sheetz-Nguyen, *Victorian Women* , 60.
[22] Jessica A. Sheetz-Nguyen, *Victorian Women* 60-1.
[23] Rejected Foundling Hospital Petitions, A/FH/A/08/1-1840-60, LMA.

These few examples are some of the more sensational notes Brownlow left on petitions, but in most cases his reason for rejection occurred simply because the mother gave birth in a workhouse, which went against the hospital's requirements for eligibility.[24] Despite his harsh, almost dismissive language, Brownlow was a man trying to uphold the rules and regulations of the institution. His sympathy becomes much clearer once the mother's petition was accepted.

Brownlow received all the letters in this study and served as a locus of emotional energy for the mothers' inquiries. He is the common denominator in the narratives of these letters, but (almost refreshingly), his words are mostly absent from the body of the thesis. His responses and letters have been lost to time, sent back to the mothers and not organized into a central file like theirs were. While only half of the conversations have been preserved, the interpersonal relationships in the correspondence reveal the agency these Victorian women possessed. It cannot be determined if they were successful in their efforts, but the evidence of their attempts is valuable on its own because it shows the attempts at individual action.

While the history of the FH is well established, the stories of the women who gave up their children to the foundation deserve more examination. Life for a working-class woman in London could often be a lonely experience. As historian Anna Clark explained, "Late-eighteenth- and early nineteenth-century plebeian women, then, shaped for themselves a culture which defied the increasingly narrow conventions of middle-class life. They stepped out into public life of streets and pubs and organized themselves

[24] Rejected Foundling Hospital Petitions, A/FH/A/08/1-1840-60, LMA.

to bridge between work and home."[25] The influx of women into London during the era of enclosures (the period from 1750-1860 when the Enclosure Acts restricted peasant access to open and wasted lands) and the rise and expansion of London as an entrepôt for world trade coincided with the Napoleonic Wars (1803-1815).[26] The spaces these women worked happened to be well-appointed homes in West and North London, in fashionable neighborhoods like Regent's Park and Westminster. "The master, mistress, and family occupied the middle three or four floors with the top and bottom of the house filled primarily with servants' quarters, kitchens, and storage. The ground floor was the most likely space for keeping company."[27] The serving women operated primarily in the spaces behind the scenes, however. By the last quarter of the eighteenth century, "it was more common for upper floors to be taken up entirely by bedrooms, dressing rooms, and closets. Uses of these rooms are seen as distinctive of the eighteenth century. Bedrooms were no longer commonly used for receiving visitors, except for women who were lying-in after childbirth and who would only have received female guests."[28] As trends changed in the eighteenth century, they shaped housing situations for London servants in the nineteenth. Servants usually lived in the top of the house, unless they worked in the kitchen, which meant they slept in the basement. Employees completed their tasks out of sight of the guests through separate entrances, staircases, and workspaces hidden from the

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[25] Anna Clark, *The Struggle for the Breeches: Gender and the Making of the British Working Class* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1997), 40. (Hereafter: Anna Clark, *Struggle for the Breeches*)
[26] Robert Tombs, *The English and Their History* (New York: Vintage Books, 2014), 494.
[27] Benjamin Heller, "Leisure and the Use of Domestic Space in Georgian London," *The Historical Journal*, 53, No. 3 (2010): 633.(Hereafter: Benjamin Heller, "Leisure and Use")
[28] Benjamin Heller, "Leisure and Use,"637.

public view. Their spaces were separate from those they worked for, but they interacted with them, flitting in and out of the spotlight in the most beautiful houses in London.

In Victorian London, women's employment rarely afforded many opportunities, but little was known about the working conditions of those serving. Henry Mayhew, a journalist and advocate for reform of social issues in the nineteenth century, commented on how strange and out of place women workers seemed, as he conducted interviews with women who worked out in the streets for his book *London Labor and London Poor.* Charles Booth, a social researcher and reformer, also mentioned women's work, but his protégé, a woman named Clara Collet, a British social reformer and researcher, shed the most insight on their lives. Collet (who, at the end of the nineteenth century received a Parliamentary commission to investigate the lives of working women) conducted the pioneering piece of investigation on the lives of the female serving class.

Collet's work was so groundbreaking because before her, a rising fear of united social groups led to a separation and isolation of workers by employers in the nineteenth century. "Yet, as the nineteenth century advanced, they (working class women) faced increasing controls over their sociability and increasingly rigid definitions of respectability."[29] Purposefully, employers separated women, broke them into units for work and attempted to prevent them from uniting into any sort of cohesive force. "London servants stranded in middle-class neighborhoods and needlewomen slaving in sweatshops faced a forbidding isolation. Nonetheless, female networks set the precedent for a working-class solidarity that could move beyond concerns of the workplace to those

[29] Anna Clark, *Struggle for the Breeches* , 40-1.

of families and the larger community."[30] London generated immense numbers of poor law workhouses and infirmaries and charities for unwed mothers, but the FH provided assurances of safekeeping of their out-of-wedlock child, and singularly afforded this. It took an act of courage for them to begin the process of petitioning in the first place. In their loneliness and isolation, the path to falling pregnant came easily, and the lifeline of writing to the FH became an essential tether to reality for many of them.

One of the greatest challenges to researching the history of working-class women in Victorian London is the lack of literature documenting or writing about their lives. They occasionally starred in penny novels about servant women marrying rich or discovering their status as a secret heiress. Typically, women of this era are not thought of as active agents of their lives but rather passive victims of patriarchal control, in contemporary perspectives. When looking closer, however, this stereotype often falls apart. In an article discussing challenges to writing history, Nida Bikman and Victoria Krumholz explained, "One of the reasons why significantly lower agency is attributed to past women might be because people may be unaware of women's achievements in male-dominated areas in the past or the different ways in which they may have exerted agency."[31] This study will bring needed focus to women operating within a system to get what they desired through agentic action.

Although agency is a relatively new subject of academic writing, historians have been writing about the charity for nearly one hundred and sixty years, and in that time

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[30] Anna Clark, *Struggle for the Breeches* , 40-1.

[31] Nida Bikman and Victoria Krumholtz, "The Importance of Knowing Your History: Perceiving Past Women as Less Agentic than Contemporary Women Predicts Impaired Quantitative Performance." *Sex Roles: A Journal of Research*, 79, no. 11-12 (Dec 2018): 622.

perceptions of the hospital's most important aspects underwent multiple iterations of change. Historical interpretation of the London FH and its operations changed from primary examinations of the function of the charity to in-depth analyses of individual experiences within the system. Historical writing changed over the twentieth century because of a shifted focus in scholarly research from top-down to bottom-up explanations of past events, and a shift from histories written by participants of the charity to studies conducted by professional historians. The institution itself became the first focus covered by historians examining the wealth of archives it left behind.

In 1856, the FH Governors published an illuminating document also essential to this study: an updated, Victorian set of rules called *By-Laws and Regulations of the Foundling Hospital*. This document, constitutional in nature, lays out in full the expectations of all people working for the charity, from the committee to the inspectors of children in the country. The main focus of the corporation is the admission of illegitimate children.[32] It uses very specific language concerning the children that can be accepted: less than twelve months old, already born, and no money could be given in exchange for the child's acceptance.[33] The language the authors used for mothers is especially specific: "The Committee shall be satisfied of the previous good character, and present necessity of the Mother of every child proposed for admission; and that the Father of the child (if living) has deserted the Mother and child; and that the reception of the child will, in all probability, be the means of replacing the Mother in the course of virtue, and the way of an honest livelihood."[34] This list of rules and regulations, thirty-seven

[32] "By-Laws and Regulations of the Foundling Hospital" (London: C. Jaques, 1856), 3.
[33] "By-Laws and Regulations of the Foundling Hospital" (London: C. Jaques, 1856), 3.
[34] "By-Laws and Regulations of the Foundling Hospital" (London: C. Jaques, 1856), 3-4.

pages long, was written to communicate societal expectations and Victorian values. The rules were printed on the front of every petition. “No person need apply unless she shall have previously borne a good character for Virtue, Sobriety, and Honesty.”[35] Rules for attending Saturday sessions with committee members are also included. This list of regulations has proved invaluable for knowing the system of the FH, and how these women operated within it.

Foucault first theorized a shift between the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries: the object of discipline in England changed from a visual punishment of the body passed down by an authority figure to a punishment of mind and soul in various institutions of anonymous bureaucracy, such as isolation-oriented prisons, asylums, homes for fallen women, workhouses, and orphanages.[36] The Foundling Hospital could be construed as one of these institutions for social discipline. In the rules and bylaws published in 1856 had specific rules, requirements, and expectations for the mothers.[37] The style of moral examination and testimony looks as though right out of the pages of Foucault’s *Discipline and Punish* with these rituals of power and attainment of the most intimate knowledge these women knew.[38]In this role as an arm of this type of discipline, however, the FH was somewhat paradoxical. It served publicly as the source of their punishment and shame, but the FH staff’s efforts in the nineteenth century to put mothers back into the position to work in reputable homes again and Brownlow’s being a source for

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[35] “By-Laws and Regulations of the Foundling Hospital” (London: C. Jaques, 1856), 36.
[36] Gareth Cordery, "Foucault, Dickens, and David Copperfield," *Victorian Literature and Culture* 26, no. 1 (1998): 72.
[37] “By-Laws and Regulations of the Foundling Hospital” (London: C. Jaques, 1856), 36.
[38] Michel Foucault, *Discipline and Punish: The Birth of the Prison* (New York: Random House, 1977), 184.

mothers to find and develop their agency show how this charity was a haven for some mothers rather than the source of their ultimate shame. In their letters, they were completely free to acknowledge their children, their grief, share about their lives, ask for help, and create their own narratives about themselves as they processed the surrender (and often the violence they had survived). On the face of it, the FH could seem an exacting source of punishment for young women who had gotten pregnant out-of-wedlock, however, it should be recalled that only fifty spaces were available per year for new children and the nineteenth century system of requiring mothers to go through a stringent examination of their morality was a method of admission borne out of the reaction to the years of general admission when the FH took all applicants and hundreds of children died on their watch.[39] Brownlow and the governors knew they had limited space, and had to perform the awful task of determining which mothers were the deserving. However, once a mother's child was admitted, Brownlow and the charity would do what they could to help the women, even if it was as simple as being a space where she could acknowledge the pain she was feeling through her letters. Mothers could work within the rules laid out for them to forge a relationship that emboldened them to share their lives through their correspondences. While it would be easy to categorize the FH as merely a Victorian institution of social discipline, thorough examination shows that it was indeed a source of agency and support for the mothers it deemed deserving of its charity.

Brownlow's *The History and Design of The Foundling Hospital with a Memoir of the Founder* is the first publication about the institution for public consumption.

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[39] John Brownlow, *History and Design*, 6.

Brownlow wrote the pamphlet in 1858 in part to honor and tell the history of the man who started the charity (Coram) and, in some ways, to advertise the achievements it had made in the hundred years since the hospital's establishment. Brownlow's esteem for the man who started the charity is displayed throughout the book, as is his staunch loyalty to the charity to which he devoted his life. He presents statistical and narrative information about how the charity started, the acceptance processes, the reason there is a board of governors, a reason for why the charity exists at all, the revenue, benevolent fund, and the intent of the FH. Brownlow's purpose, most likely, was to offer a description and defense of the institution and its achievements to raise awareness and attract donors to the privately funded organization.

As previously mentioned, another study that provided insight to the lives of these working-class women is Clara Collet's 1899 work. Joan Ruddock, a British Labour Party MP who served from 1987-2015, wrote in the foreword of the 2004 biography *Clara Collet: An Educated Working Woman, 1860-1948*: "By any definition Clara Collet was a feminist – yet I doubt she would have accepted the description. Throughout the latter part of the nineteenth century and the early twentieth, she advocated for the rights of women…But she was not a political activist in the classic sense. Her contribution to the advancement of women was rooted in an unusual discipline – statistics."[40] Collet's work as a fighter for social justice began when she started working for Charles Booth on his study *The Life and Labour of the People of London*. She also worked for the Royal Commission on Labor at this time and lived in the east end for three months working on

[40] Joan Ruddock, foreword to *Clara Collet: An Educated Working Woman, 1860-1948* (Portland, OR: Woburn Press, 2004), *ii*.

reports to Parliament.[41] In particular, her 1899 "Wages of Domestic Servants. A Report on the Money Wages of Indoor Domestic Servants," is important because it relied on data collected from surveys conducted between 1894 and 1898, and is the first attempt to examine the standards of wages and conditions of the servant class in London, particularly those of female servants.[42] She also explored conditions in England, Wales, and Ireland and what discrepancies of wages could be found among various positions, ages, and time served.[43] By asking women what wages they were receiving, Collet drew out the trends of pay, benefits (like time off and allowances), and other standards of the servant industry that had never been formally examined before. "In confining this report to the question of the money wages of indoor domestic servants it is clearly recognized that some of the most important of the conditions have been excluded from consideration. The relations between mistresses and servants are very little affected by the rate of money wages agreed upon."[44] Collet's study admitted its shortcomings; it was not the largest or most expansive exploration of conditions of servant women. The element of a worker's relationship to the mistress of the house could not be included in the survey, as most often the mistress answered or oversaw the survey and no servant could therefore be expected to answer honestly about how they were treated by their employer. Despite its shortcomings, it started the essential conversation and remains the only research on female servants within twenty years of the women who are the subject of this thesis.

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[41] Joan Ruddock, foreword to *Clara Collet: An Educated Working Woman, 1860-1948* (Portland, OR: Woburn Press, 2004), ii.
[42] Clara Collet, 'Wages of Domestic Servants. A Report on the Money Wages of Indoor Domestic Servants,' *Sessional Papers*, 1899, Board of Trade, vol. 112, 1. (Hereafter: Clara Collet, 'Wages of Domestic Servants')
[43] Clara Collet, 'Wages of Domestic Servants', 2.
[44] Clara Collet, 'Wages of Domestic Servants', 30.

In 1935, barristers Reginald Hugh Nichols and Francis Aslett Wray published *The History of the Foundling Hospital*. Nichols served as the secretary of the charity at the time. This book differs from Brownlow's in its treatment of what drove the charity ahead, namely, the authors considered economic factors above Brownlow's actions of morality. In the preface, Nichols and Wray named Brownlow's history, acknowledging its worth, while also proclaiming this new work to be a great sociological document.[45] While claiming to be a different book, this volume essentially took the brief *The History and Objects of the Foundling Hospital* (a primary source to be examined below) and used it as a skeleton on which the authors more thoroughly fleshed out the concepts Brownlow had presented seventy-seven years earlier. Notable additions to this book are excerpts from Charles Dickens' "Received, a Blank Child," a complete list of the charity's board of governors from 1739-1934, as well as more complete descriptions of the art held by the hospital, descriptions of the diet the children ate, and the establishment of country hospitals outside of London.[46] This book has a much drier, sterile approach to the operation of the charity, and has no mention of the Christian values that Brownlow lauded on about when describing the need for such a relief for infants. It is much less sympathetic and views the charity as a machine while Brownlow viewed it for the children it helped and the man who established it. This perspective is influenced by Marx and the development of the science of society (sociology). Darwin's theories had also influenced the work. From the early twentieth century view of charity, tinged by ideas of improvidence, or failure to plan adequately for the future, a calculus of respectability

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[45] R.H. Nichols, and F.A. Wray, *The History of the Foundling Hospital* (London: Oxford University Press, 1935), i. (Hereafter: Nichols and Wray, *History of Foundling*)
[46] Nichols and Wray, *History of Foundling* , viii-ix.

measured the working classes by their ability to achieve respectable standards. By the post-Poor Law reflections on social welfare, letting any and every child into the charity became a dark stain on the institution's past. This is evident in how Nichols and Wray discussed why general admission could only be seen as a negative point in the hospital's history: "There were 6,293 children on the books when this resolution was passed in 1760- and how the Governors with the resources at their command dealt with this number is astounding, for the majority were under five years of age. At this time the cost of their maintenance amounted annually to about £6 per head."[47] It all boiled down to a cost-benefit analysis based on respectable Victorian values.[48]

A break in scholarly writing occurred after Nichols and Wray, with the FH only becoming an interest again with the rise in social history in the twentieth century after the Annales School in France started the trend in the 1920s. Social historians moved from political and economic studies to focusing on social institutions, and in this case, the objects of charity, the children. Ruth K. McClure published *Coram's Children: The London Foundling Hospital in the Eighteenth Century* in 1981 and focused on the children's charity and, like the preceeding histories, addressed the first century of operation, in particular Coram as the founder and the economic function, using archival sources. While written in the rise of social histories, this book is very much written in a similar style of Nichols and Wray and was widely criticized for following an older form of social histories. Dr. McClure challenged the traditional scholarship in the history of childhood and focused on the parental nature of the organization as it cared for the

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[47] Nichols and Wray, *History of Foundling* , 58.
[48] See: Francis Michael Thompson, *The Rise of Respectable Society* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1988).

illegitimate children. She focused on the children in the context of parenthood and childhood. McClure's work is the first history to look at the hospital's archives because, while working as a research editor on Horace Walpole's correspondence at Yale, she uncovered his words about Coram and decided to dig further, retelling the story for another generation who had forgotten about the charity since its closure after World War II.[49] Although she focuses on the eighteenth century, oddly Brownlow's book is not referenced and the former secretary is only mentioned once. She relied heavily on archival material like the works that came before, utilizing the personal papers of Thomas Coram more than previous publications had, but she included published materials and notes and bibliography section, which had not been listed for this kind of research in the FH Archives before this. McClure came to similar conclusions about the eighteenth century as Nichols and Wray, and McClure's major contribution is introducing the subject to social history.

Lisa Zunshine, a literature scholar with an interest in cultural histories, published *Bastards and Foundlings: Illegitimacy in Eighteenth-Century England* in 2005, attempting an interdisciplinary look at the eighteenth century and views of illegitimacy during the English Enlightenment.[50] By examining the literature, law, and the history surrounding this time regarding bastardy and illegitimacy, Zunshine wove together a more comprehensive view of what these terms meant and why they were so common.

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[49] Ruth McClure, *Coram's Children: The London Foundling Hospital in the Eighteenth Century* (New Haven, Connecticut: Yale University Press, 1981), viii-ix.
[50] Lisa Zunshine, *Bastards and Foundlings:Illegitimacy in Eighteenth-Century England* (Columbus, OH: The Ohio State University Press, 2005), 1. (Hereafter: Lisa Zunshine, *Bastards and Foundlings*)

Zunshine argued throughout that illegitimacy in the eighteenth century was a "crucial fixture of the period's imaginative landscape."[51] Further, she stated, "I am convinced that by listening to the voices of that hitherto unnoticed dialogue, we come closer to recognizing illegitimacy as an important, far-reaching, and immensely complex sociopolitical institution of the British Enlightenment."[52]

This book is different in its interpretation of the London FH's history, as it attempted to explain how and why policies changed in the institution because of laws and literature produced in the eighteenth century, rather than reinterpreting the established history itself. An English professor, Zunshine took a refreshing approach to the material by pitting the FH against literature such as Edward Moore's *The Foundling*, Charlotte Smith's *Emmeline*, George Colman's *The English Merchant*, Maria Edgeworth's *Belinda*, Henry Fielding's *Tom Jones*, Daniel Dafoe's *Moll Flanders*, and Jane Austen's *Emma* and compares what happened in these immensely popular works to the reality of what foundlings faced.[53] This methodology lends greater context to the culture of the time and influence it had, and assists historians in gaining more comprehensive understanding of the period. While McClure was criticized for not placing the FH in historical context, Zunshine accomplishes exactly that.

Dame Gillian Pugh studied the charity from within, having served as the chief executive of Coram Family, the foundation that replaced the FH from 1997-2005 following the hospital's closure. In 2007, she published *London's Forgotten Children:*

[51] Lisa Zunshine, *Bastards and Foundlings* , 21.
[52] Lisa Zunshine, *Bastards and Foundlings* , 21-2.
[53] Lisa Zunshine, *Bastards and Foundlings*, xi, 21.

Thomas Coram and the Foundling Hospital. [54] Like the histories before it, Pugh's book covered Coram and the foundation of the charity but went further into the nineteenth and twentieth centuries, the Thomas Coram Foundation for Children, and presented interviews with foundlings. Much like the goal of Brownlow's history, Dame Pugh attempted to write the entire history of the hospital to raise public awareness, and probably hoped to attract interest to the museum she had helped open three years previously. Pugh's methodology, as indicated by the title, is much more focused on the children that went through the system and not on the mothers' sexual misconduct like Barret-Ducrocq's work (which will be examined shortly). Pugh's cultural history approach gave sympathetic voice to the experience of the foundlings, especially in the nineteenth century, with her chapter titled "No Goodnight Kiss: Brownlow, Dickens and the Nineteenth Century."[55] She showed clearly the growing pains of the city's population going from one million to three million in only twenty years, and the trouble faced by the charity during the 1834 Poor Law reforms which began the question of the respectability of petitioners and the need for thorough interviews and testimony to ensure that the mother and child in question were truly part of the "deserving."[56]

In the same year, Alysa Levine's *Childcare, Health, and Mortality at the London Foundling Hospital, 1741-1800* addressed the foundations of the charity. This book's main subject is on the infants admitted during the years of General Reception (period from 1756-1760 when any and all children were admitted to the FH), due to the number

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[54] Gillian Pugh, *London's Forgotten Children*, third cover.
[55] Gillian Pugh, *London's Forgotten Children*, 79.
[56] Gillian Pugh, *London's Forgotten Children*, 79, 93-5.

of children admitted in the four year period.[57] Like the authors before her, Levine focused on the children and the first seventy years of the hospital's tenure. Taking a clinical or medical approach, the technical aspects of how the hospital tried to keep infants alive, and how the staff faced the issues of pediatric care is the crux of what Levine brings to the debate of the London Foundling Hospital, and not much else.[58] She crafted a microhistory on a group of infants integrated into the lives of nurses in her chapter "The Nursing Network" rather than focusing on the entire three hundred year span of the FH.[59] Levine also used both quantitative and qualitative analysis to compare the survival rates of children inside the charity to the greater populace, concluding that children were more likely to die of problems they had before they entered the FH than due to the environment within the charity.[60]

The third phase of analysis addressed the nineteenth-century FH women, those who gave up their infants to preserve their respectability. These studies use different files than the ones before them, and this approach occurred at the same time as the social histories described above that focused on the children. John R. Gillis, Anna Clark, Francoise Barret-Ducrocq, Jessica Sheetz-Nguyen, Ginger Frost, and Virginia L. Grimaldi focused their studies on available sources: petitions, registers, and miscellaneous administrative documents.

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[57] Alysa Levine, *Childcare, Health and Mortality at the London Foundling Hospital, 1741-1800* (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 2007), 11(Hereafter: Alysa Levine, *Childcare, Health and Mortality*); John Brownlow, *History and Design* 8.
[58] Alysa Levine, *Childcare, Health and Mortality* , 1.
[59] Alysa Levine, *Childcare, Health and Mortality* , 1.
[60] Alysa Levine, *Childcare, Health and Mortality* , 72.

Historian John R. Gillis, who wrote the 1979 article "Servants, Sexual Relations, and the Risks of Illegitimacy in London, 1801-1900," was one the first to use the FH archives not for information on the children, but as a measure of sexuality in Victorian London. Gillis created a microhistory focused on qualitative analysis to establish that it was servants, for the most part, who utilized the charity of the FH. Out of the twelve hundred petitions the study was based on, sixty-five percent of the mothers who had a child admitted worked in the servant class.[61] Gillis also explained why it was servant women who most often needed help in the case of the FH, because of the nature of their work. "Service differed from other female employments not only because of its live-in character, but also because the servant was involved in the elaboration of the employer's life-style - a role that required not only discipline and specific skills but also unique character traits and demeanor. Among higher servants, the work demanded a conformity to upper-class standards of respectability, rules of behavior which, even when not wholly internalized, had important effects on servants' social relations in and outside the household."[62] Gillis's emphasis on the serving class's presence in the petitions of the charity is important, but his focus was much more on the relationships serving women would get into in Victorian London.

In 1987, historian Anna Clark published *Women's Silence, Men's Violence: Sexual Assault in England, 1770-1845* which also utilized FH petitions to explore sexual relations in Victorian London. Clark's microhistory used the broad views of popular

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[61] John R. Gillis, "Servants, Sexual Relations, and the Risks of Illegitimacy in London, 1801-1900," *Feminist Studies* 5, no. 1 (Spring, 1979): 144.
[62] John R. Gillis, "Servants, Sexual Relations, and the Risks of Illegitimacy in London, 1801-1900," *Feminist Studies* 5, no. 1 (Spring, 1979): 143.

culture of the time pitted against the evidence of the limited cases of violence found in the FH archives. She explained the necessity for this by first exploring rape in the eighteenth century, and how after 1796 the Old Bailey refused to publish testimony from rape cases and how this led to "the suppression of women's ability to protest about rape."[63] The FH petitions contained testimony that is some of the only surviving explicit discussions of Victorian sexual relations. Clark's central theory is a rejection of the myth of rape as warning for punishment of women who go out alone being a nineteenth century invention (she found no evidence of rape cases used "to warn women to stay out of the public space" in the eighteenth century).[64] While Clark's piece was groundbreaking and immensely valuable to studies of criminality, sexuality, and women's history, it used the hospital's archives for a narrow look at sexual activity, and not a focus on the mothers at any point other than their sexual experience.

Among the historians who utilized the hospital archive was Francoise Barret-Ducrocq and her 1989 *Love in the Time of Victoria: Sexuality, Class and Gender in Nineteenth-Century London.* Her study is different from previous works because she used this glimpse at the records to extrapolate her picture of sex in Victorian London.[65] This is the first critical look not at the public purpose of the charity (the care of abandoned children), but the private one (redeeming the reputation of the mother so she could once again have a respectable job). It is also the first book to take some artistic license to tell a

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[63] Anna Clark, *Women's Silence, Men's Violence: Sexual Assault in England, 1770-1845* (New York: Pandora, 1987), 59.
[64] Anna Clark, *Women's Silence, Men's Violence: Sexual Assault in England, 1770-1845* (New York: Pandora, 1987), 3.
[65] Françoise Barret-Ducrocq, *Love in the Time of Victoria: Sexuality, Class and Gender in Nineteenth Century London*, trans. John Howe (New York: Verso, 1991), 3.

more narrative story and have it read like a novel.[66] The work was originally published by Plon, a literary publisher in Paris that specialized in historical novels, and therefore was framed for a different audience, which could explain why the citations were so poor. Barret-Ducrocq also painted the women petitioning as either prostitutes or victims of abuse, ignoring Brownlow's previous assertions that these were respectable working-class women living in central and west-end London.[67] While including excerpts of letters from petitioners and fathers, Barret-Ducrocq's citations were so poor that it is impossible to trace the letters with ease, as the only attribution was given is "FH" to indicate a piece is from the foundling hospital's Archives. Although poorly cited, Barret-Ducrocq's theories influenced the studies that came after her work was published.

Victorian views of morality and sexuality heavily shaped the lives of the mothers of the FH. Foucault's *History of Sexuality* claims "the discourse on sexuality" (the increased public discussion of the nature, definition, use, and vilification of sexuality) was at its height at this period in England.[68] Unwed women were publicly expected to know nothing of sexuality at this time and those who acknowledged their criminal activity were expected to feel nothing but shame and regret about the matter.

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[66] Excerpt from page 39: "Clocks were striking seven. The woman was passing an enormous building site where masons were hard at work on the new British Museum… Her pace slackened. She had come a long way, and something cold and heavy was tightening about her heart. Having turned into Southampton Row she at length came to her destination, the gatehouse of a large building. In her arms a young baby slept." Françoise Barret-Ducrocq, *Love in the Time of Victoria: Sexuality, Class and Gender in Nineteenth Century London* (New York: Verso, 1991). (Hereafter: Françoise Barret-Ducrocq, *Love in the Time of Victoria*)

[67] Françoise Barret-Ducrocq, *Love in the Time of Victoria*, 41; John Brownlow, *History and Design*, 38.

[68] Michel Foucault, The History of Sexuality: An Introduction (New York: Pantheon Books, 1978), ff.

However, as Barret-Ducrocq determined, the passages of sexual activity in the FH petitions should be believed as common, truthful interpretations of sexual practice among the working-classes in London, who were held to far lower standards than those of the ruling class. The author also added "the committee of governors, which made the final decision in each case, was far from rigid in its judgement of the petitioners' virtue."[69] While the mothers of the FH may not having knowingly contributed to the rising discourse of sexual activity, their unashamed acknowledgment of the children they had out-of-wedlock in the letters they only wrote because of their sexual indiscretions contribute nonetheless. Their non-elite status offers a rare glimpse of working-class views of the system of social morality and shame meant to be passed down in general from the elite to those who were not privileged, and how that system falls apart when an elite person knew intimately the story of a non-elite and understood the situation sympathetically.

In 2012, Jessica A. Sheetz-Nguyen published *Victorian Women, Unwed Mothers and the London Foundling Hospital*. She argued from a different perspective than the works that came before it: the lives of the mothers, known to the FH as petitioners, who surrendered their children. "It takes their perspective by telling the stories they never had a chance to tell because they were working. It documents their accounts through their petitions to the hospital for assistance. From the packet, the application form, the oral transcripts and letters of recommendation, the tattered lives of exceptionally strong women emerge."[70] This focus on the petition as a historical document that reveals the

[69] Françoise Barret-Ducrocq, *Love in the Time of Victoria*, 41.
[70] Jessica A. Sheetz-Nguyen, *Victorian Women*, 2.

experience of the mothers makes the book a innovative work - a change from the broad histories of the charity or the medical narratives of the years before it. By exploring what society said the poor deserved, Sheetz-Nguyen examined space, social values, and respectability to reconstruct the image of the women who gave their children up as women with little choice in tough circumstances, not villainous monsters who might have thrown their baby on the trash heap if it came to it, or faceless creators of children who merit no comment.[71]

One of the historians who followed Sheetz-Nguyen's lead of focusing on the petitions is Ginger Frost and her 2014 article "'Your Mother Has Never Forgotten You': Illegitimacy, Motherhood, and the London Foundling Hospital, 1860-1930." In it, Frost argued that although mothers separated themselves from their children, they still cared deeply for them and often worked painstaking schemes to communicate with or eventually reclaim them. A petitioner's reclamation of her child, or restoration, occasionally occurred, and this policy is the reason for the FH never allowing private adoptions.[72] Mothers had to go through another grueling process, showing that they had the job and the health to care for the child once again, and so restorations happened very rarely, only about 3.4 percent of foundlings were reclaimed in this period.[73] Frost showed that this often traumatic process hardly ever came to fruition for the hopeful petitioners.[74] The bulk of this study came from the Letter Books in the FH archive, which are copies of

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[71] Jessica A. Sheetz-Nguyen, *Victorian Women*, 188.
[72] Ginger Frost, "'Your Mother Has Never Forgotten You': Illegitimacy, Motherhood, and The London Foundling Hospital, 1860-1930," *Annales de démographie historique* 127, no. 1 (2014): 51.(Hereafter: Ginger Frost, "Your Mother Has Never Forgotten")
[73] Ginger Frost, "Your Mother Has Never Forgotten," 51.
[74] Ginger Frost, "Your Mother Has Never Forgotten," 67.

the letters from the secretary, since most of the correspondence directly from mothers after admission was unavailable to Frost at the time.[75]

The most recent scholarly publication about the FH is from Victoria Grimaldi, a doctoral candidate at York University. "Single, Unwed, and Pregnant in Victorian London: Narratives of Working-Class Agency and Negotiation," published in 2017, offers another take on FH history from the perspective of the mothers. With heavy usage of terms from Foucault, Grimaldi uses post-modern critique to challenge Sheetz-Nguyen by claiming "that the petitioners' testimonies before the Hospital Committee were performances; role-playing that could easily incorporate falsities."[76] Grimaldi accepts Butler's theory of performativity and the concept that identity is created through discourses and performance. For Grimaldi, there is no truth and no way to prove the authenticity of the sources because you cannot trust them. While attempting to use the term created by Butler to explain gender forms and theory, this author uses "perform" to construe the petitioners as actors lying about their reform rather than women forced to perform the roles expected of them within a system of social discipline.[77] Grimaldi argued throughout that the mothers deceived the governors as cunning agents of their fate, saying what they had to say to have their child accepted and that "a petitioner who knew that frequent sex with her partner was abhorred by the Committee easily stretched the truth about her number of liaisons."[78] Grimaldi also argued that petitioners used

[75] Ginger Frost, "Your Mother Has Never Forgotten," 47.
[76] Virginia L. Grimaldi, "Single, Unwed, and Pregnant in Victorian London: Narratives of Working Class Agency and Negotiation," *Madison Historical Review*, 14, Article 3 (2017): 18. (Hereafter: Victoria L. Grimaldi, "Single, Unwed, and Pregnant," 18.
[77] Victoria L. Grimaldi, "Single, Unwed, and Pregnant," 18.
[78] Victoria L. Grimaldi, "Single, Unwed, and Pregnant," 30.

specific language to pin the responsibility of seduction on the absconding father of their child.[79] This article uses performative theory as evidence, while this thesis relies on the letters themselves for evidence. While Grimaldi's post-modern claims have little to no evidence, the studies before it were built on extensive qualitative and quantitative research. Like those studies, this project is based on archival research of thousands of letters and therefore draws conclusions different from Grimaldi's.

From the time of Nichols' and Wray's qualitative analysis of the charity itself, to Virginia L. Grimaldi's assertions of performance and negotiation, the interpretations of the London FH change from the macro examinations of the charity, to the micro studies of the women and children. No two scholars used the same sections of the extensive archival collection of documents, so every piece has different views of the functions and relations of the world's first children's charity. Changing interpretations of the FH are easy to understand when the amount of differing evidence each writer used is considered. Changes in historical focus, from top down to bottom up stories with an emphasis on individual stories and experiences account for variations over time. This is evident with the London FH, given the availability of both dry, administrative information, as well as richly detailed, person-to-person accounts of different life experiences. With so many widely varying interpretations and directions the archives have been taken in, it is exciting to think about where else scholars can go.

The methodology of this thesis develops from a qualitative analysis of over 800 women and their letters to Brownlow. The research draws on the London Metropolitan Archives' Foundling Hospital Collection, specifically the Correspondence from Mothers

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[79]Victoria L. Grimaldi, "Single, Unwed, and Pregnant," 32.

of Children, 1857-1872, the only letters available for public view. This file is comprised of about three thousand inquiries from women asking about the health of their surrendered children to those asking permission to visit, thereby challenging the by-laws. Jessica Sheetz-Nguyen described them best: "The secretary kept them on a spindle. Archivists tied up the letters with red ribbon; they were dusty with coal soot and unlikely to have been touched, as many stuck together until the 1990s."[80] Many letters in the collection remain unnumbered, only tucked into boxes and labeled "at risk."[81] The reason other studies did not utilize these letters is simple: they were not publicly accessible until recently. Interestingly, Barret-Ducrocq indicated that the archives opened while she conducted her research, and then closed again in 1980 when the institution, in order to protect the privacy of living descendants, closed the files for another fifty years so only those up to 1840 were available.[82] After her work, a rule of one hundred and ten years before making files available to the public was established, in order to protect the privacy of those who may still be living and related to the mothers and children in the file.

The letters that populate this file were photographed, digitized, and organized for the purposes of this research project. The petitioner mothers with the most letters were

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[80] Jessica A. Sheetz-Nguyen, *Victorian Women, Unwed Mothers and the London Foundling Hospital* (London: Continuum, 2012), 170.

[81] Among these letters are a few of the standard response the hospital gave the mothers which had been returned to sender due to errors in the mail. Printed on a standard piece of the blue paper, like most of the Foundling Hospital's documents, it read: "Foundling Hospital, [W.C.] _______18___/__________, in answer to your inquiry, I beg to inform you that your Child is/_________________________/ I am, Your obedient Servant, /J. Brownlow, Secretary/ Note. - In making inquiry after your Child,: you must not fail to state the date on which it was admitted, and likewise the private letter. Also enclose a stamped envelope with your address thereon for the answer." Correspondence from Mothers of Children, A/FH/A/09/019/007/1-632, LMA.

[82] Françoise Barret-Ducrocq, *Love in the Time of Victoria*, 187.

selected for transcription, although in the long term all will be transcribed. Original petition paperwork (a mother's application) for those women was retrieved because they required signatures, which were compared and verified to prove that these women wrote their letters themselves. Mothers might occasionally write at length in response to their conversation with Mr. Brownlow.

These letters are raw, coming from regularly educated or self-taught women who are not the height of decorum or class. They were not proofread or dictated and have different standards of language than we do today. For the sake of preserving their imperfection and raw tone of voice, transcriptions of letters have been left in their original state including misspellings and lack of punctuation. Questions of the accuracy of a transcribed word will be noted. These inaccuracies remain in the text as an effort to preserve as much as possible the tone, grammar, and voices of the mothers who wrote and poured their hearts out onto the page in the best way they could. Some transcriptions may be confusing to read, error-ridden and lost in emotion, but explanations to their meanings will follow when necessary. Every attempt is made to preserve the mothers' voices for the sake of enabling them to tell their stories to the reader.

The chapters are based primarily on the letters. Chapter one focuses on the letters in the broadest sense: how letters were written in Victorian London, how they were sent, the conditions of the letters today including the handwriting, paper, ink, grammar, spelling, addresses, and signatures. All of these factors offer valuable clues about the women who were writing them. Chapter two focuses on the key role correspondence played for the mothers who forged a close relationship with the FH through inquiries about their babies. It also looks at women who, despite illiteracy or personal

circumstances, used other avenues to communicate their need for information on the health of the child. The third chapter analyzes the letters' contents, which often reflected the mothers' emotional traumas; this chapter utilizes modern understandings of the pain and suffering of surrendering a child to find patterns in the letters. The concluding chapter examines specific narratives of some of the mothers whose frequent correspondence provides the most complete picture of their experience. The stories offer insight into their circumstances, struggles, and agency, revealing their heartaches and victories, and how with the FH's charity they recovered from the perceived shame of an unwed pregnancy. This final chapter is especially important because it attempts to measure the hospital's secondary mission: restoring the reputations of the mothers it chose to help, enabling them to work again.

This thesis goes further in the life line of mothers than any of the research previously described here. Literature written on the mothers up to this point relied on information given to the FH the day a woman petitioned and testimony during the acceptance process, in other words, just a few days of her life. While Sheetz-Nguyen mentioned the letters written by the mothers briefly, this is the first effort to look at them as a primary focus. By taking petition paperwork and putting it together with the letters they wrote, the body of information on mothers' lives goes from just a few days of her life to several months and years, in some cases. Rather than many of the studies before this, the purpose of this project is not to sift through the petitions for snippets and descriptions of sexual activity, but instead explores how these mothers overcame the label of sexual immorality and moved on with their lives while processing the emotional

burden of giving up a child they had not planned to have. Contributions to understandings of literacy and working-class life for Victorian women will also be made.

CHAPTER ONE: THE MOTHERS' LETTERS

In the second half of the nineteenth century, when the rules of etiquette were at their strictest, the act of writing letters themselves had precise and nuanced protocols. For working women, the rules were spelled out in the manuals the Victorians published and read with dedication. For young women specifically, writing to a gentleman had certain parameters: the correspondence "should be ceremonious and dignified. If the acquaintance is slight, write in the third person, if there is a necessity for a letter. If a business letter, be respectful, yet not servile. It is better to avoid correspondence with gentlemen, particularly whilst you are young, as there are many objections to it."[1] Women were also cautioned not to be too friendly, to get permission from their husband or family before writing a man, and to avoid any communication that required secrecy.[2] By this advice, the mothers' writings already were breaking rules by asking a man to whom they were not related to keep a secret correspondence. Letters of inquiry also had their own rules as well:

> Letters of Enquiry, especially if they request a favor, should contain a few lines of compliment. If the letter is upon a private subject, such as enquiry with regard to the illness or misfortune of a friend, avoid making it too brief. To write short, careless letters upon such subjects, is unfeeling, and they will surely be attributed to motives of obligation or duty, not to interest. Letters of enquiry, referring to family matters, should be delicately worded, and appear dictated by interest, not mere curiosity. If the enquiry refers to matters interesting only to yourself, enclose a postage stamp for the reply. In answering such letters, if they refer to your own health or subjects

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[1] Florence Hartley, *The Ladies Book of Etiquette and Manual of Politeness* (Boston: Lee and Shepard Publishers, 1872), 124. Although this publication is from the United States, it can be presumed these etiquette rules applied across the pond as well, as all women in America took their fashion and lifestyle advice from Europe, especially Britain. (Hereafter: Florence Hartley, *Ladies Book of Etiquette*)

[2] Florence Hartley, *Ladies Book of Etiquette* , 124.

> interesting to yourself, thank the writer for the interest expressed, and answer in a satisfactory manner. If the answer interests your correspondent only, do not reply as if the enquiry annoyed you, but express some interest in the matter of the letter, and give as clear and satisfactory reply as is in your power.[3]

The enquiries fell somewhere between business and personal correspondence, and authors had to pay attention to language, deference to the reader, and length. This proved a tricky balance to achieve. "Let your letters, as well as your person, be clothed with gracefulness and care-neither extravagantly apparelled, nor slovenly clad. Write legibly. Do not cross the lines of caligraphy. Do not attach post scripts. Never fail to reply to all communications promptly."[4] This is from an 1856 manual and it, too, clearly stated how highly regarded the act of crafting a letter became in this era. That is not to say the working-class women who found themselves patronized by the Foundling Hospital's (FH) charity had time to be reading etiquette manuals or could be careful in their attention to social rules, but many women knew these rules and took care in their writings to John Brownlow. An examination of the letters written by the mothers shows that, although they may not have had a good understanding of etiquette rules due to their class or education level, they strove to conform to the rules for letters of enquiry to maintain good relations with the charity. They also utilized this form of communication to build better relationships with the FH and express their needs and concerns. In letter writing these women had something they could get almost nowhere else: a private conversation with a man, one on one, while still being socially acceptable.

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[3] Florence Hartley, *Ladies Book of Etiquette* , 124-5.

[4] *A Manual of Etiquette for Ladies: or, True Principles of Politeness. By a Lady* (London: T. Allman & Son, 1856), 38.

Life was difficult for working-class women in London. Very little comprehensive work has been done on what domestic servants earned in Victorian London. Clara Collet's "Money Wages of Indoor Domestic Servants. Between 1894 and 1898" relies upon surveys that asked employers all over the United Kingdom about what they were paying servants.[5] Collet spent years surveying all sorts of working women in London and around the country and her report is most valuable because it provides a realistic picture of working women's wages just twenty years after the letters examined in this thesis.

As Sheetz-Nguyen demonstrated, women who petitioned at the FH fell into all six of Collet's classes of jobs: family business living with parents; teacher or foreign language instructor; cook, embroiderer, maid, or nurse; general servant; kitchen and laundry maid, bar maid, flower seller; and deserted wife, widow, unknown.[6] Most of the women fell into classes three and four, with two hundred and thirty-five out of three hundred and fifty-six women working in these categories.[7] "While 44.5 per cent of all British women were employed in domestic service in 1891, at least 72 percent of the FH petitioners surveyed between 1842 and 1892 worked as domestics (classes 3,4, and 5).[8] Collet reported that the average wage of a female servant in London was £17 18*s* in the

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[6] Jessica A. Sheetz-Nguyen, *Victorian Women, Unwed Mothers and the London Foundling Hospital* (London: Continuum, 2012), 92-3. (Hereafter: Jessica A. Sheetz-Nguyen, *Victorian Women*)
[7] Jessica A. Sheetz-Nguyen, *Victorian Women*, 93.
[8] Clara Collet, 'Wages of Domestic Servants. A Report on the Money Wages of Indoor Domestic Servants,' *Sessional Papers*, 1899, Board of Trade, vol. 112, 94.

1890s.[9] The earliest subjects of this study received slightly lower amounts. "On the other hand, housemaids earned between £11 and £14 per year in the 1840s and 1850s; while nursemaids earned as little as £5 and as much as £30 per year, although the high figure was most likely an exception."[10] Age, position, and size of household (how many servants it employed) also affected how much a female servant made.[11] The study also included Wales, Ireland, Scotland, and the English countryside - all of whom made slightly less than workers in London - with those in England and Wales making £16, Belfast making £15 1*s*, Dublin making £14 2*s*, and Cork and Limerick making £12 3*s* on average.[12] For a woman working in London, this averaged out to about 6*s* and 6*d* per week.

One mother who wrote regularly helped confirm Collet's findings. Hannah Hepworth broke social protocol and wrote frankly on a taboo subject: her finances and income. In an effort to see if she could make an attempt at being restored with her child, she told Brownlow clearly about her earnings, regardless of the societal norms, in order to make a bid for her ability to reclaim the baby she surrendered. Hepworth's spiky, spider-like handwriting can be found all over the FH file. In 1858, she applied at 23 years old for her son to be admitted.[13] The father of her child, George Mawson, was a stationer and bookseller with his brother in a shop in Bradford.[14] The two brothers stayed in the

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[9] Clara Collet, 'Wages of Domestic Servants. A Report on the Money Wages of Indoor Domestic Servants,' *Sessional Papers*, 1899, Board of Trade, vol. 112, 5. One pound (£) was worth twenty shillings (*s*). (Hereafter: Clara Collet, 'Wages of Domestic Servants') Jessica A. Sheetz-Nguyen, *Victorian Women* , 92.
[11] Clara Collet, 'Wages of Domestic Servants', 10.
[12] Clara Collet, 'Wages of Domestic Servants', 10.
[13] Accepted Foundling Hospital Petitions, A/FH/A/08/1/2/67/1-1858, LMA.
[14] Accepted Foundling Hospital Petitions, A/FH/A/08/1/2/67/1-1858, LMA.

same house as Hepworth at the time of conception.[15] Hepworth had known him her whole life and entered into courtship with him at the age of seventeen.[16] Living in Bradford, Yorkshire, with one of her uncles, Hepworth lived in the same house as Mawson at the time of their relationship. Hannah lived as an "entire orphan" and spent years being passed around from relative to relative.[17] Her relationship with Mawson met with objection by her family, but she continued it anyway. In her testimony she explained the night it happened: "He seduced me in august 1857 at Bradford – we were out walking – it was with my consent – he had criminal conversation (intercourse was referred to as criminal conversation in FH testimony) with me 2 years previously".[18] After she found out about her pregnancy in April of 1858, her family immediately wrote to the father, who responded positively at first and then left for Australia.[19] Hannah was sent to live with her Uncle Bentley on Liverpool Street by King's Cross, where she gave birth and remained at the time of her petition.[20]

After the child's admittance, Hepworth wrote the FH nineteen times, with her final letter from 1861 kept with her petition paperwork. Her other notes kept to a standard format, asking merely after her son and not including any personal information.[21] Her final letter informed Brownlow of a new position and the wages Hepworth earned: "I am in receipt of your favour of the 19th in reply I beg to state that I hold a situation in a

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[15] Accepted Foundling Hospital Petitions, A/FH/A/08/1/2/67/1-1858, LMA.
[16] Accepted Foundling Hospital Petitions, A/FH/A/08/1/2/67/1-1858, LMA.
[17] Accepted Foundling Hospital Petitions, A/FH/A/08/1/2/67/1-1858, LMA.
[18] Accepted Foundling Hospital Petitions, A/FH/A/08/1/2/67/1-1858, LMA.
[19] Accepted Foundling Hospital Petitions, A/FH/A/08/1/2/67/1-1858, LMA.
[20] Accepted Foundling Hospital Petitions, A/FH/A/08/1/2/67/1-1858, LMA.
[21] Correspondence from Mothers of Children, A/FH/A/09/019/002-6, LMA.

Millinery Establishment with a salary of £20 per annum and maintenance and a prospect of her allowance of salary__ I also receive from not to five shillings from week for extra work. Mrs Durst who is the Mother of a family, will take charge of my child by paying so much per week. I shall be glad of your reply."[22] This final letter exacting Hepworth's situation in a millinery establishment and her precise salary is a rarity. Compared to Clara Collet's *Report on Employment of Women* in 1893, women in millinery around London made about twenty pounds per year when starting out, just as Hepworth reported in Manchester.[23] For context, the average wage in England in 1866 was £33 per year, so Hepworth's earnings fell well below average and had very little buying power.[24] Although unsuccessful in restoring her child, this mother including her wage in a letter to Brownlow confirm Collet's findings and show how little a single working woman could earn in England in the 1860s.

While considering wages, it is also important to include the cost of sending these inquiries to understand the impact on a woman's income the letters to the FH had. The postal service was democratized in Britain in 1839 with Rowland Hill's postal reforms, which allowed flat rates for parcels and introduced postage stamps.[25] In 1871, reforms were introduced in the House of Commons and alterations to the prices for sending post

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[22] Accepted Foundling Hospital Petitions, A/FH/A/08/1/2/67/1-1858, LMA.
[23] Clara Collet, "Labour Reports on Employment of Women," Royal Commission on Labour, *Command Papers,* 1893-4, C.6894-XXIII, 10.
[24] Arthur Lyon Bowley, *Wages in the United Kingdom in the Nineteenth Century* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1900), 35.
[25] House of Commons, 'Return of Rates of Postage on Letters,' *Sessional Papers*, 1871, Accounts and Papers, vol. 39, 259.

were discussed.[26] While showing what the rates were and what they were to be changed to, it is possible to show how much it cost to send letters to the FH. For envelopes less than half an ounce before 1871, it cost 1d for postage.[27]After 1871, it changed to any letter less than an ounce cost 1d to send.[28] If the correspondence ended up being heavier, it cost up to 3d to send.[29] With the mothers being required to include a pre-stamped envelope in their inquiries, a letter to the FH cost them from 2d to 6d depending on how much it weighed, but most probably ended up being under a half ounce and therefore only cost 2d with the return postage included. This meant that women could send and receive news and updates about their child relatively cheaply if they had the tools to craft the letter. Women who had to hire scribes had to pay a little more, and those who had to pay for their writing supplies had to spend a bit more. However, overall, they could afford the endeavor to ask about the health of their babies. Emotionally, it may have cost them a lot to write Brownlow, but financially, this burden seemed worth bearing to know that they had made the right choice and that their child lived and thrived in the arms of the FH.

The idea of allowing mothers to inquire after their children at the London FH began in 1807 with a petition to the board of governors. Thirteen former foundlings asked the board to loosen the regulations so that mothers and children could more easily inquire about the other, charging that the current situation "is incompatible with the principles

[26] House of Commons, 'Return of Rates of Postage on Letters,' *Sessional Papers*, 1871, Accounts and Papers, vol. 39, 259. (Hereafter: House of Commons, 'Return of Rates')
[27] House of Commons, 'Return of Rates', 259.
[28] House of Commons, 'Return of Rates', 259.
[29] House of Commons, 'Return of Rates', 259.

upon which the [FH] was originally formed."[30] This decision eventually changed, and the secretary informed two other petitioners that the governors could give out information on a case-by-case basis, according to the Regulation of the Hospital.[31] In 1856, the board passed new rules and correspondence between the secretary and the former petitioners began. What started as a trickle of letters eventually became a decently well-known option for mothers who wanted to know whatever they could about their child, with over eight hundred letters received in one year, which averages to about fifteen inquiries a week.

Acceptance in the nineteenth century proved a brutal and rigorous process. A woman had to prove she had led an otherwise moral and Christian life and this one incident was the only mark against her. Out of about 200 petitions (applications) a year, only fifty were admitted on average. This meant that the women who succeeded had to be a very special type of unwed mother. They could not be just any poor woman from the streets who wandered in. They had to prove themselves capable working women who could get other, more powerful people to vouch on behalf of their character and history.

When the hospital accepted a child, the mother brought it on the day of reception and received a receipt with a unique letter, identifying her child, and rules for future communication with the charity. The receipt they received said: "Let this Paper be carefully kept, that it may be produced whenever an enquiry is made after the health of the Child, (which may be done on Mondays, between the Hours of Ten and Four,) and

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[30] R.H. Nichols, and F.A. Wray, *The History of the Foundling Hospital* (London: Oxford University Press, 1935), 306-7. (Nichols and Wray, *History of the Foundling*)
[31] Nichols and Wray, *History of the Foundling*, 307.

also in case the Child should be claimed."[32] Very few women utilized the visiting-hours rule, but those who took advantage of them, commented on it when they had to write their inquiries rather than express them in person. It seems they simply observed the children through their day, rather than being introduced individually to their baby. They picked out favorites from the crowd but could not know individually who belonged to whom. At any time, a mother could return to the hospital and reclaim her child if evidence proved she could care for it again. This process, called restoration, occurred for less than one percent of the children in the hospital over the course of its existence.[33] Many women could not prove the sustained increase in their ability to take the child back on and therefore failed this process. Private letters became necessary as the institution baptized and rechristened the children as they entered, and the mother could not know their new name.

Other rules for the mothers came at acceptance, with the child having to be between three and twelve months old at the time of admittance, and unlike the wet-nurses, they could not visit when they pleased.[34] There was always the possibility of rejection, after acceptance. Even after the child had been admitted, the FH could cut off the mother any time it chose and that fear is probably what drove many women to painstakingly monitor their correspondence with the charity. The inquirers kept the FH at arm's length with professional, dry language and repeatedly asked for information on

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[32] 1820–1911 Foundling Hospital reclamation and inquiry form, A/FH/A1/3/1, LMA.
[33] Ginger Frost, "'Your Mother Has Never Forgotten You': Illegitimacy, Motherhood, and The London Foundling Hospital, 1860-1930," *Annales de démographie historique* 127, no. 1 (2014): 51. Remove extra space below this footnote. (Hereafter: Ginger Frost, "Your Mother Has Never Forgotten")
[34] Jessica A. Sheetz-Nguyen, *Victorian Women*, 169; 176.

their children while taking care not to upset, offend, disappoint, or fall out with the only means of communication a mother had about her baby.

The physical condition and indicators on each letter tell a unique story. Rather than exclude letters that went unsigned, examinations were performed on all of them for clues proved essential. Indications like this give insight about the writer to see if it could be narrowed down who wrote them and where they came from. All the letters have immense value, and all have stories to tell, even if they do not bear the name of their creator.

When a woman inquired to the hospital, her letter was stabbed on a spindle, pierced through the center, much like how we store receipts today. Presumably Brownlow placed them on the spindle once the inquiry had been completed and a reply sent. Every single note has a small hole stabbed through the center of the page. Brownlow stored them on these small, sharp spindles, and they stayed there long after he died. The letters remained on those spindles until the 1990's when the London Metropolitan Archives processed and preserved them.[35] Due to the casual nature of their storage (as opposed to most everything else in the hospital's archive), many of these letters are out of order, sorted into files based on how Brownlow placed them on the spindles, not by what year or by what person wrote the inquiry. Even the simple, haphazard files they are sorted in to this day is like a view into a time capsule of Brownlow's office and how he dealt with the letters that steadily streamed in for him from women whom he knew desperately wanted information. Sometimes letters from one mother several weeks apart are placed together as if he stored them away, like he needed

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[35] Jessica A. Sheetz-Nguyen, *Victorian Women*, 170.

to refer to the first inquisition or simply wanted to keep track of who followed up. Other times letters that are dated only a month apart are stored in totally opposite ends of the file numbers. Only a few of the bundles of letters are even numbered individually. Before now, an exact number of the letters did not exist, but now all of them have been photographed and counted. The collection holds 3,042 letters.

The edges of many of the letters are crumbling or discolored. The soot on them is pervasive, as the time they were created in was coal-powered, and the papers themselves shook out all sorts of dust and dirt when disturbed. Most of them have marks around the edges where the note rested under the letter next to it and the larger ones bear clearly the rectangles of the letters it touched. Most are small, only about six inches wide and eight inches long. The paper they are written on is thin, most of the time, which is why they are crumbling along the exposed edges. This thinner paper reflects its cheapness, or simply the paper the mother had access to when writing. The color of the paper varies from the most common, white or light blue, to other shades like green, pink, or occasionally purple. A few cards are also in the file, one for Christmas and another for a birthday. One letter even featured a damask texture, like a watermark, that reflects in the light.[36] Overwhelmingly the paper is plain, regular writing stock, but sometimes it came emblazoned with an address at the top, such as “Moor End/ Tadcaster,” or “S Mary Magdalene’s Home/ 26 Delamere Crescent.”[37] Occasionally thicker paper is used, but these letters were written in such a way that they are folded in half to fit in the envelope and so most have writing on the back and front, as well as a crease in the middle that

[36] Correspondence from Mothers of Children, A/FH/A/09/019/004/1-57, LMA.
[37] Correspondence from Mothers of Children, A/FH/A/09/019/012, LMA; Correspondence from Mothers of Children, A/FH/A/09/019/008/Box 2, LMA.

must be unfolded to get all the contents of the note. Thicker paper over time becomes stiffer and brittle, so unfolding them to read the whole inquiry is a challenge and risk to the document. These riskier letters were painstakingly and carefully opened, with the use of weights, only long enough to be photographed and then put back the way they belong. The thicker paper also tended to have a shiny finish, which has made the ink fade over time.

The letters that have held up the best are the ones written on the most expensive stationery. These few stand out because they tend to be the crispest white, most intact edges, and are marked by a thick, black band around the edges. These black-edged notes are written by the women most advantaged, whether by job or marriage. The paper appears to be the most expensive choice of stationery and after one hundred and fifty years it has withstood the test of time. The black edge indicates the formality of the inquiry but also attests to the fact that a mother could afford an entire, whole sheet of proper stationery on which to write her letters. The black band also made the paper sturdier, as very few of these letters have any damage to their edges.

The ink used on the letters varied as well. Ninety-nine percent of the time it was simply black ink, but on occasion, a letter with purple or blue ink stands out from the rest. Some inks have held up better than others and the cheaper ones tend to be faded and slightly browned from the paper they are on, as well as less sharp around the edges as the ink breaks down and feathers into the page. Surprisingly, the specially colored inks have held up rather well, remaining crisp and easy to read.

After the condition of the letter, the paper, and the ink used, the next factor of categorizing a letter is the handwriting. All have copperplate writing, but of course styles

vary. There are two main kinds of physical writing in the letters. There is the more traditional, pointed, dainty writing of careful practice, with flourishes on ends of words or capital letters. This handwriting is slightly harder to decipher as the letters are not formed as precisely as others, and instead the writing flows from one letter to the other on more of a straight line. The second kind is a slightly blockier handwriting, with squared off and open letters which are formed individually near each other, but not necessarily connected to every letter. Some handwriting is much clearer than others, and the style or appearance most likely does not absolutely have to do with education or station, but is more likely related to individual style and ability. It is clear when a letter written to Brownlow proved a painstaking and careful endeavor, with each word carefully formed as beautifully as it could be, and it is also clear when the letter came to the page as quickly as possible with not much attention given to legibility or appearance. Sometimes letters went on longer than a woman intended and after filling the entire front and back, rather than adding a page, she turned it sideways and quickly signed her name, writing over her other words. These are the hardest to decipher by far. The letters represent all levels of ability represented in the letters, from perfectly formed and exquisite examples handwriting, to splotchy, ink-covered, and haphazard letters of a beginner.

The next level of categorization, spelling and grammar, vary as widely as quality of handwriting and are not necessarily in conjunction with each other. While a letter may be beautifully written, variations of spelling and incorrect word usage may abound. This is compounded by a lack of standardized spellings, variations of British English, and spellings that are now outdated. Even with all these exceptions and variables, spelling and grammar can indicate what level of education and literacy a writer possessed. For

example Francis Mary Scott wrote regularly, but her spelling took a phonetic approach: "Frances Mary Scott will feaill much oblidge to Mr Brownlow if he will Informer her the full perticuarly of her dear little boys health and if Mr. Brownlow as See aim laittley/I am sir your obeadient servent/ Frances Mary Scott."[38] There are multiple writers whose accent can be heard in the way they spelled (much like Scottish tweets today). In some exceptional cases, a mother's literacy (both spelling and handwriting) improved over the years of writing to the FH. Amelia Richards, who after moving to Australia, sent several letters spelling her new home as "Sidney" until she finally realized she lived in "Sydney."[39] Louisa Bourne is another example: her handwriting and spelling improved over the course of her correspondence, which could have been because her employer required her to read and write more, or simply because she took it upon herself to improve her abilities. Whatever the case, she better communicated her inquiries as her relationship with the institution went on.

The letters conveyed less information about the authors' dwelling and writers rarely included addresses or other specific details about their dwellings, the likely result of a few factors including the requirement to include a stamped and addressed envelope within the letter for the hospital to send a reply. The address likely appeared on the sender's envelope which the hospital was not in the practice of saving, throwing away the receiving one and using the other to send a response to the mother. The addresses, no matter how rare they are, still add insight to where some women lived after they left the hospital. The locations vary widely, with some women moving to places as far-flung as

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[38] Correspondence from Mothers of Children, A/FH/A/09/019/004/1-57, LMA.
[39] Correspondence from Mothers of Children, A/FH/A/09/019/008 Box 1, LMA.

Australia, Russia, India, Portugal, or as close as Paris and Ireland. Most of the time, however, they stayed in the city. The addresses varied within the city, but mostly came from North and West London.[40] Others wrote because their employers took them out of town to vacation spots like Brighton and they became unable to visit like they wanted to.[41] Regardless, the addresses included in the letters have a lot to tell about the women and where they scattered to after they benefitted from the institution's charity.

At least one hundred unsigned letters with no name attached to them are in the correspondence from unwed mothers file. These notes cannot be attributed to a specific writer without more information and time in the archives correlating them to the private letters and dates of admission that are sometimes included in the text, but even then, the information could be lost to time. That does not mean they have no value to this study. Because of the factors discussed here – physical condition, paper and ink qualities, handwriting, spelling and grammar, and addresses – determinations can be made about these anonymous writings. Presumably the name appeared on the envelope included inside the inquiry, or a woman attempted as much as she could to remain unidentifiable to anyone but Brownlow, just in case the letter went astray or wandering eyes discovered her secret.

A specific example includes three letters in file ten of the correspondence that are unsigned, have the same handwriting, and all include different information about the writer. She wrote from "21 Hatton Street Marylebone" on one of them, which is an address just a few blocks west of Regent's Park in London.[42] The kind of paper varies on

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[40] Correspondence from Mothers of Children, A/FH/A/09/019/004/1-57, LMA.
[41] Correspondence from Mothers of Children, A/FH/A/09/019/008/Box 2, LMA.
[42] Correspondence from Mothers of Children, A/FH/A/09/019/0010, LMA.

all three letters, as well as the format of the note itself, with some smaller than others as she cut whatever spare she could find. The handwriting is the pointier, more flourished copperplate writing, and all include the same date of admittance and private letter. She lived in a decent house, in a good part of town, and though she could not afford the nicest stationary, she clearly held a position she wanted to keep and secretly wrote to the FH. Anonymity became the key to keeping herself in this position. Why she wrote only three letters is unclear; perhaps she had a scare, or her employer found out, or she started visiting on Mondays and no longer needed to write. For whatever reason, she stopped sending inquiries about her child.

Between the years 1856 and 1872, the FH accepted 782 babies from their mothers.[43] Out of those, only 45 percent of them sent written inquiries to Brownlow. In two out of three cases, she wrote more than once. A small number of unsigned letters (forty-four) remain unattributed to any case.[44] Sixty of the women who wrote gave dates of admission prior to 1856.[45] On average, most of the inquiries came when the child's age spanned between one and five years old.[46] Two likely explanations account for this: childhood mortality statistics suggest youths in this age range were at higher risk of death, and after the age of five the FH moved the children to the main campus in London making it easier for mothers to visit. Women who wrote after the child returned to London tended to be those with addresses listed as somewhere other than the city.[47]

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[43] Accepted Foundling Hospital Petitions, A/FH/A/08/1/2/65-80, LMA.
[44] Correspondence from Mothers of Children, A/FH/A/09/019/001-13, LMA.
[45] Correspondence from Mothers of Children, A/FH/A/09/019/001-13, LMA.
[46] Correspondence from Mothers of Children, A/FH/A/09/019/001-13, LMA.
[47] Correspondence from Mothers of Children, A/FH/A/09/019/001-13, LMA.

Overwhelmingly, these letters tended to stick to the rules, being short inquiries including a question of health and the child's private number information. Only twenty percent of them spanned longer than a page.[48] There is much more numerical information to be gleaned from the files, but this project focuses on the authors and what can be learned about them from the letters.

This vast collection of letters has value not only historically, in the sense that they tell the stories of unwed mothers not only in the abstract, but also as physical receipts of their existence. They bear witness to the days, places, and conditions under which the inquiries were composed. Even the most basic elements give clues to who the authors were: paper, writing, ink, spelling, etc. The physicality of the letters is just the tip of the iceberg, deserving of comment and analysis.

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[48] Correspondence from Mothers of Children, A/FH/A/09/019/001-13, LMA.

CHAPTER 2: "THE POOR MOTHER WILL BE GLAD TO HEAR": INTERPERSONAL RELATIONSHIPS AS THE GO-BETWEEN

Although many of the petitioners increasingly could read and write over the time span of this study, not all achieved a level of intimacy with the Foundling Hospital (FH) like many of the regularly writing mothers came to expect. These women, the so-called others, communicated in alternate means with the charity: whether through a scribe, their employers, family and friends, or they simply wrote the same inquiry repeatedly. A scribe is someone not related to the mother who wrote for her, and usually received payment for his or her writing. Employers wrote for illiterate mothers if they knew her story and themselves cared about the child. Family and friends proved another common avenue of communication for mothers who could not write themselves. Script-writers (women who wrote the same inquiry multiple times) had the ability to write and chose to walk the line in regard to what they asked so as to keep in good standing with the institution that had saved them. These other women chose to be careful in their lines of communication with Brownlow and in so doing operated successfully within the system to which they surrendered their children. The women who had children admitted to the FH had multiple options available to them when communicating about the children they gave up, and took it upon themselves to find out those options. Literacy in the nineteenth century is a complex issue. While mothers wrote more letters than expected, not all of them could write for themselves but had the option of asking someone else to compose in their stead. Inquiries of this type make up less than one-fifth of the letters in the file.

Letters written by professional scribes had common characteristics: they tended to say the same thing repeatedly, employed different handwriting styles, referred to the

mother in third person, and lacked a signature. In one case the writer stated "Elizabeth Holmes would be greatly obliged to Mr. Brownlow if he would kindly tell her how her baby is."[1] The mother sent this note on multiple dates and from different addresses fourteen times in one year. Various hands created the notes, with occasional addendums, including an address in Haverstock Hill.[2] Holmes posted the notes regularly and then ended with no explanation. Matilda Gowan occasionally used a proxy to communicate her inquiries: "[She] presents hir duty to Mr Brownlow and will feel very much obliged by his forwarding the rules of the foundling Hospital."[3] This unsigned note is scrawled in a different hand than the other couple of signed notes she sent, and shows she tried to follow the rules before writing herself to the FH. Janet Belford also used a scribe: "Please sir will you kindly inform Janet Belford how her child is which was received the 6th day of July 1863 letter E"[4] Caroline Gale also had occasion to have someone else write for her. "Wile Mr Brownlow Kindle let Miss Gale hear how N. admitted Dec 12 1865 is getting on. Blacking May 12 1865."[5]

The use of a scribe occurred less and less in the letters as time went on reflecting rising literacy rates, and the increasingly careful selection process of the FH committee. Occasionally mothers had friends and family who enquired on their behalves, either because they could not write themselves, or circumstances prevented them from being able to risk their position by writing personally. Martha Ford is an example of one of

[1] Correspondence from Mothers of Children, A/FH/A/09/019/002/1-48, LMA.
[2] Correspondence from Mothers of Children, A/FH/A/09/019/002/1-48, LMA.
[3] Correspondence from Mothers of Children, A/FH/A/09/019/008 Box 2, LMA.
[4] Correspondence from Mothers of Children, A/FH/A/09/019/007/1-632, LMA.
[5] Correspondence from Mothers of Children, A/FH/A/09/019/010, LMA.

those women, who specifically requested a friend write a few times for her while she was out in the country with the family she worked for. "My friend Mrs. Locke will write a time or two for me as I have going in the country for 2 or 3 months with the family I am living with….Perhaps find out my misfortune wich would go against me so much."[6] Harriet Locke dutifully wrote three times while Ford traveled in the country and could neither write nor come by during the Monday visiting hours. Petitioners also had siblings write from time to time. Fanny Welkerman had her sister write: "Will you kindly let me know at your convenience if my sisters…child received the 27th of April is well + if not against your rules what her name is. It seems early to trouble you but being weak she is curious + anxious + I know you will excuse."[7] In a particularly strange case, the husband of a petitioner and father of one of the admitted children wrote inquiries: "Will you be so kind as to let us know how the health of the little male child H is that you so kindly received into your Benevolent Institution on the 21st Day of Dec. I return you many thanks sir for your kindness to my wife +child."[8] Lazard wrote a few more times, but never explained the circumstances under which the child was accepted.

Having the luxury of a friend or family member to send inquiries meant those mothers had the freedom others lacked: their family knew about the bastard child and still maintained a relationship with the mother. Multiple times in letters mothers asked Brownlow to be careful where he sent his responses because they wished to prevent their mothers or families learning about the child they had given up. Occasionally, the only people who knew a mother's status as a FH beneficiary was her employer at the time she

[6] Correspondence from Mothers of Children, A/FH/A/09/019/008 Box 2, LMA.
[7] Correspondence from Mothers of Children, A/FH/A/09/019/010, LMA.
[8] Correspondence from Mothers of Children, A/FH/A/09/019/011, LMA.

gave birth and whoever had given character witness for her petition made to the charity. The mothers described above leaned on their friends and family for support, at the same time having to bear their judgment, while they reached out for information about the child they anxiously wanted to know lived a healthy and happy life.

Other women had employers write for them. Susan Good wrote herself, but occasionally, her employer, Mary E. Howard, also inquired about the baby.[9] "I shall esteem it with favor if you tell me when Susan will be allowed to see her child, the little girl will be three years old the 15th of next month," Howard wrote.[10] This technically broke the rules, as mothers consented to never see their child again unless they were being restored. However, Susan Good (and probably Mary Howard) hoped that by using her employer to appeal to the secretary, an exception could be made.

Occasionally, employers offered an extraordinary amount of detail about the mothers. Jemima Page had suffered bouts of Rheumatic fever and could not write, so her employer, a doctor, wrote on her behalf.

> I have a young person in my service named Jemima Langford who I understand left at your Insitute [sic] of Mercy a female child "M" on June 19th 1865.- This poor girl has had two severe attacks of Rheumatic fever since and is now very ill. She has been quite unable to write to get information as to her baby and now asks me to do so. I believe her to be a very good girl in spite of her having fell from virtue and she is, it seems, and has been fretting about her baby so hope you will kindly written to herself or me afford information as to how the poor little deserted thing is.[11]

Calloway went even further and remembered the child's birthday, writing x years later in 1868:

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[9] Correspondence from Mothers of Children, A/FH/A/09/019/008 Box 1, LMA.
[10] Correspondence from Mothers of Children, A/FH/A/09/019/008 Box 1, LMA.
[11] Correspondence from Mothers of Children, A/FH/A/09/019/008 Box 1, LMA.

> You were kind enough to respond to my periodical enquiries as to the health of Jemima Langford's little girl on several occasions while I was residing at Ryde. I am reminded that the child's birthday occurred this week + feeling sure that the poor mother will be glad to hear of its welfare again to trouble you. I have on account of my own failing health quitted the medical profession + taken a chemists business here but have been sadly taken in. Jemima Langford came here with us and her health has much improved since we removed inland. I had hoped my position + prospects here would have justified me in removing the child but regret today I am disappointed. Thanking your for your former courtesy / I remain dear sir / Your faithful servt./ Samuel Calloway[12]

Calloway was a special case, since he himself mentioned having been interested in helping Langford reclaim her child from the institution, but could not, as his own circumstances changed. His devotion shows in the right family and circumstances how much a part of the family a household servant could be regarded. The members of house and staff had lofty standards to uphold to protect the reputation and status of the household, and in turn, occasionally, could be cared for like a family member.

People who were not quite friends, family, or employers also inquired. In 1864, Ann Farley had her school's superintendent inquire on her behalf. "Will you kindly inform me, at your convenience, how the female child of Ann Farley's is V. admitted 7th of January 1861/ and you will oblige Dr sir Charlotte Elizabeth Wakeling, Superintendent/ please put the enclosed 10/ in the plate next Sunday for me."[13] This is one of a few letters Wakeling wrote on the mother's behalf. Presumably Farley studied at the school, being a young girl when she had the child. Or she could have worked for the school. Including money with the inquiry was rare; this is the only case of it in the letters. In 1860, a Mrs. Tickell wrote asking about the child of Susanna Hyde, but used a proxy

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[12] Correspondence from Mothers of Children, A/FH/A/09/019/010, LMA.
[13] Correspondence from Mothers of Children, A/FH/A/09/019/007/1-632, LMA.

to write the letter (possibly her lady's maid).[14] It is from an address in Lincolnshire, near a manor house, but nothing else can be gleaned from the inquiry about the circumstances of Mrs. Tickell's relationship to Hyde.[15]

The necessity of writing by proxy affected a small minority of the mothers. They lacked the ability to write for themselves, but still sought a way to communicate about their child and took necessary steps to find out if the baby still lived, possibly paying more of their money for the scribe and the cost of posting the letter. Mothers went to great lengths to follow the FH instructions by finding people who could write letters when they could not. But proxy writers show that despite a lack of literacy, these women still had the agency and concern to take extra steps to find out if their baby thrived. The women who had their employers write on their behalf show that some women need not hide their status as an unwed mother and, indeed, their employers invested emotionally in the mother and child enough to help.

The FH reminded mothers that they were only allowed to ask after the health of their child and that they had to include the date of admittance and the private letter they were given for the child. This led to many women coming up with a script, of sorts, where they wrote the same thing repeatedly and rarely diverged from the template. The majority of the letters exhibit this pattern. The mothers carefully followed the rules, asking only about their child, and trying to walk the line between having the agency to write for themselves, and being respectful of the rules of the institution that saved them. Hannah Hepworth is one of these mothers: "Will you kindly inform me of the health of

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[14] Correspondence from Mothers of Children, A/FH/A/09/019/003/1-21, LMA.
[15] Correspondence from Mothers of Children, A/FH/A/09/019/003/1-21, LMA.

my little boy who was admitted into the FH on the 21st of June 1858, letter Y."[16] She wrote this note twenty-two times over a two-year period. Hepworth's letters are only distinguishable by the differences in the paper they came delivered on, dates, and sender location.

Some mothers wrote with such frequency that they dropped the pretense of what the FH required and inquired directly about the information they sought. Martha Foss wrote at least eighty times over a six-year period. "Oct 30 To J Brownlow Esq/--Sir/ Will you please tell me of my dear child. /Your very humble servant M Foss."[17] While she occasionally diverged from this script, most of the time this is the note that would get sent - to the point that the staff knew to expect her inquiry. Slipped in with the bundled letters was a small scrap of paper dated 15 April 1862: "M. Foss wrote as usual, and the note was accidentally burnt."[18] Clearly someone working in the secretary's office wrote this and found it unnecessary to include any of what Martha Foss asked, because it was the "usual" inquiry.[19] She knew she wore on their nerves: "Will you please tell me of my childs welfare/ Also permit me to thank you for your unwearied attention to my weekly request. It is now twelve long months since you so kindly took my child. If I could only be allowed to see him I shall be happy, but I know I must not ask."[20] Foss knew she had such a relationship with the staff at the FH that she dared to ask for more, taking a little bit more control and showing what agency she had gained over the years.

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[16] Correspondence from Mothers of Children, A/FH/A/09/019/002/1-48, LMA.
[17] Correspondence from Mothers of Children, A/FH/A/09/019/007/1-632, LMA.
[18] Correspondence from Mothers of Children, A/FH/A/09/019/007/1-632, LMA.
[19] Correspondence from Mothers of Children, A/FH/A/09/019/007/1-632, LMA.
[20] Correspondence from Mothers of Children, A/FH/A/09/019/007/1-632, LMA.

Women of a higher social standing had to conform to the rules of letter writing just as much as those in lower classes. Mary Anne Baker is one of those writers. "Will you please to let me know how my Child is that was received on the 24 Oct 1864 by so doing you will oblige your/ Humble Servant."[21] This letter came fifteen times in two years with no variation, other than dates and locations, once again. The amount of deference and careful attention to etiquette in letter writing is apparent in Baker's case. Most letters ended with the phrase "your humble servant," but Baker also included an extra step of careful phrasing, "by doing so you will oblige your humble servant."[22] Her careful use of etiquette along with excellent penmanship indicate her higher status, but the black-edged stationery she wrote on is the clearest indication of her elevated station. Despite not giving any personal information in her letters, she was either from a well-off family, had married well, or (most likely) worked for an upper-class household.

Mothers who stuck to scripts they had constructed for themselves reflect the fear of rejection they still held when inquiring to the FH. Mothers wrote the same phrases repeatedly, knowing they would get a positive response if they asked only what they were allowed: the health of the child. They knew they would get the blue form they craved, all filled out and telling them if the child lived and grew. The repetition in letters show that, while desperate for news about the child, these women still feared they might mess up their relationship with the establishment that had taken their child and restored their reputations. The mothers who had proxies inquire for them show how, despite their illiteracy or ability to write about their child, they took extra steps to find out if it was

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[21] Correspondence from Mothers of Children, A/FH/A/09/019/008 Box 1, LMA.
[22] Correspondence from Mothers of Children, A/FH/A/09/019/008 Box 1, LMA.

healthy and happy. Employers or friends reaching out to the FH show the special relationships these women had and how people in better positions socially tried to help the mothers who needed it.

While the examples presented thus far began correspondence soon after turning their children over to the FH, some mothers waited more than a decade to write the charity. These women had no regular relationship with the FH but had not forgotten the children they gave up. The long pauses in correspondence show that while circumstances may have prevented their ability to reach out (whether that be the hospital's rules for inquiry, an employer who was unaware of their circumstances, etc.), they never forgot, and they never stopped wondering what had happened to the baby they chose to separate from. These mothers had the power to initiate a relationship with the FH at any time. Ellen Louise Cronies explained in 1861 that her travel prevented inquiries.

> Sir I write to inform you that I have come to Australia from America. My parents wrote from my husband and myself and he died soon after we arrived here, leaving me a widow without any children. I should feel very grateful if you would let me know how my boy is that was received into the Foundling Hospital on the 4th of June 1849. I am very anxious to know how he is, he must be now a big boy oh! How much I should like to see him. Australia is not what it is represented to be I would much rather live in England perhaps after a few years I shall go back, if not I should like to know whether I could get the boy out here when I shall be in position to keep him. [23]

Ellen's financial position precariously trapped her. She was stranded in Australia until she could afford a ticket back to England and then she had the trouble of finding a job when she returned. She specifically mentioned that her husband had died leaving her a widow without children, so of course in her heartache she could not help but wonder

[23] Correspondence from Mothers of Children, A/FH/A/09/019/007/1-632, LMA.

about the child she had surrendered twelve years before in England. She hoped she could find a position that would enable her to have him returned to her, but the odds of this were stacked against her. At the time she gave up the boy, she probably expected to have more, never imagined she might find herself half a world away with no husband, no money, and no other children to give her life purpose. Her story shows how dependent women's lives had been in this time on other people's help, whether a husband or family, since she had neither. However, she found out she could ask about the baby she had never forgotten, and reached out from the other side of the world in the hope of hearing about him, hoping his life had turned out better than hers, and perhaps confirmation that she had made the right choice in giving him up.

Some mothers waited so long before enquiring and gave no reason as to why they had not asked before. Sarah Malyn wrote to the hospital twelve years after her child's admission. "With Respectufll Duty of Adress you Trusting by this time you will give me every hope of seeing my Child I came to London Last Monday and Called at the foundling for that very purpose I was Sorely Disapointed____ The Journey is Expensive and i fill an upper situation and cannot at all times be spared with convenience Will you give me every information what to Do And Be good Enough to Relieve my Angisity as soon as you can___ I depend infinitely upon your kind consideration."[24] She reveals no explanation about what kept her from writing for such a long time, but she clearly tried to see her child during the visiting hours and could not, either because the child was ill, or perhaps already apprenticed out and no longer at the hospital for her to see. This single letter is all she wrote, and hopefully Brownlow assisted her ability to visit the child, but it

[24] Correspondence from Mothers of Children, A/FH/A/09/019/007/1-632, LMA.

is unclear whether she succeeded. In April of 1868, Mary Ann Millett sent inquiries about her son: "[She] would feel greatly obliged to Mr. Brownlo or present manager of the Foundling to inform her of the health of her son E entered 13 Decr 1847."[25] This incredibly brief note raises more questions than answers as to Millett's relationship to the FH. It looks as though it, too, is another letter written by a scribe since there is no signature, two different addresses, and even Brownlow's name is not spelled correctly. Because of this, the inquiry is very short and offers no explanation as to why Millett had not asked in twenty-one years about the child she surrendered. By this time the child was surely out of the FH completely and had a job elsewhere, but hopefully Brownlow forwarded this on to him and that is why Millett never wrote again to the hospital.

Isabella Buseton presents a particular mystery in the FH letters. She sent two inquiries, both with different handwriting and approximately a year apart. The first one, being in the earlier set of files, she wrote: "Mrs. Buseton Duty to Mr. Brownlow wishes to Inquire after the health of her Daughter T who was admitted into the Asylum 20th Day of September 1852."[26] The second inquiry, written in significantly sloppier handwriting, is similar. "Mrs Buseton duty to Mr Brownlow wishes to enquiry after the health of her daughter T who was admitted at the hospital the 20 day of September in the year 1853 Wich I heartily thank you for past [illeg.]."[27] This second note is on smaller paper and has water damage on multiple words. There is also a discrepancy in the year the child was surrendered which suggests the two notes likely came from two different authors. Either sixteen or seventeen years after the child's surrender, Buseton sent two notes, some time

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25 Correspondence from Mothers of Children, A/FH/A/09/019/010, LMA.
26 Correspondence from Mothers of Children, A/FH/A/09/019/010, LMA.
27 Correspondence from Mothers of Children, A/FH/A/09/019/011, LMA.

apart from one another, and one she possible wrote herself, and one she had written for her, or neither came directly from her hand. It is unclear what kept her from writing for such a length of time, but she clearly had not forgotten her daughter.

In some instances, the mother herself never wrote, but someone who knew about the child inquired years after it had been admitted. Mary Anne Burton wrote:

> We shall be glad to know if J, Admitted 13 day of Feb 1854 continues well and merits your kindness still, you have always cheered me by the good account and her good Mother is very desirous to hear how her child is growing up and I believe thinks much about her. The other child is doing well in the country. Mrs Owen the mother is now in most respectable service as Cook a truly valuable servant and good woman. I trust you have been preserved in health during the late trying weather and that you may long continue to receive the love of so many little ones.[28]

Burton likely helped the mother get admitted and shows up a few times around the FH as a woman who helps others get their children admitted. Here she tried to use her relationship with the FH as a means of gaining information. She told Brownlow that the woman had another child that lived out in the country in the care of another woman. Despite two children she had given up, this mother maneuvered herself into the high paying position as a cook for a family, some thirteen years after giving a child to the hospital. Burton's correspondence with Brownlow shows she personally cared what happened to the child, as well as her desire in keeping the hospital up to date with the status of one of its petitioners.

Emmela Champien indicates she wrote more than once, but only one of her letters appears in the public archives, dated fifteen years after her son's admission. Her other letters may not be in the years of publicly viewable inquiries (the earliest are from 1856).

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[28] Correspondence from Mothers of Children, A/FH/A/09/019/008 Box 2, LMA.

> Mr. Brownlow Secretary to Foundling Hospital Sir The Liberty I take in again asking for the information respecting my son that became an inmate on the 10/1/53 of it most you approved to be pleased to answer this respecting his welfare, if not to for trusting to ask his whereabouts I should be happy to communicate to him There be to Heare his name Wilhaim Pierce for the mark of kindness shown to me in past favors I humbly beg to return my greatful thanks and remain your Obedient servant[29]

She hinted that she either knew what her son's name had been, or what she had named him, but it is unclear which is correct. She wanted to communicate with him, to know about his life and share about hers, but was unsure if he was still at the Foundling at the age of fifteen. Her interest in knowing him shows that she remembered him and hoped he would want a relationship with her when the time came.

This trend of women who waited ten or more years to reach out and check on their babies shows that the decision to part from the child they had given birth to had never left them. Not checking for several years could have been due to inability because of a job, illiteracy, their family situation, or even the pain of separation. However long they took to write, they wrote, and they wondered about that baby. No matter how much time had passed, they could not forget, and they could not help but wonder.

These mothers, the others, lacked intimate relationships with the FH. They were prevented by their illiteracy, job, or even grief process, from developing a closeness with John Brownlow that other women were privileged to have. They kept the hospital at arm's length, not quite detailing the changes they experienced post-admission of their children. They still had curiosity about the situation and health of the child, but they walked a careful line in their relationship to the institution.

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[29] Correspondence from Mothers of Children, A/FH/A/09/019/010, LMA.

CHAPTER 3: GONE, NOT FORGOTTEN: EMOTIONAL CONFESSION POST-SURRENDER

William Hogarth was a celebrated British artist who created several pieces for the London Foundling Hospital (FH). One of his most notable was "Moses Brought to Pharaoh's Daughter," which was created in 1747 and still resides at the hospital's museum.[1] The piece is said to depict the metaphor of the FH, embodied in the Pharaoh's daughter caring for Moses while his real mother looks on, tearfully accepting the silver she was paid to nurse him.[2] This painting explores the emotions of mothers delivering their babies to the FH, knowing they made a brave choice, but emotional about it nonetheless. Just because they had the agency and bravery to separate themselves from a child they knew they could not care for, they were still emotionally distraught at the separation. By recording their emotional upheaval, however, the mothers wrote stories for themselves, narrated their lives, and left evidence of the agency they exercised.

Instead of turning a baby over to an agency or selected couple, unwed mothers in London could appeal to the FH. Children admitted to the charity had the potential to be restored, and therefore the organization appealed to servant women who hoped to someday be able to take the child back. This experience of giving up a child willingly, for its benefit over maternal instinct, is uncommon and the feelings associated with it can transcend time and place. "Adoption is usually viewed from one perspective, that of the happy couple acquiring the child of their dreams. Little attention is paid to the woman who gave birth to that child and her reactions to the adoption process. Her adjustment to

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[1] "Moses Brought Before Pharaoh's Daughter." Moses Brought Before Pharaoh's Daughter | Art UK.
[2] "Moses Brought Before Pharaoh's Daughter." Moses Brought Before Pharaoh's Daughter | Art UK.

the relinquishment of her child is a painful and somewhat unknown process."[3] The mothers of the FH left behind emotional responses to trauma that are similar to what health care professionals would expect of a modern birth mother.

While research on the effect surrendering a child has on a woman has been challenging to acquire due to the hushed nature of closed adoptions in the United States before Roe v. Wade, it has been studied sporadically over the last forty years all over the world. Our modern understanding of this separation reveals processes like those reflected in the letters to the FH. Women today are warned that giving up a child will result in an emotional upheaval like the death of the child, since the grief process is the same. However, other researchers (like Ann Fessler, an artist who interviewed one hundred women to study the human condition of surrender) say it is closer to a different cycle of emotions: "The grief was likened to the separation loss experienced by a parent whose child is missing or, by a person who is told their loved one is missing in action. Unlike the grief over the death of a child, which is permanent and for which there is an established grieving process, the loss of a child through adoption has no clear end and no social affirmation that grief is even an appropriate response."[4] While grief may subside over time for most major losses, for relinquishing mothers, the grief may actually

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[3] Holli Ann Askren, and Kathleen C. Bloom, "Postadoptive Reactions of the Relinquishing Mother: A Review," *Journal of Obstetric, Gynecologic & Neonatal Nursing* 28, no. 4 (1999): 395. The same issues that resulted from cutting and pasting the citation into this document are found in each instance. Be sure to correct them in each citation of this source. (Hereafter: Holli Ann Askren and Kathleen C. Bloom, "Postadoptive Reactions")

[4] Ann Fessler, *The Girls Who Went Away: The Hidden History of Women Who Surrendered Children for Adoption in the Decades Before Roe v. Wade* (New York: Penguin Press, 2006), 208. (Ann Fessler, *Girls Who Went Away*)

intensify over time.[5] Fessler quotes Dr. Michael DeSimone's study, "Birth Mother Loss: Contribution Factors to Unresolved Grief," which was published in *Clinical Social Work Journal* (1996): "One study has shown that high levels of unresolved grief in women were found to correlate with the 'lack of opportunity to express feelings about the loss, the lack of finality of the loss (the child continues to exist), the perception of coercion, and the resulting guilt and shame over the surrender.'"[6] Mothers who give up children for the benefit of the child have long-term ramifications to face. Dr. Holly Ann Askren and Dr. Kathleen C. Bloom (an OBGYN and Professor of Nursing respectively) agree with Fessler on this: "Relinquishing mothers have more grief symptoms than women who have lost a child to death, including more denial; despair; atypical responses; and disturbances in sleep, appetite, and vigor…The fact that the loss is incomplete may contribute to the grief reaction. That is, although the birth mother has no access to the child, the child continues to exist."[7]

Another very important aspect to understanding this grief process is the societal perceptions of relinquishment and the ramifications it has: "Lack of social acceptance of the grief response in relinquishing mothers also contributes to chronic, pathological grief."[8] Due to the societal view of surrendering a child as a voluntary choice, no process of grief or acknowledgment of loss is expected of a mother.[9] A surrendering mother is traditionally encouraged to continue her life as if the experience had not occurred,

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[5] Ann Fessler, *Girls Who Went Away* , 209.
[6] Ann Fessler, *Girls Who Went Away* , 209.
[7] Holli Ann Askren and Kathleen C. Bloom, "Postadoptive Reactions," 397.
[8] Holli Ann Askren and Kathleen C. Bloom, "Postadoptive Reactions," 397.
[9] Holli Ann Askren and Kathleen C. Bloom, "Postadoptive Reactions," 397.

causing the woman to suppress her trauma and often leading to larger issues later in her life.[10] Similar to this, the FH mothers were expected to pick up and continue as though nothing had happened, although for them the stakes are often higher. While today mothers may experience social condemnation, Victorian women who were foolish enough to fall pregnant were often at a point of either starving on the streets or petitioning the FH for relief. They may have spent some time as a wet-nurse after the child's admission, but eventually they had to move on, and often they had to carry on with no one in their life they could talk to about the grief they felt. The only outlet for grief for some of the mothers was John Brownlow. As Sheetz-Nguyen explained, for Victorians everything depended on their character: "Yet, their reputation, as measured by the Foundling Hospital governors and committee, represented the definition of 'character' for over a century…Such preparations added considerable pressure to Victorians' lives, especially if society deemed their behavior aberrant and the only recourse for help turned out to be the public workhouse."[11] The process of grief is a serious one, and these women, based on the emotions they expressed in their writings, felt all of it.

Unlike the scripted writings that avoided discussing much emotion presented in chapters one and two, a handful of letters openly shared the emotional state of the authors. Martha Foss admitted to her grief: "Will you please tell me of my childs welfare You kindly told me you would see him last Wednesday so will you if I am not asking to much tell me how he looks. Oh sir my heart bleeds with anguish at haveing parted with

[10] Holli Ann Askren and Kathleen C. Bloom, "Postadoptive Reactions," 397-8.
[11] Jessica A. Sheetz-Nguyen, *Victorian Women*, 102-3.

him but still I am grateful to you and the committee for taking him."[12] Lizzie Dix, a regular correspondent, wrote Brownlow: "It would give me great pleasure if you would kindly let me know any time before Saturday how my darling child is- 'L'/ She was admitted 23rd of April 1866- I would give worlds for one tiny glimpse. Will you kindly tell me if she can run about?"[13] Dix put her pain in poetic metaphor, expressing quickly how desperately she missed her child. Isabel Cogan expressed what many women told Brownlow: "I felt anxious to write but I was afraid of being intrusive and troublesome, that kept me from making inquiries."[14] Women said over and over again they were "anxious" to hear about their child, a term that likely carried some weight in a Victorian society concerned with hysteria and other ailments women suffered caused by the stresses of modern life.[15] The term "anxious" comes from the Latin "angere," or "to choke, strangle," and became popular in the English lexicon in the seventeenth century.[16] Here it is often used to express the concern and emotional fatigue the writers felt at waiting for information about their children, conveying how debilitating their worry made them feel (women were commonly sent to asylums for anxiety at the time, though they most likely said this hyperbolically).

Birthdays and holidays especially are a time of grief for a birth mother, or woman processing the grief of relinquishment. In modern studies, Fessler found: "Women often experienced extreme sadness on the anniversary of their baby's birth."[17] In a very special

[12] Correspondence from Mothers of Children, A/FH/A/09/019/007/1-632, LMA.
[13] Correspondence from Mothers of Children, A/FH/A/09/019/008 Box 2, LMA.
[14] Correspondence from Mothers of Children, A/FH/A/09/019/007/1-632, LMA.
[15] "anxious, adj.". OED Online. June 2018. Oxford University Press.
[16] "anxious, adj.". OED Online. June 2018. Oxford University Press.
[17] Ann Fessler, *The Girls Who Went Away*, 213.

example, one mother even sent a birthday card for her child, which included a poem: "Birthday. May each returning birthday find You very much improve; Then you'll grow wise, good, and kind, And be by all beloved. May He who guides your youthful steps Strew blessings on the road, And with kind Providence direct. To his divine abode."[18] The body of the card read:

> Honoured sir, I take the liberty of writing at this time. This day is my poor little Child J birthday you know sir I feel this tie very much. Would you kindly let me know how she is- I am anxiously looking forward to this time next year if it Please God to spare us all to that time it is a long time to wate, but I know sir that you will let me know as soon as it is Possabel for me to see hir. May it Please you to grant me that pleasure- My kind ladies are quite well and hope that sir may long enjoy that great Blessing[19]

In fact, Isabella Cameron regularly commemorated her child's birthday, writing in 1865, 1866, and 1867. In each, she includes emotional language describing her anguish at the anniversary of the child's birth. "next Monday it is hir Birthday the most awful day of my life I waited patiently 3 years but 2 more years in addition to that 3 had been very irksome to me! No one knows what I felt since that smiling infant was taken from my Bosom on the 16th day of February 1863."[20] That note commemorated the child, Jessie's, third birthday. It had been a painful one for Isabella, apparently. On the child's fourth birthday she sent:

> "Tomorrow is my childs birthday and I feel it is a very hard day for me more so as I have not seen my child at the end of 3 long years recording to promice no one knows what these 3 years has been…I cannot live like this I must come and see you about it I do hope you will try and do what you can for me I have no one to speake to my heart is like to break all around me ar strangers to my sorrow and my only comfort is my hearing from you about hir and I do trust I shall have a little consolation about hir soon."[21]

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[18] Correspondence from Mothers of Children, A/FH/A/09/019/007/1-632, LMA.
[19] Correspondence from Mothers of Children, A/FH/A/09/019/007/1-632, LMA.
[20] Correspondence from Mothers of Children, A/FH/A/09/019/008 Box 2, LMA.
[21] Correspondence from Mothers of Children, A/FH/A/09/019/008 Box 1, LMA.

She speaks about her anxieties and tribulation at having to wait even longer to see her baby. The letters dropped off after this and one can only hope Cameron could go to the FH around the child's birthday after that and witness the child personally on those painful days.

Other women also wrote on or near the child's birthday. "My dear little boy's birthday was larst Thursday the 5 of May. I wondert many times if is health and strength was improving, but I must be contented ~~to know~~ when I get to know, that he is well."[22] Another mother wrote: "22nd April, Dear Sir, I write this to ask you if my child is well/ received on the 7 day of July, 1860 the letter V Tomorrow is her Birthday. From your humble servant, Martha Downs."[23] Yet another woman wrote at length, exploring her emotional state:

> I cannot in words thank you for your very kind note, oh what ---- to a poor bruised hear by god bless and reward you for so great a charity… dear sir I have written to you for a word from my child who ever fills my heart with sorrow feeling I cannot ever see it for so long but how dare I murmour it is the anniversary of its birth today 10 March what I would give to see him poor little pet he little knows what a heart of love he has in his mother who lives and deprives herself of so many comforts or rather inquiries for his sake[24]

Matilda Titherly wrote occasionally and struggled with creating sensible recordings of her inquiries. Overwhelmingly her letters read more like a stream-of-consciousness diary rather than a letter asking for some concrete request for information. They tended to start

[22] Correspondence from Mothers of Children, A/FH/A/09/019/002/1-48, LMA. Marie Gümpel to John Brownlow.
[23] Correspondence from Mothers of Children, A/FH/A/09/019/007/1-632, LMA.
[24] Correspondence from Mothers of Children, A/FH/A/09/019/008 Box 2, LMA.

out well, but as she wrote her thoughts and emotions poured from her and descended into a chaotic over-sharing to Mr. Brownlow about what had happened to her.

Mothers often sent letters in December, as they worried about their children and could not get away from their jobs to visit. In a setting almost straight from a Charles Dickens story, many other women tried to go to the Christmas services at the chapel and the dinner that followed in the hopes of catching a glimpse of their child. In fact, Charles Dickens himself regularly attended the chapel at the FH at this time and even wrote about a Christmas dinner scene in his play “No Thoroughfare,” a writing that will be discussed further at the end of this chapter.

The other anniversary that was a painful reminder for mothers is the date of surrender, when the mother took the child to the FH. Likewise, modern birth mothers are warned about it: “The anniversary of birth and relinquishment can be powerful reminders of the mother’s grief.”[25] Sarah Parsons wrote about it:

> I was so longing to hear of my poor little one and have been continually thinking of him during the past week, the 18th of July being the anniversary of that most painful parting/ Your communications from time to time are most precious to me, and I thank you most heartily for them. My poor little boy is now nearly 14 months old. I should so much like to know whether he can walk yet and whether cutting his teeth occasions him much pain Do please sir tell me and I shall feel ever grateful to you.[26]

This rare note shows that this mother, at least, remembered the day she left her baby and kept it as a day worth grieving in her calendar.

Women commonly asked Brownlow for favors. They knew it broke the rules, but since they already asked for information, many mothers used the excuse to go ahead and

[25] Holli Ann Askren, and Kathleen C. Bloom, "Postadoptive Reactions,” f398.
[26] Correspondence from Mothers of Children, A/FH/A/09/019/004/1-57, LMA.

ask for more, from trivial things like if the children could walk or cut their teeth, to bigger favors like special visits or "likenesses." Any little snippets of information other than the basic report of health became what mothers hoped for: "Wether it has go all of hiss teeth for the dear child wich I am nursing as all of them dear sir is there no hope left me that can see him in any way."[27] Fanny Wickerson also asked: "would it be asking to great a favour for you to let me know if he is likely to walk yet or if he has any teeth I should so very much like to know hoping my questions will meet with no offence."[28] Alice Maplethorpe, another coorespondent, also requested information on her son cutting teeth yet.[29]

Those who asked for more risked souring their relationship with Brownlow and the hospital itself. Perhaps empowered by the warm responses Brownlow sent them, or just willing to risk a relationship for the possibility of a reward their pain and desperation drove them toward, they asked for the impossible. D.U. Warner requested a photograph of her son about a year after his admission.[30] Elizabeth Tongue wrote often, and asked too for the favor of a likeness, "if I pay for it (which of course I should do)"[31] And a third example from Emily Jenkins: "Sir will you kindly let me know how my dear child is and if you could favour me with a likeness of him it will greatly relieve my mind."[32] All three of these mothers expressed desires to see their children, and hoped the substitution of a

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[27] Correspondence from Mothers of Children, A/FH/A/09/019/004/1-57, LMA.
[28] Correspondence from Mothers of Children, A/FH/A/09/019/008 Box 2, LMA.
[29] Alice Maplethorpe to John Brownlow, letter, Correspondence from Mothers of Children, A/FH/A/09/019/011, LMA.
[30] D.U. Warner to John Brownlow, letter, April 1, 1869, Correspondence from Mothers of Children, A/FH/A/09/019/011, LMA.
[31] Elizabeth Maria Tongue to John Brownlow, letter, Correspondence from Mothers of Children, A/FH/A/09/019/008 Box 2, LMA.
[32] Correspondence from Mothers of Children, A/FH/A/09/019/010, LMA.

likeness could suffice. They all used their interpersonal relationship with the FH to try to receive favors that would quell their grief.

While the mothers experienced grief cycles of extreme emotion, nothing prepared them for death of their child in the charity's custody. Child mortality, and mortality in general, was common in England during the Industrial Revolution: illness, lack of access to medical care, lack of nutrition, and overwork led to much shorter lifespans and less healthy pregnancies. Consequently, children grew up weaker and often they died. "Mortality peaked in the middle of the eighteenth century at a very high level, with nearly two-thirds of all children — rich and poor — dying by the time of their fifth birthday."[33] The rates improved in the nineteenth century, but the guidelines established in the eighteenth-century FH reflect the rates of death they experienced and the safeguards they tried to establish to keep children alive, including changing from general admission to careful rules about morality and limiting how many children could be admitted per year, as well as requiring them to pass a health examination before admittance.

In the mid-nineteenth century, thirty percent of all children died before the age of five, regardless of if they were born wealthy or poor.[34] A lack of understanding about nutrition and illness led to deaths, regardless of a child's start in life or opportunities. As Sheetz-Nguyen found, "Up until the 1890s, the hospital, like other domiciliary institutions, struggled desperately to preserve Foundlings. An average of 33 per cent of infants and children admitted at the Foundling Hospital died between 1842 and 1867."[35]

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[33] Peter Razzell and Christine Spence, "The History of Infant, Child and Adult Mortality in London, 1550–1850" *London Journal* 32, no. 3 (2007): 288.
[34] Peter Razzell and Christine Spence, "The History of Infant, Child and Adult Mortality in London, 1550–1850" *London Journal* 32, no. 3 (2007): 288.
[35] Jessica A. Sheetz-Nguyen, *Victorian Women*, 178.

This is an improvement on mortality rates Alyssa Levine found for the eighteenth century. However, children survived more often in the hospital than juveniles in the general population. "Even so, fewer foundlings died at the Foundling than those children who remained with their parents in St George in the East, where the infant and child mortality rates ranked among the highest in the metropolis."[36] The hospital staff took careful note of mortality and tried their hardest to keep the children healthy and alive, sending them out to nurse mothers in the countryside until their fifth birthdays and having strict dietary and exercise regimens.[37] This mortality is reflected in the mothers' asking about the health of their child, with mothers regularly requesting Brownlow inform them if the child died. They wanted to know if the baby was alive or not still because the odds favored survival, but one out of every three children died in the care of the Foundling in the years of these letters.

The correspondence shows the full transition to death. The mothers were already grieving the loss of the child in a cycle of emotions like that if the child had died, and in these cases the child passed, so the finality and acceptance of never again seeing the baby was expressed. Rosa Charloner wrote regularly before her child passed.[38] Even in this case, Charloner followed the Victorian rules of letter writing: she included little personal information in her writings and, even in her acknowledgment of the child's death, she kept her tone professional and withdrawn, expressing her gratitude to the hospital and to Brownlow in a short note:

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[36] Jessica A. Sheetz-Nguyen, *Victorian Women*, 179.
[37] Jessica A. Sheetz-Nguyen, *Victorian Women*, 181.
[38] Correspondence from Mothers of Children, A/FH/A/09/019/008 Box 1, LMA.

> I feel I cannot let your letter pass without assuring you that I feel quite convinced every thing was done possible for my little girl W you was admitted the 28th of August 1865 and should have sent to enquired before but my health as been so bad never having been very well since her birth now return many thanks to you and all connected with the Institution for your great kindness to me and my child and remain Sir Yours gratefully[39]

Her response is perhaps the least emotional in the wake of such devastating news.

Others poured out their heartache and pain to Brownlow's news. Clara Mudd had a child admitted and wrote a few times, before being notified her child had died. Upon receiving notice she wrote:

> I received your letter and am Truly sorry to hear of my dear childs death and I am Thankfull to you and to others for your kindness to her which I am sure is shown to all of them it was her home that one she as never reached the age to begin life so that she as never seen any Troubles in this world so I feel sure she died happy / Sir would you be kind enough to let me know w^h ere she was buried and what name she went by please to answer me this if I had wrote at the time she was ill should I have been allowed to have seen her ^ before she died Oh I blame myself for not writing before but I could have felt happier if I had once seen her before she died but I hope to meet her in Heaven could I have seen her if she had lived to go to service [40]

Brownlow wrote a note in red at the top of the letter: "From the mother of Lucy Sanders on the first child seized with Typhoid Fever JB."[41] Coate in her heartache expressed to Brownlow her gratitude and grief and even asked if the hospital could employ her.

In what is probably the most notable case of a response to the child's death, this letter rambles on as the mother processes the news, descending into incoherence as she expressed the visceral suffering she experienced:

> I have just received ~~your~~ the bad news it is indeed most unexpected so sudden, it is like a death blow to me it was hard to haver taken from me for a time but now <u>she</u> <u>is</u> <u>gone</u> <u>for</u> <u>ever</u> I do feel it indeed Oh that I could have

[39] Correspondence from Mothers of Children, A/FH/A/09/019/010, LMA.
[40] Correspondence from Mothers of Children, A/FH/A/09/019/008 Box 1, LMA.
[41] Correspondence from Mothers of Children, A/FH/A/09/019/008 Box 1, LMA.

> seen her before she died but I must try and not regret she has left a world of sin behind I don't think I shall be long on earth now she's gone my health is going fast I am most greatful for you sir in all that has been done for my Babe but I feel had she had a mother's care she would have been here still forgive me I feel my heart will break Will you tell me where my Babe is buried in what Church yard + what county do not refuse me this small request I should like to know as I shall visit town soon. To think only one short week ago she was quite well + now she's no more I can scarsley believe but I must have dreamt it for your letter _ A stronger child was never known Do please write + tell me where she is buried what a sad fate is mine, when I shall get over this dreadful blow I can't tell. Mother is in London yet Forgive me dear sir how this is not you. Will fell for a Mother oh it is hard to bear Write by Return Any I to destroy the helper once more theanking you for all kindness to my boy Child I am sure all would be done for her as you promised me it should[42]

This letter intermittently lashed out in anger as the mother wrote out her grief and processed the news that the child she had gone to extreme lengths to preserve and save had died on another's watch. She expressed her gratitude, but also her disappointment in the hospital's inability to keep her "strong" child alive.[43] The tear stains, or simple water damage, flow over words making some of them illegible and lost to time..

Women who gave their child up to the FH knew that it could not always prevent the deaths of their babies. They put their hope and trust in the institution and the belief they had made the right choice. When the FH failed to preserve the children surrendered to it, these mothers understandably shared their heartbreak, sorrow, and regret that they had separated themselves from the child and it had still not been saved. Their grief is piercing in their letters as they expressed what they could in what probably served as the only setting they could discuss the child they had given up.

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[42] Correspondence from Mothers of Children, A/FH/A/09/019/007/1-632, LMA.
[43] Correspondence from Mothers of Children, A/FH/A/09/019/007/1-632, LMA.

In the many emotional stories shared in letters to the FH, one shares a resemblance to a famous literary work from a celebrated patron of the charity, Charles Dickens. H.A. Major wrote regarding Sybil Woodward. She originally wrote on September 25th, 1862, inquiring on behalf of Woodward's mother (the child's grandmother) and said, "the child's friends through circumstances did not like to write from the country, but now being in Town would like to hear some little account"[44] The child was admitted in 1852, so at this point was at least ten years old. Upon receiving a response, Major wrote back, thanking Brownlow for responding to her inquiries about Sybil's child and telling of her life since the child had been surrendered:

> the mother of the child is, now living in Manchester and has had 3 children since her marriage, her two first children lived to be 2 and 3 years of age, and then died. In her agony at the loss of the second, a beautiful girl, she said it was a judgment on her for deserting her firstborn; it made her unhappy but she cannot alter it, it not being known in the country since she left London 5 years ago. She has not even asked after the child.

Major revealed that the family also bore the shame of the out-of-wedlock child, being too afraid to inquire after it when they stayed home in the country, fearing a neighbor would see they corresponded with the institution. Sybil's heartache at losing her true-born children convinced her that she needed to be punished for "abandoning" her first baby, and this shows the emotional trauma she had gone through, bearing all responsibility for her situation and the choices she had made.

The letter bears a striking resemblance to a work Dickens (1812-1870), the famed Victorian author who was a contemporary of the women discussed in this study, who

[44] Correspondence from Mothers of Children, A/FH/A/09/019/007/1-632, LMA.

lived down the street from the FH, and had a pew in its chapel.[45] *No Thoroughfare*, a play (and later, novel) Dickens co-wrote with Wilkie Collins in 1867, is a case of mistaken identity that started at the London FH. Major's 1862 letter told of attending the chapel at the FH for a few years, developing a relationship with a child she had hoped was Sybil's:

> six or seven years ago attend for the first time the beautiful service at your Chaple, and looking at the little faces of the Girls, sitting in the first row, I marked out one child as I thought, most like the mother. I have attended Chaple many times since then, and have seen the gradual progress of my little favorite, when at dinner I spoke to her on one occasion and asked her name, she replied "Ellen Dyke".__ I have thought many times since, it was wrong of me to go there, and feel an affection, that may after all not be the one whose right it is. I have keept away long at a time to shake it off – longer than I ought. If I dare ask you, if my <u>judgement</u> is <u>correct</u> – pray do not answer my <u>letters</u>. If I am wrong, to send back my envelope empty – and then I will not attend any more it will be futile, I should not make any use of it, but for my own satisfaction when I attended Chaple – for no one seems to care for her but me.[46]

Similarly, *No Thoroughfare* started by describing a woman coming to dinner at the FH alone, searching for a child called "Walter Wilding."[47] The veiled woman begged the attendant tell which child is the one she seeks, and the attendant acquiesced to the desperate request.[48] She went to him:

> She lifts her veil, and, stopping at the touched boy, asks how old he is?
> 'I am twelve, ma'am,' he answers, with his bright eyes fixed on hers.
> 'Are you well and happy?'
> 'Yes, ma'am.'

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[45] Jessica A. Sheetz-Nguyen, *Victorian Women*, 159-60. Dickens mentions the FH repeatedly in his work, from *Little Dorrit* to naming the character who saves the protagonist Brownlow at the end of *Oliver Twist*. He even wrote an article about the FH in 1853 called "Received, a Blank Child."
[46] H.A. Major to John Brownlow, letter, sent from "Western Central Post Office, Holborn W C", Correspondence from Mothers of Children, A/FH/A/09/019/007/1-632, LMA.
[47] Charles Dickens and W. Collins, *No Thoroughfare* (London: Leipzig Bernhard Tauchnitz, 1868), 11-2.
[48] Charles Dickens and W. Collins, *No Thoroughfare* (London: Leipzig Bernhard Tauchnitz, 1868), 12.

> 'May you take these sweetmeats from my hand?'
> 'If you please to give them to me.'
> In stooping low for the purpose, the lady touches the boy's face with her forehead and with her hair. Then, lowering her veil again, she passes on, and passes out without looking back.[49]

This scenario which set up the plot for *No Thoroughfare* is remarkably similar to the letter from H.A. Major, who had told her story to Brownlow in 1862. Dickens may not have heard this exact story from the secretary, but he had private knowledge of the hospital's inner workings and they may have inspired his work. The famed author's attraction to the FH and stories that came from it show an interest in emotional trauma in these women's lives. Societal convention prescribed disgust and disdain for unwed mothers, yet the subject was a fixture in the literature of the time: the public could not help but be curious about their plight. This duality of societal constraint and popular culture highlighting stories of liberation is exemplified in Dickens' writings. Dickens observed the emotional trauma of the FH and found it a rich breeding ground for stories to be told.

The women who exited the hospital gates on Guilford Street empty-handed had an uphill battle to face as time went on. They knew they had made a desirable choice for their children and expressed gratitude for the charity choosing them, but the mothers' gratitude could not exclude feelings of grief at the separation. Through the collection of letters we can see their grief and pain in their own words and feel empathy for them as though they still lived today. They broke their own hearts for their children because they knew this institution could do what they could not: give their children a stable home with

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[49] Charles Dickens and W. Collins, *No Thoroughfare* (London: Leipzig Bernhard Tauchnitz, 1868), 12-3.

regular meals, an education, and a relatively comfortable childhood. While their tears have been long dry, and all who knew them are gone, their pain, grief, and anguish are still real, tangible affectations they left buried in the desperate letters they wrote. Unlike the mothers in chapter one, these women broke with social norms to make their feelings known. Their agency compelled them to give up the child, and their agency compelled them to write about how much it hurt to do so. They chose to disclose their emotional experiences and deviated from social norms and used their letters to construct for themselves a space of individual expression and thought.

CHAPTER 4 "PARDON THE BOLDNESS OF A MOTHER'S LOVE": SPECIAL RELATIONSHIPS WITH THE FOUNDLING

The mothers who demonstrated the most individual agency tended to have the best results of getting what they wanted or needed due to their persistence and careful navigation of relationships with people more powerful than themselves, as shown in the following narratives. These stories take into account everything from a woman's initial petition paperwork through all the letters she ever wrote to the Foundling Hospital (FH) and show how her life changed after the child's admission to the charity. This glimpse into several years (in most of these cases) of her life after she left the FH show how a good relationship with Brownlow could help far after the admission of the child and reveals in some ways the success rate of the FH's rehabilitation of the mothers' lives. Their letters to Brownlow are often confessional in nature: they told him anything and everything in the confidence that he could not turn them away. He served as a receiver of all the worry and strife they could not regularly speak about. While his replies do not survive, their remarks about his kindness, his sympathy, and his willingness to bend rules to help them in their strife provides some indication of how he responded. There are four main points to this chapter: charitable organizations like the Queen Charlotte's Lying-In Hospital helped mothers access agency by helping them forge personal relationships with advocates and to express their needs and concerns (agency), higher-status women wrote on behalf of unwed mothers, women who formed personal relationships and expressed their needs (which often pushed the boundaries of Victorian norms) were rewarded, and the FH helped unwed mothers get back on their feet. All these points culminate in presenting evidence of mothers' agency in their time corresponding with John Brownlow.

In choosing these specific cases, the mothers whose petition paperwork was easily found and wrote more than ten letters was the base outline for selecting those to examine thoroughly. As is said in *Love in the Time of Victoria*, “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.”[1] When trying to generalize the cases, it should be noted all were unique in their own ways and all represent a real, three-dimensional woman’s experience with unwed motherhood and surrendering a child. Through their constant correspondence, these mothers left behind a story of what their lives looked like after they made the choice to give up a child and how that individuality of thought and action shaped their world afterward. Through these vignettes of mothers’ narratives, we learn how mothers successfully exercised their agency.

The first two points of the chapter are connected: charitable organizations connected unwed mothers with advocates, and these higher-status women used their status to help mothers connect better with the FH and express their needs. Elizabeth Holmes is the only person presented here who never wrote on her own behalf. Through relationships she formed with women above her station, she gained agency through them acting on her behalf. At 26 years old, she applied to the FH. She had been a cook, working for a Mrs. Hall in Kensington, near Notting Hill. Holmes told a familiar story of abandonment in the testimony she gave to the FH. After meeting the father in the street on the way to a bakery one evening, he began courting Holmes with permission of her

[1] Françoise Barret-Ducrocq, *Love in the Time of Victoria: Sexuality, Class and Gender in Nineteenth Century London*, trans. John Howe (New York: Verso, 1991), 42.

employer.[2] "In December last he seduced me at Mrs. Hall's under a promise that he would immediately marry me – it was in my room below stairs – it was repeated twice – my pregnancy was found out in May + and I was discharged."[3] This man, Henry Martin, disappeared after a while. The FH's inquirer, James Twiddy, tracked down and interviewed his parents, however.[4] According to his mother, she had found out James had been "keeping company" with Elizabeth about a year earlier.[5] However, in the early part of the summer of 1858, he had lost his job and became "unsettled, and expressed a desire to go to Australia," so he left home in search of work to get himself there.[6] Five weeks before Twiddy inquired, the Martins had again heard from their son who told them he planned to disembark for Canada soon, where they assumed him to be. Mrs. Hall fired Holmes (a pregnant cook could not keep up with her chores) and was confined at Queen Charlotte's Lying-in Hospital, which Twiddy confirmed:[7]

Queen Charlotte's Hospital for women provided a place for unwed mothers to be confined during and after delivery.[8] As Sheetz-Nguyen found, "Of the petitioners applying to the FH, 20.8 percent relied on lying-in homes for their confinement."[9] At

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[2] Accepted Foundling Hospital Petitions, A/FH/A/08/1/2/67/1-1858, LMA.
[3] Accepted Foundling Hospital Petitions, A/FH/A/08/1/2/67/1-1858, LMA.
[4] James Twiddy was the FH's inquirer, a sort of investigator. For each petition he would go out and investigate the mothers' claims by interviewing past employers and friends and family while trying to track down the fathers and corroborate stories. His notes for each investigation are kept with the petitions of each case.
[5] Accepted Foundling Hospital Petitions, A/FH/A/08/1/2/67/1-1858, LMA.
[6] Accepted Foundling Hospital Petitions, A/FH/A/08/1/2/67/1-1858, LMA.
[7] Accepted Foundling Hospital Petitions, A/FH/A/08/1/2/67/1-1858, LMA. "Your inquirer has seen the entries in the books of the lying Queen Charlotte's Lying-In Hospital, and finds them to be corroborative of those in the form of petition, respecting the date of birth of the child, which is declared to be petitioner's first."
[8] Jessica A. Sheetz-Nguyen, *Victorian Women*, 150.
[9] Jessica A. Sheetz-Nguyen, *Victorian Women*, 151.

least fifteen corresponding foundling mothers appear on the Queen Charlotte registers. Although this situation was more desirable than giving birth in the workhouse, unwed mothers were kept separate and isolated for ten days after birth, with no visitors permitted, according to policy.[10] Staff at the Queen Charlotte Hospital referred Holmes to the FH and helped secure her a position as a wet nurse. The woman who employed her, Sophie Frankland, the wife of a doctor, wrote to the FH on Elizabeth's behalf as a testimony of her character.

> I received with her a good personal character from her former mistress whom she served in the capacity of cook during twelve months. She has now been with one a month and has conducted herself with propriety and to my perfect satisfaction, and I believe she should be a worthy recipient of the bounties of the Foundling Hospital.[11]

Frankland's testimony reveals the connection between the FH and Queen Charlotte's Lying-In Hospital: a network of sorts to help young women in desperate circumstances. Likewise, the upper-class women associated with those institutions occasionally attempted to use their influence to help the mothers in need. They found these mothers to be objects of charity over whom they could exert influence.

Frankland continued in her testimony of the petitioner, telling Twiddy she attempted first to influence the father:

> I have through her been made tolerably well acquainted with the circumstances of her present positions and have also myself written to the mother of her seducer, urging her to use her influence with the latter to assist at least pecuniary Elizabeth Holmes in supporting the child. In reply to this letter the mother states that her son has gone to America and that whilst she deeply regrets the sad occurrence her own circumstances do not permit her

[10] John R. Gillis, "Servants, Sexual Relations, and the Risks of Illegitimacy in London, 1801-1900," *Feminist Studies* 5, no. 1 (Spring, 1979): 166. (Herafter: John R. Gillis, "Servants, Sexual Relations")
[11] Accepted Foundling Hospital Petitions, A/FH/A/08/1/2/67/1-1858, LMA.

> to render any assistance, neither does she believe that her son will nor be induced to contribute anything.[12]

Frankland's order of procedure (appealing to the father, his family, and then to the FH) shows the standard practice when it came to bastardy issues. Other cases in the Foundling letters mention this practice of an employer reaching out to the father or his family to secure monetary retribution, and Frankland's letter best explains how she, as an employer, went about trying to intervene for Holmes' sake.[13] Frankland's interest in protecting Holmes confirms Gillis's finding, "Sometimes employers would confront the man, demand that he marry or, at the very least, support the child."[14] Often, employers of servants would get involved when one became pregnant if, for no other reason, to preserve the image of morality in the household.[15]

She also wrote on Elizabeth's behalf, inquiring after the child's health after it was admitted. As mentioned previously, Holmes never wrote herself, only by proxy. Twelve inquiries were sent over the next couple of years, repeatedly making the same request: "Elizabeth Holmes/ Would feel very much obliged to Mr. Brownlow if he would kindly tell her, how her baby is."[16] At least six of those inquiries match handwriting of the letter Sophie Frankland sent. Why Elizabeth stopped having inquiries sent is unknown. Both Frankland and Hall wrote letters of character about her and had only positive things to

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[12] Accepted Foundling Hospital Petitions, A/FH/A/08/1/2/67/1-1858, LMA.
[13] See petitions for Francis Mary Scott and Maria Walker for other examples of this. Accepted Foundling Hospital Petitions, A/FH/A/08/1/2/67/1-1857, LMA; Accepted Foundling Hospital Petitions, A/FH/A/08/1/2/67/1-1858, LMA.
[14] John R. Gillis, "Servants, Sexual Relations," 164.
[15] John R. Gillis, "Servants, Sexual Relations," 163.
[16] Correspondence from Mothers of Children, A/FH/A/09/019/002/1-48, LMA.

say about her conduct and propriety. Their recommendations and Holmes's stay at the Queen Charlotte's Lying-In Hospital were integral to getting her child accepted. Holmes represents several types of cases in one here: She wrote by proxy, stuck to a script, and came from a lying-in hospital. Elizabeth Holmes lacked the ability to read and write, but she had the fortune of evoking sympathy from her employers, who were literate women, into helping her once she fell into this situation. Her case reveals that expressing agency through letters was not reserved only for literate women. These higher-status women advocated on her behalf and through those relationships, Holmes was able to hear about her child. They made choices that gave her a unique relationship with the FH and therefore the ability to hear about the choice she made on her own. She, like so many other young women of this time and place, fell for the promises of a man, and paid for it. However, the FH, as well as Frankland and Hall, saw to it that she might not spend the rest of her life paying for it, and secured her child a home, as well as paved the path for her to continue working and earning in respectable homes.

This next case also comes from connections with the Queen Charlotte, as well as shows the prevalence of domestic violence in the workplace. Rebecca Murfitt wrote often to the charity; she corresponded forty-eight times with Brownlow.[17] Having had her child accepted at twenty-two, she worked hard to maintain the relationship. When she became pregnant, she was working as a servant to a greengrocer in Tottenham Court Road and the father was the shop assistant. Courtship and promises of marriage circulated, known to Murfitt's employers.[18] He assaulted her violently two months into the courtship and

[17] Accepted Foundling Hospital Petitions, A/FH/A/08/1/2/68/1-1859, LMA.
[18] Accepted Foundling Hospital Petitions, A/FH/A/08/1/2/68/1-1859, LMA.

then fled to join the Seventh Dragoon Guards and left for his post in India by the time she gave birth.[19] Murfitt was confined at Queen Charlotte's Lying-In Hospital. She worked with a family to wet-nurse after her time at Queen Charlotte's, and she won the affection of her employer, who wrote to vouch for her character. These two factors are almost certainly why Murfitt's child was accepted. In this instance, the patriarch of the family, FHN Glossop, wrote to Brownlow for the petitioner, hoping his profession may influence the response:

> I am inclined to think it is just the sort of case most likely to be benefitted by the reception of the child at the Hospital. I cannot of course vouch for the truth of the above statement but I fully believe it to be substantially correct…I have not mentioned the subject of this letter to the young woman as she is at present happy about the child which is place at nurse + as long as she receives wages as a wet nurse she can afford to pay for her own child but this will last only a few months after which her position will be a sad one. As you may not know my name I will mention that I am a county magistrate + that my only motive in making the enquiry in the hope of benefitting a person whom I think deserving of pity.[20]

Glossop expressed concern for the wet-nurse and divulged that this letter was sent before Murfitt's petition as an inquiry into whether the child fit the requirements to be admitted.[21]

She corresponded regularly for the first five years of the child's life. She stuck to a script but started including personal questions about if the child had come to London or still in the country toward the end of the correspondence. "Will you have the kindness to inform me of the health of my dear child and will you have the kindness to tell me wether she is in Town or still in the Country/ Private Leter e was admitted on the 21 day of

[19] Accepted Foundling Hospital Petitions, A/FH/A/08/1/2/68/1-1859, LMA.
[20] Accepted Foundling Hospital Petitions, A/FH/A/08/1/2/68/1-1859, LMA.
[21] Accepted Foundling Hospital Petitions, A/FH/A/08/1/2/68/1-1859, LMA.

February 1859."[22] The letters dropped off in 1866, presumably because the child moved to London and Murfitt visited her on Mondays. Her scribbled writing showed how hard she pieced together her notes in a desperate need for information. Murfitt was among the mothers who wrote the most, with forty-eight letters. Her story of being attacked by someone who promised marriage is a common one, and she is one of the few examples of someone who had the right connections to unburden herself with the child that resulted from her attacker.

Both Elizabeth Holmes's and Rebecca Murfitt's association with Queen Charlotte's led to their employ as wet-nurses and led to her finding the FH. The connection between the two charities created a network of upper-class Victorians helping unwed mothers in dire circumstances. The relationships some mothers formed with contacts at both QCH and the FH led to other, better connected women advocating on their behalf and show how these relationships and networks meant individual mothers could enjoy extraordinary relationships with the FH. By sharing their stories, women could evoke sympathy from those with more power and enabled them to work around social protocol for specialized treatment.

One mother was not associated with another charitable organization but did have a higher-status woman advocate on her behalf. Maria Gümpel presents an uncommon case: a well-trained, foreign-born unwed mother, whose skill and connection meant she worked for some of the wealthiest families present in the FH letters. This shows how much of an individual she was and how her agency led to some of the best positions in the country after her child was admitted. Gümpel, at 27, is a rare example of a foreign

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[22] Correspondence from Mothers of Children, A/FH/A/09/019/007/1-632, LMA.

woman whose child gained admission to the Foundling and how upper-class employers grappled with discovering an unwed mother in the household. The Darrochs, who employed Gümpel, went mountain climbing in Germany and left her in a hotel where a cook she had known for a while proposed marriage to her.[23] He then left for a job at a different hotel in Nice and Gümpel's employers sent her to Geneva to meet them after their mountain climbing excursion.[24] When she discovered she was pregnant, she wrote to the father and told him, and he informed her of his engagement to another woman and plans of moving to Russia.[25] She then returned to Scotland with the family in October, where she was employed until March when her condition could no longer be concealed.[26]

Her employers at the time were interviewed by the FH's enquirer and were honest and frank about what it was like to discover someone working for the household in such a socially compromised position. Gümpel's employer, Susan Darroch, told Twiddy, "She seemed very penitent – of course I thought she should have told me long before, but I believe concealment as long as possible always accompanies such a false state."[27] Darroch's anger at Gümpel for not announcing her condition sooner, and immediate condemnation of the pregnancy itself, show how morally repulsive such a breech in conduct was. Darroch was conflicted over the matter, saying Gümpel was a good dress maker and hair dresser, but also clever at lying, but if Darroch gave a poor character reference, how would the young woman get work again?[28] Darroch reasoned: "for it is

[23] Accepted Foundling Hospital Petitions, A/FH/A/08/1/2/68/1-1859, LMA.
[24] Accepted Foundling Hospital Petitions, A/FH/A/08/1/2/68/1-1859, LMA.
[25] Accepted Foundling Hospital Petitions, A/FH/A/08/1/2/68/1-1859, LMA.
[26] Accepted Foundling Hospital Petitions, A/FH/A/08/1/2/68/1-1859, LMA.
[27] Accepted Foundling Hospital Petitions, A/FH/A/08/1/2/68/1-1859, LMA.
[28] Accepted Foundling Hospital Petitions, A/FH/A/08/1/2/68/1-1859, LMA.

most difficult for a lady to know what to do in such circumstances; if she tells the truth she deprives the unfortunate erring fellow creature of the chance of getting a situation, if she does not, it is scarcely fair upon any family to admit such an inmate without being aware of her fault. But in a Public Institution this can be more easily managed."[29] This employer reveals the damning judgment the family had passed on Gümpel, dismissing her after getting pregnant under their watch. The dilemma of telling the truth of Gümpel's circumstances and hurting her chances of securing employment or concealing the truth and deceiving whoever employed her next was likely how most upper-class Victorians felt when dealing with the issue. The FH was a welcome alternative and Darroch was relieved of her conflict.[30] Because Gümpel had made this individual decision, Darroch was happy to use her relationship with her to get the child admitted, and no longer felt the moral burden of sending a woman with a child out to starve. Although she had turned a young pregnant woman who was foreign out of her house, her conscience could be clear because the child was surrendered, and a good character could be written for Gümpel's next job. The petitioner lived and worked in a foreign land and needed help, and her service came highly praised, other than this mishap. Susan Darroch stated twice she would be happy to write a glowing reference and called her ability to speak German a beneficial skill and would make anyone a great servant if she could rise above her circumstances. This shows that while women could advocate for others, it did not in anyway mean they approved of unwed mothers. In this case, the employer felt guilt and empathy for the mother's situation but was unwilling to compromise her moral

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[29] Accepted Foundling Hospital Petitions, A/FH/A/08/1/2/68/1-1859, LMA.
[30] Accepted Foundling Hospital Petitions, A/FH/A/08/1/2/68/1-1859, LMA.

disposition to do much more for her than write a few letters and hope she could get help elsewhere.

While the relationship with Darroch was noteworthy enough, Gümpel herself wrote to the hospital regularly over eight years after her child's admission. Guessing from the locations which she wrote (Brighton, Buckinghamshire, Grosvenor Square, St. James Palace, etc.), and the quality of the stationery she used, Gümpel found herself in a desirable situation. With the glowing references she received, Gümpel's language ability and experience was viewed as a positive attribute rather than a negative (in spite of her foreign status). She likely wrote so much because, based upon her addresses, she traveled around a lot and was unable to attend visiting hours. Her crisp, well-formed words on expensive (usually pink) stationary tended to follow a pattern: "Will you have the kindness and let me know, how my Child is; he was received on: the 10 Jan 1859."[31] Gümpel is a great example of a woman who had help advocating for her, and also reveals much about the mistress/employee relationship many of these mothers dealt with. The petitioners who were fortunate enough to have women of a higher status reach out to the FH meant they were able to navigate relationships that led to them getting their child admitted, and also a good line of communication about the child.

Women who formed personal relationships with the FH, primarily Brownlow, and expressed their needs had very clear expressions of agency. The behavior could push the boundaries of Victorian norms, but mothers like Louisa Bourne were emboldened to push the line by their sense of self and need. She had resided with her brother who ran the Old

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[31] Correspondence from Mothers of Children, A/FH/A/09/019/007/1-632, LMA.

Red Lion public house with his wife, a publican, and Oscar Gerzabek, who lived at the house with them for a time.[32] Bourne said in her petition that Gerzabek had worked as a correspondent or clerk, but she knew not which.[33] He promised her marriage, which her family objected to because he was a foreigner.[34] "He, however, was considered a respectable person – no impropriety of conduct was ever observed between them."[35] They corresponded by letter and he regularly repeated intentions of marriage.[36] He seduced her; within a few months she was pregnant.[37] Shortly thereafter he left for New York and she moved to her aunt's house for her confinement and gave birth there.[38] Left on her own, Bourne applied to the FH at twenty-two years old.

After her child was admitted, Bourne wrote to the FH twelve times over the next few years. In some of her final letters she repeatedly asked Brownlow if her daughter had been moved from the country yet, and in 1863 she took the uncommon step of sending a doll and asked him:

> if you have an opportunity will you please to send it to her. I have had it by me some weeks but delayed sending it thinking she would be back from the country but as she is to remain there the winter I thought she might as well have it. It has been a great pleasure to dress it for her and I hope it will amuse her… and I shall be so glad to hear about her. I do not know when you will receive the box, but I dare say one day this week my sister will call and leave it. [39]

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[32] Accepted Foundling Hospital Petitions, A/FH/A/08/1/2/66/1-1857, LMA.
[33] Accepted Foundling Hospital Petitions, A/FH/A/08/1/2/66/1-1857, LMA.
[34] Accepted Foundling Hospital Petitions, A/FH/A/08/1/2/66/1-1857, LMA.
[35] Accepted Foundling Hospital Petitions, A/FH/A/08/1/2/66/1-1857, LMA.
[36] Accepted Foundling Hospital Petitions, A/FH/A/08/1/2/66/1-1857, LMA.
[37] Accepted Foundling Hospital Petitions, A/FH/A/08/1/2/66/1-1857, LMA.
[38] Accepted Foundling Hospital Petitions, A/FH/A/08/1/2/66/1-1857, LMA.
[39] Correspondence from Mothers of Children, A/FH/A/09/019/007/1-632, LMA.

In her next letter, she asked Mr. Brownlow if the girl liked the doll, and if she were any better. Bourne wrote every other week that winter and then suddenly stopped, which may have resulted from her daughter's return from the countryside allowing Bourne to come to the weekly visiting hours.[40] Once again, it could have been because she changed jobs and could not write. Bourne's story is notable, however, in that the institution knew this child's father's status as a foreigner and it admitted the baby despite xenophobic attitudes. Possibly sympathetic views of a young woman being tricked by a foreigner curried favor, or perhaps Bourne's social standing simply allowed her to move more freely than others. Her individual choice to send gifts meant she did something hardly any other mother dared. Bourne requested exceptional allowances from Brownlow and the charity and thus bravely broke down rules and procedures. She chose to make the bold choices in her interactions with Brownlow and had an individual relationship with the charity because of it.

Another mother who formed a personal and uncommon relationship with Brownlow was Martha Foss. At thirty-three years old, she represents one of the oldest mothers to successfully petition the hospital. She came from Hitchin, a small village in northern Hertfordshire, about forty miles north of London, where she held the position of school mistress for about seven years. She entered into a relationship with a man named George Frederick Clark, who worked at his grandfather's book and shoe shop in the village. In December of 1857, he was convicted of robbery and sentenced to twelve months in prison. The authorities at the school wanted Foss to end her acquaintance with him but, when she refused, they discharged her. About a year and a half before her

[40] Correspondence from Mothers of Children, A/FH/A/09/019/007/1-632, LMA.

petition to the Foundling, she was hired by a Mrs. Newby at a registry office, and she thought Clark had gone to America. After some time, Mrs. Pohl, Clark's grandmother who lived in London, came to Foss and her employer, telling them that Clark had reappeared and wanted to see Martha, and asked Mrs. Newby's permission for the acquaintance to continue. "After some deliberation on the matter, it was agreed that informant should first see him. The Father accordingly called there, and made a plausible statement respecting his intentions towards petitioner, whom he promised to marry in a short time. Preparations were made for this event, and the wedding ring was bought. The father was permitted to visit petitioner there, and his conduct towards her, appeared to be satisfactory. At length, he suddenly disappeared, and petitioner's real condition became apparent. She left her place a few days before the birth of the child, which took place at Mrs. Pohl's, where she still remains."[41] Martha then lived with her child's paternal great grandmother and sought the assistance of the FH. In investigating the case, Twiddy wrote to George Baker, who had been treasurer of the FH before retiring and moving to Hitchen, requesting help investigating the statements made and corroborating the story. In summing up the case to Baker, Twiddy included: "At length, by subtlety, obtained from her, all her money, he seduced her, and, on the discovery of her pregnancy, deserted her; and she is now destitute. The fact of her having given birth to a child is not known by her mother residing at Hitchin, and she is anxious her mother should not be informed of it_ And she is promised by the Hospital, that her desire in the respect, shall be complied with."[42] In return, Baker procured a statement from J. Sharples, the banker of Hitchin and

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[41] Accepted Foundling Hospital Petitions, A/FH/A/08/1/2/69/1-1860, LMA.
[42]Accepted Foundling Hospital Petitions, A/FH/A/08/1/2/69/1-1860, LMA.

the school's patron, saying that Martha, indeed, had worked as a satisfactory schoolmistress until she refused to end her acquaintance with the convicted thief, Clark.[43]

Having been a schoolmistress, Martha's literacy enabled her to inquire often to the hospital. There are seventy-five of her letters in the archives, and possibly more stored elsewhere within the files. Typically, her letters came as simple notes: "Will you please tell me of my poor dear child / Your humble servant / M Foss"[44] On occasion, however, she wrote with painstaking honesty about the pain she was going through. "Will you tell me of my child I am affriad I shall weary you inquireing so often but for pitys sake attend and allow me to remain your humble servant M Foss."[45] She also commemorated anniversaries, particularly that of the child's admittance: "Will you tell me please of my dear child. It is three long years to day since you so kindly took him."[46] She tried to bend the rules, urging Brownlow to bring her son from the country at only three years instead of the usual five: "And may I also ask if it will be very long before I may see him. Forgive my impacience but I do so want to see him. My wages are due tomorrow and if you would but allow me to pay the nurses fare to London that I may see my child I would thank you more than words can tell. When I saw the little ones in Chapel today I did so wish he was among them."[47] She knew Brownlow had the power to order such a thing and knew she had a good relationship with him, and so asked him for the special favor her heart desired.

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[43] Accepted Foundling Hospital Petitions, A/FH/A/08/1/2/69/1-1860, LMA.
[44] Correspondence from Mothers of Children, A/FH/A/09/019/007/1-632, LMA.
[45] Correspondence from Mothers of Children, A/FH/A/09/019/002/1-48, LMA.
[46] Correspondence from Mothers of Children, A/FH/A/09/019/007/1-632, LMA.
[47] Correspondence from Mothers of Children, A/FH/A/09/019/007/1-632, LMA.

Foss also used some of the most emotive language found in the inquiries: “Will you please tell me of my childs welfare You kindly told me you would see him last Wednesday so will you if I am not asking to much tell me how he looks. Oh sir my heart bleeds with anguish at haveing parted with him but still I am grateful to you and the committee for taking him. /Forgive my informality and allow me to”[48] She knew she imposed quite often on the hospital for the information she wanted, and she expressed her apologies for it: “Will you please tell me of my dear child and do not be displeased at my impatience but my desire has become so intence to see my child that I cannot controwl my anxiety. Do have pity on me and tell me how soon I may see him.”[49]

Martha Foss seemed to have an exceptionally personal relationship with Brownlow. She had the freedom and ability to disclose her emotional state, as well as the ability to visit her child. Her own agency and control is apparent in her letters:

> Will you please tell me of the welfare of my dear child and permit me to thank you for the great priviledge you granted me last Monday I trusted you before but to see him in the care of such a nurse was more than I could picture. I hope I have sincerely repented my crime but I shall never cease to grieve at having brought into the world the child you have so kindly cared for I am so thankful and satisfied that I will not trouble you so often has I have done but should he die will you let me know before he is buried.”[50]

Foss acknowledged the special treatment she had been given in meeting her child individually and also speaks of her role in moving on after such an event and how the grief affected her. When she almost married a man, she confessed to Brownlow in no uncertain terms the circumstances of what happened:

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[48] Correspondence from Mothers of Children, A/FH/A/09/019/007/1-632, LMA.
[49] Correspondence from Mothers of Children, A/FH/A/09/019/007/1-632, LMA.
[50]Correspondence from Mothers of Children, A/FH/A/09/019/007/1-632, LMA.

> In the blackest dispare I remembered your promise but shame prevents my seeking an interview Yet I feel after the trouble you took to save me I ought to let you let you know the result. All I can tell is the man has proved false I have not the slightest clue to him. You will only blame me for my misplaced confidence and think if I had loved my child as I professed I should not have listened to his --- promises. But the thought of a home where I might be in years to come welcome my dear child made me blind I did not want a husband I never saught him would he had not saught me. And now if one so bad as me my please let me plead on behalf of my child that you sir will be his friend. Also will you allow me to hear of him occasionaly is all I ask.[51]

She also divulged while visiting her family in Hitchin, she had still managed to conceal from her mother her status as an unwed mother for at least three years, as this letter came dated 1863 "PS I shall be in London in three weeks' time when with your kind permission I will call at the Hospital. So please do not send to me again at Hitchin. I am so afraid my poor mother should find out my disgrace."[52] She regularly took advantage of visiting hours when her son came up from the country, and is one of the few who still wrote inquiries as well as visited, and provided commentary reflecting this: "Do please tell me if he is looking any better than when I saw him."[53] Foss actively controlled her interactions with the FH. She shared her shame in her personal life, as well as asked for exceptional help in still concealing her child from her mother. She took charge and had personal agency over her life, hiding from some while disclosing to others in honesty about what she was going through.

Moreover, Martha Foss used Brownlow for help with employment, and kept him up to date with how her interviews went. Mrs. Newby eventually employed Foss again,

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[51] Correspondence from Mothers of Children, A/FH/A/09/019/007/1-632, LMA.
[52] Correspondence from Mothers of Children, A/FH/A/09/019/007/1-632, LMA.
[53] Correspondence from Mothers of Children, A/FH/A/09/019/007/1-632, LMA.

but not before Brownlow had to intervene: "Sir I have called as has you kindly requested me at Mrs. Newbys but that lady does not think I look strong enough for her service at present."[54] Foss had no special connections or influential recommender in town, yet she cultivated an unusual relationship with Brownlow, who assisted her search for employment, wrote and visited her as often as she liked, allowed her to attend services in the chapel, and acted as her confessor without fear of being cut-off and cast out into the world. Her letters are some of the most honest, emotional, and raw writings sent by a FH mother and her story shows how much she struggled emotionally after her child's admission, but also how much the charity invested in her, cared for her, and guided her life after the committee agreed to take her case. She boldly wrote her needs and concerns and in doing so, maintained a relationship wholly unique to her circumstances. Foss's agency meant she created a personal relationship with the FH, she knew her son, she confided in Brownlow when she needed, and she had help concealing her shame from her family. Foss also shows the social disciplining role of the institution, as well as how women could use this role to their advantage: she used her connection to the FH to ask for more and to share her life. Mothers who persisted in their writing, created regular correspondences with Brownlow and in so doing, formed relationships with him that were exceptional. They were brave and asked for what they wanted in a system that normally would not allow that and were not punished for it.

Finally the FH helped mothers get back on their feet. During Brownlow's tenure as Secretary especially, the institution helped not only the children of unwed mothers but also served the needs of some mothers to help them get back to work with their

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[54] Correspondence from Mothers of Children, A/FH/A/09/019/007/1-632, LMA.

reputations renewed. Sarah Hemnell is an especially good example of this secondary mission of the charity and how mothers could use the seeming role of social discipline to their advantage. She applied to the FH at twenty-seven years old, when she needed help in 1858. Unlike most cases at the FH, Hemnell was not a servant. She had a career. Hemnell had been working at the Colney Hatch Lunatic Asylum outside London for six years, appointed first as a matron and then as an assistant.[55] She had publicly courted one of the attendants working there, Henry Maides.[56] The staff knew that they intended to get married.[57] However, Henry fell ill, so Sarah took a leave of absence to nurse him.[58] He died 18 April 1858.[59] Hemnell tried to return to her duties at the asylum, but she became so "despondent," according to Twiddy's interview of the staff, that the marshall ordered her to take another leave of absence, this time for three months, with the thought of getting a change of scenery.[60] She took a job nursing an insane man in Camden Town, and at the end of those three months, went to nurse her sister, but could not complete this because she went into labor. From the texts it seems that Sarah was unaware of her pregnancy and had the child so quickly and suddenly that no medical attendant arrived in time. Her friend, Mrs. Wilhaus, accompanied her to the hospital when Hemnell petitioned and acted as her midwife.[61] She came to the hospital and begged the staff to hold off making inquiries about her at the asylum until after she had been interviewed by the

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[55] Accepted Foundling Hospital Petitions, A/FH/A/08/1/2/67/1-1858, LMA.
[56] Accepted Foundling Hospital Petitions, A/FH/A/08/1/2/67/1-1858, LMA.
[57] Accepted Foundling Hospital Petitions, A/FH/A/08/1/2/67/1-1858, LMA.
[58] Accepted Foundling Hospital Petitions, A/FH/A/08/1/2/67/1-1858, LMA.
[59] Accepted Foundling Hospital Petitions, A/FH/A/08/1/2/67/1-1858, LMA.
[60] Accepted Foundling Hospital Petitions, A/FH/A/08/1/2/67/1-1858, LMA.
[61] Accepted Foundling Hospital Petitions, A/FH/A/08/1/2/67/1-1858, LMA.

committee and returned to work. She passed the inspection, and James Twiddy, the FH's inquirer, found only confirmation of her story and glowing reports of her work.[62] Hemnell had suffered a personal tragedy and a surprise pregnancy. She came on her own to seek help from the FH and received it. Her individuality and skilled profession made her uncommon, and after admission, she continued to give evidence of her agency in the letters she frequently wrote. While the alternative mission of the FH was to help mothers stand on their feet again and work in reputable situations, it should be noted that the rate of restoration (the child being reunited with the mother) was so low (it occurred with less than one percent of all cases), because of the incredibly high standards the FH had for mothers proving their financial ability to take the child back on.[63] The FH valued the children more than anything, so they made the process of restoration a tough one to go through for both the assurance that the child was properly reared and cared for, and to discourage women from scamming their system and temporarily leaving children with them when it became inconvenient. The FH had such limited space and such a serious admission process that restoration had to be that much more challenging because the children they took on was no light agreement; it was a serious commitment between mother and charity to ensure the safety and care of the child they both cared for.

After her child's acceptance by the Foundling, Hemnell wrote thirty-five times over the next seven years, hardly ever deviating from the same script: "You will greatly

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[62] Accepted Foundling Hospital Petitions, A/FH/A/08/1/2/67/1-1858, LMA.

[63] Ginger Frost, "'Your Mother Has Never Forgotten You': Illegitimacy, Motherhood, and The London Foundling Hospital, 1860-1930," *Annales de démographie historique* 127, no. 1 (2014): 51.

oblige the undersigned by stating the health of the Child N entered November 1st 1858".[64] Several times she asked Brownlow to seal the envelope "as so many are opened and that is not very pleasant." [65] Her address varied over time. For several years post-admission, Hemnell wrote signing her address as Hanwell Asylum.[66] She bounced between that and 22 New Road Commercial Road East, a house which is still standing in London and only a block away from the Royal London Hospital.[67] It is not certain whether Hemnell worked at the Royal London, but after her child's admission to the FH, she found employment again at Hanwell, meaning she had qualification to work as a matron at other medical facilities. It is logical to guess Hemnell could have worked at the Royal London, given her skill and proximity, as well as interest, perhaps, in moving on to a job where no one knew what had happened to her. She kept her manner very professional in all her letters, not divulging any personal information (other than her displeasure when someone read her letters), and the only way she informed Mr. Brownlow of job changes came in her address. This is not so surprising, however, given the report from the inquirer on how everyone at Colney Hatch found her to be a professional and efficient worker. It is unclear why she stopped writing to the Foundling after seven years - like so many of these mothers anything could have happened: the child is absent from the mortality registers but perhaps she married and moved, changed jobs, or, simply let go of this tether to the child she had with Henry Maides. Because the Foundling accepted her case, she

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[64] Correspondence from Mothers of Children, A/FH/A/09/019/007/1-632, LMA.
[65] Correspondence from Mothers of Children, A/FH/A/09/019/007/1-632, LMA.
[66] Correspondence from Mothers of Children, A/FH/A/09/019/007/1-632, LMA.
[67] Correspondence from Mothers of Children, A/FH/A/09/019/008 Box 2, LMA.

could move on, continue working in the mental health hospitals around London, and continue her life.

While the FH had strict rules, individual women helped create individual circumstances and exceptions, when the situation necessitated. It would be easy to plaster two-dimensional rules on most FH cases, but there were three-dimensional mothers whose lives and agency meant they needed special treatment. Margaret Hall's story is one of the most sensational cases in the FH letters. At sixteen years old, her mother brought her to the FH. This petition is much shorter than most of the FH's accepted cases, with several usual pieces absent.[68] The reason for the lack of paperwork can be found when examining the unusual case: Margaret Hall's brother impregnated her.[69] Before his death, Hall's father had been a successful surgeon in a respectable neighborhood in Leeds.[70] He died eight years before Hall's petition, and he left a wife and eight children behind.[71] Margaret was the fifth child, with four older brothers; the father of the child, Samuel, was her older brother closest in age to her.[72] Twiddy explained that Samuel had been sent to a boarding school in Yorkshire, and it was his brother's belief that this led to Samuel's decline in "moral tone" and where he learned "pernicious practices."[73] Twiddy continued, explaining what the oldest Hall brother (a surgeon like his father) had told him:

> That petitioner is of a delicate constitution. His attention was, by his mother, directed to the deranged state of petitioner's general health, in April last, he prescribed the usual medicines for removing what he considered to be, only, a temporary suspension of the natural secretions; but, failing in

[68] Accepted Foundling Hospital Petitions, A/FH/A/08/1/2/65/1-1856, LMA.
[69] Accepted Foundling Hospital Petitions, A/FH/A/08/1/2/65/1-1856, LMA.
[70] Accepted Foundling Hospital Petitions, A/FH/A/08/1/2/65/1-1856, LMA.
[71] Accepted Foundling Hospital Petitions, A/FH/A/08/1/2/65/1-1856, LMA.
[72] Accepted Foundling Hospital Petitions, A/FH/A/08/1/2/65/1-1856, LMA.
[73] Accepted Foundling Hospital Petitions, A/FH/A/08/1/2/65/1-1856, LMA.

> accomplishing this object, he was induced (still at the instigation of his mother) to examine, more closely, petitioner's condition. From certain indications, his suspicion of her pregnancy were awakened.[74]

This intimate discussion of family life, menstruation, and the realization of Margaret's pregnancy reflect how chaotic the home must have been with only a mother to care for the eight children, spread out from twenty-four years of age to ten. Margaret must have mentioned to her mother that her menstruations had stopped, not knowing what would cause that, and her mother simply assumed she was ill, and told her son, the second oldest and a surgeon like his father, to take care of her. No one had explained to the girl what intercourse led to, and she knew no better. In May, Samuel disappeared and upon questioning, Hall revealed he had intercourse with her three times:

> the first attempt upon her was made when living at their former residence, near Leeds. At this time, she was little more than 14 yrs of age – The brother-but 16, just returned from school, abounding with the corrupt notions obtained there, and coming with immediate contact with an inexperienced girl, commenced those wicked practices upon her, which had been invulcated by the current vices of his school, the baneful effects, of which, are her bitter turn. Petitioner admitted, that intercourse occurred three times. She professed her ignorance of the evil consequences that might ensue therefrom. She declared that she did not oppose the father in the first instance _ he told her, that as he was going to do her, would not hurt her _ that others did the same thing, but she was never to tell of what occurred between them..[75]

After explaining the sensational details of the case, Twiddy went on to include that Margaret's uncle and oldest brother were both in high positions at a cloth merchant's firm in Leeds and threatened the entire family with violence if the secret of the circumstances became known.[76] The neighbors believed Hall and her mother went to London because of

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[74] Accepted Foundling Hospital Petitions, A/FH/A/08/1/2/65/1-1856, LMA.
[75] Accepted Foundling Hospital Petitions, A/FH/A/08/1/2/65/1-1856, LMA.
[76] Accepted Foundling Hospital Petitions, A/FH/A/08/1/2/65/1-1856, LMA.

her mother's health, not the scandalous pregnancy.[77] Based on this account alone, the hospital admitted the child, a girl, and the petitioner went to work, securing a position as a prison matron.

Life in prison disagreed with her, as she went on to tell Brownlow time and time again. She wrote inquiries to the hospital thirty-five times over the next fourteen years, usually around Christmas. Her long letters often included details about her life in the prisons where she worked. "We are going on much as usual down her certainly no better if anything worse. I never saw such a bad lot of prisoners we have at this present time to deal with its most true."[78] She hated her job, especially when her post changed. In her correspondence she worked in three different facilities. After six years she pleaded with Brownlow to find her something else:

> your previous kindness to me has induced me to take this liberty by being thus candid the position I hold here is a very trying one + I thought + hoped you might perhaps be able to help me to get something a little less ardous I suppose you could not give me a situation were you are I should be very grateful if you could you could have a Refference of nearly 6 years + I would be glad to take much less money then I am now doing if I could ensure a comfortable home the life here mixed with the class I am in is more revolting every day A matron of a Workhouse or any light place of trust If you could assist me I should feel most Grateful + I promise you you shall never have cause to regret as far as my conduct is concerned I am sadly afraid I shall not be able to keep on here much longer I must again thank you for all your great kindness to me[79]

She failed to get her wish and remained working in prisons to the end of her correspondence.

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[77] Accepted Foundling Hospital Petitions, A/FH/A/08/1/2/65/1-1856, LMA.
[78] Correspondence from Mothers of Children, A/FH/A/09/019/007/1-632, LMA.
[79] Correspondence from Mothers of Children, A/FH/A/09/019/011, LMA.

Her time at boarding school shaped how she wrote her letters: always starting with the location and the day, commenting on the weather, asking after Brownlow's health as well as commenting on her own. Occasionally she misspelled words, and her distinctive, sharp handwriting is easily recognized against the soft curves of the other letters. Almost morbidly, she eventually requested that Brownlow only refer to the child as her niece in his writings, as did she, in case she mislaid a letter or someone misdelivered a reply and one of her coworkers opened it.[80] Technically, Margaret was not wrong, as the child was the daughter of her brother, and she passed the blame to her brother for the child's existence.

Repeatedly, Hall tried to secure a way to see her child, but inevitably failed every time, saving up for a while, and then falling ill or having a death in the family, or the prison going on lockdown when she was due for leave. For what she implied in the letters, it looks as though Brownlow tried to accommodate the child visiting her where she was posted, but it never came to fruition. She explained fully the situation while she was working at a prison in Surrey:

> I have been waiting + hoping that some favourable opportunity may turn up that she may be able to come down here or me come but not the slightest shadow of a chance of either do I see after waiting so long the case is just this I see no chance of have her down here with the least safety In the first place I know no one were she can go + in the next place this a little gossiping place one of the worst of the worst + it would of course be who is she + as I could not answer the question straight forward doubt would naturally arise so under those circumstances there is no chance in that regard... I must reluctantly resign the hope for the present but still hope for the future[81]

[80] Correspondence from Mothers of Children, A/FH/A/09/019/011, LMA.
[81] Correspondence from Mothers of Children, A/FH/A/09/019/011, LMA.

Margaret may have worked for the prison, and was compensated for her time, but from her letters it looks as though she felt she became as locked away as the prisoners she worked with. She could not freely visit the daughter she had given up, the terrible secret that weighed on her, and it pained her deeply that she was cut off and cast out from the world. She had only been sixteen at the time of her daughter's admission, and she mentioned once her romantic life: "Then again sir in all probability I shall now never marry I never told or even hinted the unfortunate circumstance to but one + he spurned me as though I were worse then a serpent + I have never forgotten it."[82] Her prediction proved false, however. In her last letter to the FH, dated by the secretary's office to be from 1871, she wrote to inform Brownlow that she had married a prison officer and had settled into life as a wife.[83] "I am striving to do my duty in this station of life feeling it's the one God has been pleased to call me again," she ended the letter.[84] Having spent such a long time working in a prison, clearly she felt she had done her time and had been deemed favorable again. She also included that she had told her new husband all the details of the circumstances of her daughter, and that "all through the piece I felt it such a consolation to feel I had nothing untold that I ought to tell oh what a Good consolation a clear conscience is."[85]

Margaret Hall's story indeed proved an arduous one. Impregnated by her brother, working nearly fifteen years in a prison position she hated, she ended with a marriage she hoped would be a good one. But much like those beloved English novels, her story

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[82] Correspondence from Mothers of Children, A/FH/A/09/019/011, LMA.
[83] Correspondence from Mothers of Children, A/FH/A/09/019/012, LMA.
[84] Correspondence from Mothers of Children, A/FH/A/09/019/012, LMA.
[85] Correspondence from Mothers of Children, A/FH/A/09/019/012, LMA.

dropped off there. Hall started her journey as an FH mother as a passive participant in the circumstances of her child's admission. She let her family and the administrators take charge while she told the truth of how she became pregnant and let the others handle what they would do. As she aged, she found her voice. She wrote to Brownlow more often and she not only recorded her own stories, she began to ask for more and more in her relationship to her child. Hall saw her opportunity to try to exercise some level of control over her life and she took it. Her commentary as a prison matron is interesting, but the circumstances which brought her to the FH in the first place are what make the case so important. An upper-class family came to the institution in a hushed-up and hastened affair to conceal the truth of Hall's transgressions rather than to admit and repent for them, and the hospital acquiesced to this bending of the rules. After, Hall began to realize and process what had happened to her and reached out for emotional catharsis and personal help from someone she knew had power and could use that power to help her better her circumstances. Brownlow corresponded with her on a personal level (from the evidence of Hall's letters) and went so far as to try to arrange for the daughter to visit. Everything about Hall's case was exceptional, and none of it would have been possible if not for her social status and the agency she found as she grew up.

This small sample of stories reflects the treasure trove of lives preserved in the letters to the FH. All these women led special lives. These vignettes reveal how the FH helped unwed mothers get back on their feet, how the women were rewarded for forming personal relationships and expressing their needs, how charitable organizations like Queen Charlotte's Hospital helped mothers access agency by helping them forge personal relationships with advocates and to express their needs and concerns, and how higher-

status women who wrote on behalf of the unwed mothers were motivated for various reasons. They had control over some aspects of their lives and they actively participated in making choices and recording the outcomes of that agency. Their stories tell us about the mothers, as they lived and felt and worked through the trauma of separation, and as they moved up from their fall from grace. Their words survived, and they matter because they get to tell the mothers' stories in their own words. Their narratives are the beginning of the stories mothers left in the archives of the FH.

CONCLUSION

Over the last four chapters, this project has aimed to show the value of the letters from mothers the Foundling Hospital's Archives contains. Their stories come from over one hundred years in the past, and they reach out and share their pain and sorrow today. The mothers who had their babies accepted into the Foundling Hospital (FH) in nineteenth-century London had to prove themselves truly worthy of the institution's charity: through raw confession of sexual activity and withstanding a rough examination of their character. They had to be moral, upstanding women who could find people like employers and clergy to speak on their behalf, and to give testimony to their character and circumstances. Most of all, the women in this project showed they had to possess agency: the capacity for individual choice and action in Victorian England despite social values and norms inimical to those of the unwed mothers' interests. These were not passive bystanders allowing life and circumstances to wash over them. They exercised judgement, participation, and action in their letters; they chose to reach out, to decide to share about themselves, and judged Brownlow a trustworthy source of information and comfort. Mothers who wrote to the FH chose not to ignore, forget, or conceal their out-of-wedlock babies. They allowed it to be part of themselves and their identities and in that space created narrative identities of their existence and pain, preserved for observation and study today in the words they wrote.

Current historiographical trends agree: agency is an essential component of women's and gender history. Most writings stem from understandings of Michel Foucault's theories on identity, Joan Scott's "Gender: A Useful Category of Historical

Analysis," and the consciousness-raising models of the 1970's.[1] These models define agency as the ability to govern one's choices and regulate will reflectively, without any mention of how relationships and society play roles in one's agency.[2] This has changed and now agency is understood to be how much power an individual had over their lives in conjunction with the restraints society placed on them. Over time discussions of agency have moved to the extent of an individual's power over their own life in conjunction with the restraints society place on them, which presents a paradox of sorts. In the case of the FH mothers, it was the institution that placed constraints on them while, at the same time, provided the avenue for agency. Women, as recent research has shown, constantly and consistently subverted these social norms to meet their needs. They worked within the cracks of the systems they were placed in and in the blind spots they carved out modicums of control over their lives. In the rise of searching for the histories of the marginalized, microhistories revealing the agency of women in oppressed situations are written frequently, be it Victorian women in Britain, or women living in India, or the Middle East today. These research projects are growing because of the availability of material full of stories to tell, long forgotten in the corners of a dusty archive or hidden in plain sight, unexamined and untold. This project falls in line exactly with that trend. And while it may seem unnecessary to tell microhistory after microhistory, as a corpus of knowledge they teach us how women have been subverting patriarchal oppression for

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[1] Nida Bikman and Victoria Krumholtz, "The Importance of Knowing Your History: Perceiving Past Women as Less Agentic than Contemporary Women Predicts Impaired Quantitative Performance." *Sex Roles: A Journal of Research*, 79, no. 11-12 (Dec 2018): 622.

[2] Hilde Lindemann Nelson, *Damaged Identities, Narrative Repair* (Ithaca, NY: Cornell University Press, 2001), 23. (Hereafter: Hilde Lindemann Nelson, *Damaged Identities*)

thousands of years. Common knowledge leads to the misconception that Victorian women of the working class had little to no agency. The women of this study show this to be false. Scholarship holds that agency is down to individual action and not conforming to what was socially expected or accepted of them. The FH had specific rules and regulations for the mothers of admitted children, and the women shown here pushed the boundaries of those rules, and regardless of the success of their requests, they still pushed back against a system designed to contain them.

Foundational feminist history texts like those of Hilde Lindemann Nelson and Nancy Hartsock show what these present theories of agency have to do with the women of the FH. Nelson wrote about how self-narration was a form of agency: "The narrative agent who *constructs*, rather than reads, stories to enhance her own and others' perception of herself requires no particular narrative or normative expertise, nor need she strike up an acquaintance with any literary critics."[3] Nelson's work shows how any woman could be agentic if they could simply tell about themselves, which the mothers at the FH accomplished. They wrote out their thoughts, emotions, and needs and in so doing, created identities for themselves and claimed control over how they were perceived. Unlike philosophers before her, Nelson held that to be an agentic narrator, a person must not be an avid reader or highly educated. "While novels may be among the imaginative resources she draws on when creating a counterstory, the success of a counterstory doesn't depend on reading the right kind of fiction…inventing good counterstories requires only ordinary amounts of narrative and normative competence,

[3]Hilde Lindemann Nelson, *Damaged Identities*, 66.

and these may be exercised by even minimally educated people."[4] Not all the FH mothers were well educated, but they could tell their stories and in that act, claim agency over how they were perceived.

Nancy Hartsock's work also established basic foundations about what agency is in gender historiographies. In her 1985 book, *Money, Sex, and Power: Toward a Feminist Historical Materialism*, Hartsock explains how power is not about exerting control over others, but unifying. "We can begin to see some of the outlines of an understanding of power which stresses both its dimensions of competence, ability, and creativity and does not lose sight of the importance of effective action in the world, action at least in part defined by its sensuality and its variety of connections and relations with others in the community."[5] Through connections, women gain power and agency. When working together, women are no longer isolated units to be oppressed, but individuals woven together into a community of friends and familial connection.[6] Through their relations with friends, family, employers, and even John Brownlow, the mothers of the FH worked to get the things they wanted and, in those moments, gained power and control. Through their interpersonal relationships, even mothers who were illiterate were able to convey their desires and needs and have them answered.

The contribution of this study lies in its source material: the FH letters. This collection of over three thousand manuscripts of women inquiring about their children

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[4] Hilde Lindemann Nelson, *Damaged Identities* , 66.
[5] Nancy Harstock, *Money, Sex, and Power: Toward a Feminist Historical Materialism* (Boston: Northeastern University Press, 1985), 258.
[6] Nancy Harstock, *Money, Sex, and Power: Toward a Feminist Historical Materialism* (Boston: Northeastern University Press, 1985), 258.

preserved the agentic voices of women dead for over a century. These mothers get to tell their own story. They contribute not only to our understandings of Foundling Hospital scholarship, but also understandings of life for women in Victorian London, working class-women, emotional cycles of women after voluntarily surrendering a child, survivors of sexual assault in the nineteenth century, networks of charitable institutions in London, and day-to-day narratives of working life. Women comment and write for years of their lives, giving larger snapshots of themselves than most studies can hope for. Documentable evidence of mothers actively seeking control and exhibiting agency in such a scope is an exciting aspect of this project and contributes to perceptions of nineteenth-century women and how much control they had in life.

In terms of the London FH's historiography, this research picks up where Sheetz-Nguyen's *Victorian Women* left off. While scholars like Sheetz-Nguyen and Frost touched on the letters sent by mothers, this project looks at the whole scope of them. It expands the knowledge of the tribulations the unwed mothers faced, and attempts to synthesize complete narrative stories for mothers, from the moment they set foot on the hospital grounds, to the last words they sent, to show insight into their lives larger than previously crafted before.

Building on the work of Anna Clark's theory of female networks, this project also shows the connection between the London Foundling Hospital and the Queen Charlotte's Lying-In Hospital and how women who met each other through the QCL would connect and go to the FH for assistance as needed. Unlike Victoria Grimaldi's conclusions in "Single, Unwed, and Pregnant in Victorian London: Narratives of Working-Class Agency and Negotiation," this thesis shows that these letters are a trustworthy account of the

mothers' thoughts and feelings. Grimaldi thought the mothers were actors, pretending or overexaggerating their pain and penitence to get their children admitted, but these letters show that pain after the successful admission.[7] In one-on-one conversations with John Brownlow, these women were honest, because it was one of the few opportunities they had to recount in complete truth their emotional state. Rather than look at the mothers at victims once again, this project aims to show that even though they were young women who had gotten pregnant, these cases show they actively made choices, expressed truthfully their emotions, self-narrated their stories, utilized interpersonal connections to get what they needed, and in doing all of this, proved themselves agentic participants in their lives.

Working-class Victorians rarely had any part of their lives recorded or written down, but these women made the time to write about themselves and that in it of itself is rare. Women who lived and worked for their living in the second half of the nineteenth century recorded and sent out details of their personal lives as well as their emotional states, and they were deemed worthy of saving, first by John Brownlow for record keeping, and then by the Metropolitan Archives as part of the FH's overall collection of documents. They were preserved and kept and protected, deemed precious to humanity, or some small part of it. That is exceedingly rare, and rarer still to be stored all together in one place. The revelations of women working and processing their separation from their children are rich and valuable pieces to add to current understandings of social history. Stereotype dictates that Victorian women were not in control of very much of anything in

[7] Virginia L. Grimaldi, "Single, Unwed, and Pregnant in Victorian London: Narratives of Working Class Agency and Negotiation," *Madison Historical Review* 14, Article 3 (2017): 18.

their life, but this collection of letters says differently. From their own mouths, the Foundling Mothers tell of the control they have, over their jobs, over their out-of-wedlock children, and over their emotions.

The mothers who wrote to the FH were exceptional by all perceptions of Victorian society. In giving up the children they had not planned on, these women figured out who they were and gained a sense of self. In reaching out, they created a personal narrative of their lives and recorded their emotional needs. Despite the rigid complexities of nineteenth-century British society, these women overcame the shame of premarital sex, the ostracization that accompanied unwed motherhood, and the social protocols against emotional expression. Based on the richness of almost each case found in this collection, perceptions and understandings of Victorian women must be reevaluated. The FH mothers found agency through their interpersonal relationships and letters and were enabled to tell their stories in their own words and those words live on.

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