



CONCEPCIÓN

Arenal

Concepción Arenal Ponte

Prison activist and pioneering feminist. Defender of disadvantaged persons

Ferrol, 1820 - Vigo, 1893

It is practically impossible to condense the enormous social and intellectual efforts of Concepción Arenal in just a few lines. The number of works she published and the range of topics covered trouble any attempt to summarise her biography and legacy. This great nineteenth-century thinker devoted many of her works to criminal law and prison improvement, but she also wrote on sociology, pedagogy and science, and the common thread in all her writings was her concern for excluded persons and the social improvement of women.

Concepción Arenal was born the same year as the 'Pronunciamiento de Riego' which started the Liberal Triennium and the restoration of the Constitution of Cádiz, and she died under the government of Mateo Sagasta, who was curiously the director of *La Iberia*, the newspaper where both Concepción Arenal and her husband Fernando García Carrasco published numerous articles. The following figures reveal the tumultuous historical period in which Concepción Arenal lived: 5 different constitutions, 3 Carlist wars, the proclamation of the First Spanish Republic, the reign of 6 different monarchs and countless governments of all political stripes.

Given her aversion to revealing personal information ('I don't want my life to overshadow my work', Arenal said), we shall focus on several relevant aspects of her facet as a jurist. In 1863 and 1865, she was a prison inspector, which enabled her to learn about the situation of the imprisoned population *in situ*. The first edition of her *Cartas a los delincuentes* (Letter to Criminals) was published in 1865, but days later she was suddenly stripped of her job. However, that did not prove to be an impediment to Concepción Arenal continuing her struggle to improve prisons, and in 1867 she published *El reo, el pueblo y el verdugo o la ejecución pública de la pena de muerte*.

After the 1868 Revolution, she was once again appointed Inspector of Women's Correctional Centres, a job she held until 1873. In parallel, in 1870 she founded the biweekly magazine *La Voz de la Caridad*, in which she wrote around 500 articles which often contained condemnations of situations she viewed as unjust. With her elaborate reports, she participated in Penitentiary Congresses in Stockholm, Rome, Saint Petersburg and Antwerp and garnered extraordinary international recognition. Arenal died in 1893 before she was able to see the Spanish version of her last work, *El visitador del preso*, published.

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