



# HEROINE OUT OF FOCUS:

## *media images of Florence Nightingale*

### PART I: POPULAR BIOGRAPHIES AND STAGE PRODUCTIONS

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*Florence Nightingale (1820-1910).  
Courtesy of the History of Nursing Collection,  
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**T**he legend of Florence Nightingale (1820-1910), the reclusive Victorian reformer known primarily as the founder of modern nursing, continues to exercise a powerful hold on the popular imagination 12 decades after her retirement from public life.

The legend recalls a series of specific images, all of which originated during her 21-month mission in the Crimea, 1854-1856. These images include visions of a

slender, graceful lady walking through miles of darkened wards full of wounded soldiers, carrying a lantern to dispel the gloom; soldiers kissing her shadow as she passes by; Florence easing pain by her gentle manner, transforming morbid, filthy barracks into a clean hospital; and championing the cause of the British soldier in the guise of his beloved, determined Lady-in-Chief. During her lifetime, these images reverberated in hundreds of songs and poems, depicting her as an angel incarnate. Since her death, biographers have sought to discover the woman behind the legend, while dramatists have mined both the legend and the revelations of Nightingale's real life story for material to entertain and to inspire audiences throughout the world.

The combination of legend and biography found in dramatizations of Nightingale's life creates a fascinating problem for Nightingale scholars. Her role in establishing

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*Part II of this article, focusing on film, radio, and television presentations of Florence Nightingale, will be published next month.*

the first training school for professional nurses and her work in improving the value of well-educated nurses are well documented and universally recognized. Yet, the continuous popularization of Nightingale's image in artistic productions has also made a contribution to nursing by renewing and reinforcing the public's association of Florence Nightingale with all that is deemed important in the nursing profession. The treatment of Florence Nightingale as a dramatic persona, comprising elements of legend, of history, and of the playwright's craft, demands attention from those interested in the current evaluation of nursing's popular image, especially upon realization of just how many dramatizations of Nightingale's life have been undertaken. Between 1915 and 1965, 10 separate productions—two stage plays, three films, and five radio and television plays—have made Florence Nightingale the most dramatized woman in history (see Table 1). Each of these productions has drawn to some extent upon the historic record of Nightingale's life. Not surprisingly, the Nightingale biographers, by emphasizing certain events and character traits, have helped to shape the way in which playwrights have drawn their characterizations.

### The Contribution of Biography to Dramatic Fiction

Three English biographers dominate the field of Nightingale's history, which includes scores of popular and usually sentimental books. All the known dramatic treatments of Nightingale's life have been based upon the research and interpretations offered in these three works. In 1914, Sir Edward Cook wrote a two-volume study entitled *The Life of Florence Nightingale*; Lytton Strachey included a biographical sketch of her in his *Eminent Victorians* (1918), which also featured Cardinal

Manning, Dr. Thomas Arnold, and General Charles Gordon; and in 1951, Cecil Woodham-Smith published *Florence Nightingale: 1820-1910* [1-3]. None of these studies is a scholarly, properly documented biography, and it might be noted here that Nightingale's life and career cry out for professional evaluation. Cook's work, intimidating in its length and often excessive quotation, remains the closest approximation of a definitive, authoritative biography of Nightingale. Strachey's effort, popular for its style and brevity, offers only a summarization of Cook's narrative, with a distinctive interpretation of Nightingale's personality. Woodham-Smith claims to have written an original study, but her product appears more a reworking of Cook's familiar territory, with yet another view of Nightingale's character brought forward.

All three biographers agree in their appreciation of Nightingale's achievement, but divergent and often troublesome views of her personality and her relations with other people distinguish these biographers from each other. Perhaps because the challenge of comprehending the vast range and depth of Nightingale's work remains so difficult, biographers since Cook have concentrated upon refinements—or what they considered refinements—in explaining her motives and manners. Most troublesome of all have been attempts to explain Nightingale-the-woman in the masculine world of politics and war. The concern with personality instead of accomplishments and the problem of addressing Nightingale's feminine identity infect dramatic productions and often obscure any understanding of Nightingale's historic significance. Cook devoted more effort than the others to cataloging and describing the various projects undertaken by Nightingale: nursing reform, military organization, hospital and barracks construction, workhouse reform, sanitary and military reform in India, all facets of public sanitation, and the articula-

Table 1. Dramatizations of the Life of Florence Nightingale

Title	Author/Director	Date	Medium	Length	Source	Actress
<i>Florence Nightingale</i>	Maurice Elvey	1915	Film	35 min.	Cook	Elizabeth Risdon
<i>Florence Nightingale</i>	Edith Gittings Reid	1922	Stage	3 Acts	Cook	[unidentified]
<i>The Lady with a Lamp</i>	Reginald Berkeley	1929	Stage	4 Acts	Strachey*	Edith Evans
<i>The White Angel</i>	William Dieterle	1936	Film	90 min.	Strachey	Kay Francis
"Lady with a Lamp" on Helen Hayes Theatre	Thirol Higley	1941	Radio (CBS)	30 min.	Berkeley	Helen Hayes
"Lady of the Lamp" on Favorite Story	Jerome Lawrence; R.E. Lee	c. 1946	Radio (syndicated)	30 min.	Berkeley*	Edna Best
"Life of Florence Nightingale" on Hallmark Playhouse	[unidentified]	1950	Radio (CBS)	30 min.	Cook Berkeley Strachey*	Irene Dunne Anna Neagle
<i>The Lady with a Lamp</i>	Herbert Wilcox	1952	Film	110 min.	Strachey*	[unidentified]
"Angel of the Crimea" on Your Story Hour	[unidentified]	n.d.	Radio (syndicated)	30 min.	Strachey*	[unidentified]
"The Holy Terror" on Hallmark Hall of Fame	James Lee	1965	Television (NBC)	90 min.	Woodham-Smith*	Julie Harris

\*Source material unidentified by author/director, but presumed based on content and interpretation.



tion of a new religious ethos—to name the most prominent. But even Cook was daunted at the prospect of evaluating and placing her work in the context of other significant Victorian reform efforts.

Sir Edward Cook, a journalist and biographer, undertook the official biography at the request of Nightingale's heirs. Although he had access to many, if not all, of his subject's private papers, he wrote under either express or implied constraints to exclude information that might embarrass Nightingale's surviving family and friends. For example, he never identified Miss Nightingale's most serious romantic attachment (Richard Monckton Milnes), although he discussed the romance—and Miss Nightingale's final decision to remain single—with all the attention and seriousness due this important episode. In light of subsequent revelations, it appears that Cook underplayed the harshness of feeling between Miss Nightingale and her mother and sister. He never denied the friction that existed among the women, but took care to emphasize the positive features of both Mrs. Nightingale and Parthenope and to prove that Florence never lost her basic regard and concern for her family's welfare, despite their physical separation.

Cook's fear of giving offense may have softened certain rough edges of the truth, but does not appear to have misrepresented Nightingale altogether. Cook recognized that Nightingale could be demanding and often intolerant of the weaknesses of others, but he placed these faults in the context of her frantic efforts to bring about complicated reforms. In addition, Cook continually reminded his reader that harsh remarks found in private notes and intimate correspondence had no counterpart in Nightingale's conversation; those who knew Nightingale personally never failed to mention her charm and unflinching attention to her guests' comfort. Cook's Nightingale may have ranted and raved in letters to close associates, but in person she treated even her opponents with all the politeness one would expect from a woman raised in Victorian high society. Furthermore, Cook presented Nightingale's enemies as human beings acting, for the most part, out of honestly held opinions, and her allies as intelligent, talented, strong individuals in their own right, who willingly sacrificed much of their private time to assist her work. Cook always gave credit to Florence's allies for their role in her successes and never exaggerated the achievements of his most accomplished subject.

Cook's Nightingale was a woman who combined "intense feeling" with profound "intellectual grasp" of the problems that she sought to solve. He recounted much evidence of Florence's natural sympathy for the down-trodden, her inspirational service among the wounded at Scutari, and even the prophetic episodes of her childhood, such as bandaging dolls and pets. Yet, Cook never fell victim to a sentimentalization of Nightingale's work. Rather, he consistently cited her extraordinary mental powers and self-discipline, summarizing her peculiar combination of gifts as follows:

The greatness of Miss Nightingale's character, and the secret of her life's work, consist in the union of

qualities not often found in the same man or woman. She was not a sentimentalist; yet she was possessed by an infinite compassion . . . she had an equal measure of cleverness and charm. She had a pungent wit but also a loving heart . . . masterful in action, she was humble, even to the verge of morbid abasements, in thought. She was at once Positive and Mystic [4].

Cook accepted that his subject did not fit into easy categories; she exhibited many seemingly contradictory impulses and prejudices. She worked with the energy of a megalomaniac, yet never concerned herself with personal reward and never sought an official outlet for her natural leadership. She inspired her allies with such devotion that they worked for her to the detriment of their own health, but she rarely thanked them or complimented their efforts. Her religious beliefs motivated her, but her beliefs were unorthodox, composed of bits and pieces from different sects as well as original observations, making her spiritual life important to her but difficult for others to understand. Nightingale's particular talents lay in the prosaic field of administration and systematization, yet her fame emerged from an unanticipated misunderstanding of the nature of her achievement, which resulted in the creation of a sentimental heroine.

It would be impossible to overestimate the impact of Cook's study on later biographers or dramatists of Nightingale's life. To be sure, few others attempted to present Cook's broad, balanced, judicious portrait of Florence Nightingale; however, everyone ever involved in presenting Nightingale's story has plundered Cook for pertinent quotations and for the chronological outline of Nightingale's life and work. Cook's account of her life served as the direct source for three dramatic accounts: the 1915 silent film starring Elizabeth Risdon, an obscure play written in 1922 by Edith Gittings-Reid, and a 30-minute radio dramatization produced in 1950 for *Hallmark Playhouse*. Since Cook was the primary source of Lytton Strachey's essay on Florence Nightingale, perhaps the most influential interpretation of Nightingale's character, Cook can take credit for yet other dramatizations based on Strachey.

Lytton Strachey, a well-known English literary figure of the first part of the twentieth century, professed a distaste for Victorian sentiment. He began his sketch of Nightingale's life in *Eminent Victorians*:

Everyone knows the popular conception of Florence Nightingale. The saintly, self-sacrificing woman, the delicate maiden of high degree who threw aside the pleasure of a life of ease to succour the afflicted, the Lady with the Lamp, gliding through the horrors of the hospital at Scutari, and consecrating with the radiance of her goodness the dying soldier's couch—the vision is familiar to all. But the truth was different [5].

The truth, according to Strachey, was that "a Demon possessed her." Strachey found demons more interesting than legendary angels, albeit less agreeable, and proceeded to recount the most important episodes in her life, ever-faithful to Cook's narrative. However, at important episodes in Nightingale's life, Strachey offered an

unconventional depiction of her personality. Without ever detracting from her enormous achievement, Strachey insinuated the dark side of her character, emphasizing her growing lack of consideration for others, which began to appear during her tenure in the Crimea. He insisted that, during her most active phase, she bullied and drove both friends and enemies into doing her bidding, without any regard for their personal problems or weaknesses. Strachey placed the blame for Sidney Herbert's death squarely upon Miss Nightingale's unfeeling use of him.

On the one hand, Strachey showed the darker side of Nightingale's nature; on the other, he unnecessarily exaggerated the nature of her achievement [6]. Although he relied on Cook's narrative to supply the facts, Strachey's editing and reinterpretation of these facts produced significant changes in the tone of the Nightingale story. For example, Strachey, as if to heighten Nightingale's power and determination, would have his reader believe that she superimposed her will over the medical authorities of the Crimea and that she had an adversarial relationship with the medical officers. As Cook's more detailed account proved, Nightingale continued, throughout her tenure in the Crimea, to be sensitive to the authority of the medical officers and, in fact, often praised their efforts amidst appalling conditions.

The Strachey essay has the unmistakable advantage over Cook of brevity and a more vibrant style. Not surprisingly, Strachey's contribution to the dramatic persona of Florence Nightingale has exceeded that of Sir Edward. Strachey provided two elements that have proven useful to playwrights: first, he distilled the most dramatic and visual episodes of Nightingale's life into a short narrative and, second, he simplified Nightingale's complex personality into the vivid, single-minded posture of a fierce crusader. Although only one property cited Strachey as its source, his influence can be identified in several other productions. William Dieterle's 1936 film, *The White Angel*, with appropriate citation, relied on Strachey for the suggestion of episodes to be included; indeed, the screenwriter appears to have lifted his plot directly from the essay. Dieterle, however, did not make use of Strachey's more controversial interpretation of Nightingale's personality. Reginald Berkeley, who wrote a stage play in 1929, *The Lady with a Lamp*, did utilize the Strachey interpretation of Nightingale's character (without citing his debt), but he invented his own scenario.

The most recent important biography of Nightingale has been Cecil Woodham-Smith's *Florence Nightingale*, which came out in 1951, too late to influence most dramatizations except for James Lee's teleplay, "The Holy Terror," produced for *Hallmark Hall of Fame* in 1965. (Woodham-Smith sold the film rights to her book to an American producer, who planned to star Katherine Cornell in the lead; the project never came to fruition [7].) Woodham-Smith's study of Florence Nightingale has become the accepted standard, but it has not escaped serious criticism by professional historians [8]. Woodham-Smith suggested that she reviewed all the primary source material on Nightingale's life—a formidable task; perhaps she did, but her work reflected

enormous reliance on Cook for the organization of material and the selection of pertinent documents for quotation. Far more damning, Woodham-Smith appeared to exercise too little care in transposing direct quotations, occasionally so altering a given source as to change the meaning entirely. Too, she often ignored documentary evidence readily available to her—either in Cook or other sources—that contradicted her conclusions. Notably, she painted Nightingale's opponents as totally benighted souls who acted out of venal or base motivation.

As far as her subject's personality is concerned, Woodham-Smith interpreted Nightingale's written notes and letters as if they were indicative of her spoken word, thus presenting Florence as a short-tempered, arrogant woman. The relationship depicted among the Nightingale women—Fanny, Parthenope, and Florence—should trouble anyone who has read Cook. Fanny and Parthe's objections to Florence's work have long been known; in Woodham-Smith's version, Fanny and Parthenope acted out of selfish disregard for Florence's feelings and did all they could to thwart her every move. Perhaps Cook did gloss over many family problems, but Woodham-Smith's correction seems to have gone too far in presenting Fanny and Parthe as insipid and selfish. Woodham-Smith never acknowledged the great aid rendered Florence by her mother and sister throughout her life, from assisting her Crimean venture from their London residence to providing fresh food and flowers for her personal comfort. Furthermore, Woodham-Smith, while citing numerous examples of Florence's disgust and antipathy for her mother and sister, ignored equally numerous records of her love and concern for them throughout her life.

In this general harshening of our understanding of Nightingale's life, as presented by Woodham-Smith, there did emerge some documentary support for Strachey's earlier views of Nightingale as something of a tyrant, not a little intolerant of others. However, while citing convincing examples of Florence's relentless disregard of Sidney Herbert's health and her constant push for action, Woodham-Smith chose not to include letters in which Miss Nightingale expressed deep concern for her friend's health and happiness. In the same respect, Woodham-Smith documented countless examples of Florence's unfeeling use of her family and friends: Arthur Clough, Dr. Sutherland, Aunt Mai, Cousin Harriet, Uncle Sam, and the Bracebridges all served Florence in some respect or another, with few words of thanks. Yet Nightingale held no powerful lever to require their service, and Woodham-Smith never addressed the fact that these friends worked for Florence because they wanted to and found satisfaction in serving even so ungrateful a taskmaster. Woodham-Smith's Florence was a woman with a wide circle of acquaintances but with few true friends. This view of Florence emphasized the "hard coldness of steel" that lay beneath the surface of Nightingale's personality and chilled her relationships with others.

Furthermore, Woodham-Smith introduced puzzling suggestions about Florence's romantic life. Her relationship with Richard Monckton Milnes received no sustained analysis, and Woodham-Smith described Florence as be-



ing "unmoved" by Milnes' attention and, at the same time, as dreaming of being married to him. Throughout the narrative, Woodham-Smith referred to Florence's infatuation with other women; it is difficult to interpret this aspect of Nightingale's personality because Woodham-Smith quoted Florence's effusive language—the language of Victorian friendship—yet never informed her reader whether or not she was implying an improper or excessive intimacy between Florence and her female friends. This reliance upon direct quotation, taken out of context and left uninterpreted, characterizes much of Woodham-Smith's approach to biography.

In addition to the narrative structure of Nightingale's life, these three biographers have provided the material for two opposing Nightingale personas: Florence, the intelligent, masterful, soft-spoken lady, and Florence, the intolerant and tyrannical woman. The Florence Nightingale of written biography has never been translated directly into a dramatic work. The requirements of dramatic construction, the personal insights of individual playwrights, and the constraints and scope of different entertainment media have created hybridizations of biographical revelation with an artist's viewpoint. Each of the dramatic media—stage, film, radio, and television—involves different production values that help shape the way in which a subject is treated. In order to group these dramatizations according to their medium and thus gain an understanding of the strengths and limitations of the medium itself, a strict chronological approach must be sacrificed.

### Stage Productions of Nightingale's Life

The evanescent nature of live drama necessarily increases the importance of the playwright's contribution; after the last curtain has fallen, only the written word, the script, remains as a concrete indication of what the play was about. The limitations of the theatre stage, in terms of the variety and realism of settings, forces the audience to rely heavily on the dialogue in order to understand what the play is about. While no less visual a medium than film or television, the theatre stage cannot dictate, as the camera can, where viewers will focus their attention. Only the actors' interpretation of the given dialogue can command or lose this attention. Thus, the playwright's thematic intentions, contained in the dialogue, can often be grasped more completely by theatre audiences in the immediacy of a live performance than in film or television, where a playwright's theme is lost or diffused in confusing camera work or flashy backgrounds.

The two stage plays written about Florence Nightingale offer distinctive views of the Nightingale persona, and each play reveals the well-defined purpose of its author. Discrepancies between the Nightingale legend and Sir Edward Cook's account of Nightingale prompted Edith Gittings Reid to publish a three-act play entitled *Florence Nightingale*, which attempts to dramatize the often humorous gap between legend and reality [9]. This play, which came out in 1922, is the only drama published by Reid, an American writer known primarily for magazine articles and short biographies. Little is known of its production history; it never made it to the New York

stage even though the published script was reviewed in the *New York Times Book Review*, but may well have been used by amateur theatrical groups. In truth, Reid's drama fails many of the tests of good theatre. Very little conflict exists, either within the main character or between Florence and her family and associates. Nor do any of the characters develop in the course of the play. The result of this failure in dramatic technique has left us with a static and improbably sanguine view of Nightingale and her work. As biography, the play also lacks substance, and the playwright admitted that she took considerable poetic license in order to reduce Nightingale's life and work to manageable proportions. Many of the aberrations from historic fact seem quite pointless, and the entire play distorts the audience's appreciation of Florence's extremely difficult labor.

Trivial deviations from accuracy, such as referring to Parthenope as Lady Verney before her marriage and having Sidney Herbert make a trip to the Crimea, do little harm but add nothing to our understanding of Florence and her milieu. Far more serious is Reid's inability to demonstrate the nature of the opposition to Nightingale's reforms. At home, the Nightingale family fusses over Florence's preference for nursing over marriage, but no real sense emerges of the social conventions restraining Florence. At Scutari, the military officers, doctors, and ambassadors scoff at the notion of a female nurse before Florence's arrival, but their hesitations dissipate almost immediately upon meeting her. Finally, back home in England, the opposition to Nightingale's plans for far-reaching military reforms is never identified; that the struggle cost Sidney Herbert's life indicates its difficulty, but the audience never realizes from watching this play the kind of political and bureaucratic tangle that Nightingale fought.

If Reid could not construct a good play, she did have an ear for dialogue and managed to evoke Florence's wit and the practical, dedicated nature so ably established by Sir Edward. In addition, Reid demonstrated, perhaps more thoroughly than much better playwrights, the contrast between the highbrow rhetoric of the Nightingale legend and the language of a down-to-earth heroine. Many of the supporting characters offer fanciful and romantic imagery of Miss Nightingale's work, but the heroine always deflates these notions and emphasizes the true, practical nature of her efforts.

Horton, the family butler, consistently articulates the popular adoration of Miss Nightingale held by the lower classes. Even Florence's mother tends to exaggerate her daughter's goals: "Florence has a vision of a woman's love flowing over those red fields of the wounded," to which Florence laughs, "Mama, mama! My vision is of soap and splints and food and sheets—clean sheets." Sidney Herbert waxed poetic, too: "Florence is our hope—standing alone in her full equipment, a lady of lineage . . . with mental and physical vigor, and . . . a driving will." "Yes, yes, all very pretty," says Florence, "but we cannot waste time on words now."

Reid's Nightingale manages people very well; she uses charm, wit, and enthusiasm to sway others to her point of view. As noted above, Florence's quick conquest of the officers at the barracks hospital diminished the au-

dience's perception of her difficulties. However, her manner with the officers—deference to their medical authority and a good-natured challenge to their established routines—does reflect the way in which Florence often worked and accomplished her goals.

Perhaps most interesting of the views put forward by Reid is her understanding of the nature of Nightingale's nursing endeavor in the Crimea. Florence insists to Sidney Herbert that she have unquestioned control over the nurses because "We must make this very critical experiment of women nurses on a small scale at first." When Herbert disregards her instructions and brings out another group of nurses without her request, she laments the position he has put her in:

I have toiled my way into the confidence of the medical men by keeping my hand on every nurse; to have 47 untrained women scampering about means disaster. Every nerve has been strained to reform shocking abuses. We are making a delicate experiment. . . .

Thus, Florence realizes that her mission is more than a work of charity; it is her opportunity to prove by controlled experiment that properly organized and disciplined women could make excellent military nurses. Florence, as a nurse, is also a scientist who understands the nature of experimentation—a rare insight into the foundation of modern nursing.

Reid's *Nightingale* also shows the loving warmth for which she became famous: she cradles the head of a dying boy and clips a little of his hair to send to his mother. Yet, the overall impression of Reid's *Nightingale* is that of an enthusiastic and efficient organizer who disdains pointless sentiment, although she knows how to use it to her advantage. She answers letters from a rich admirer who writes a series of sentimental poems in her honor because she realizes that a flutter of her angelic wings will induce a contribution of funds for her new hospital project.

Without ever tarnishing the legend, Mrs. Reid made her audience aware of the legend's limitations. The next playwright to tackle the Nightingale story set about to topple the legend entirely. In 1929, Reginald Berkeley's *The Lady with a Lamp* opened in London, starring Edith Evans as Florence Nightingale [10]. Well-received in England, the play traveled to New York for a Broadway run in 1931, again with Evans in the starring role [11]. This play represents the first important dramatic treatment of Nightingale's life to receive sustained popular and critical attention. As a playwright, Berkeley surpassed Reid in most respects: the play established a variety of conflicts emanating from within and without the central character, and developed Florence through four acts, changing her in response to her experiences. Although he did not make an attribution in his production notes, Berkeley built his image of Florence Nightingale on the suggestions made about the heroine's darker side in Strachey's essay. Berkeley, however, created his own explanation for Nightingale's character transformations: a thwarted desire for romantic and domestic fulfillment results in Florence's turning to work and to sarcasm for relief. In Berkeley's hands, Florence speaks in demanding



Act II, Scene 2 — Barracks hospital, Scutari, Turkey, in Reginald Berkeley's 1929 *The Lady with a Lamp* featured Dame Edith Evans, as Florence Nightingale, giving orders to purveyors of the hospital. Despite the play's title, the emphasis in this play remains on Florence the administrator and discounts her role in rendering direct nursing care to the sick.

and intolerant tones and reveals an acidity and bitterness not even suggested in Strachey. Edith Evans, one of the most accomplished actresses of the English stage, did imbue the character with dignity and strength, yet she could not overcome the discrepancy between Florence's supposed romantic inclinations and her iron-willed obstinacy—the flowery language spoken by Florence in love simply did not fit the rest of her characterization.

Florence's relationships with men in the Berkeley play all suffer from ambivalence, as if the playwright could not understand a woman dealing with men without romantic or sexual tensions, yet was determined to so present his heroine. He did this by turning Florence Nightingale into an insensitive and sharp-tongued shrew who bullies the men around her. Perhaps most telling of Berkeley's viewpoint is his handling of the Scutari episode (in Act II, Scene 2). Although he entitled his play *The Lady with a Lamp*, it was an intentional misnomer, as his dramatization never includes a scene of Florence tenderly minis-



tering and monitoring her patients through the night. Aside from the brief scene of Henry Tremayne—an alias for Florence's true love—dying in her arms, there are no other scenes of Florence actually delivering nursing care. Offering comfort is made to appear atypical of Nightingale's role; her real job lies in purveying the hospital and overseeing the personnel of the hospital. Her handling of Bamford, the recalcitrant purveyor, exemplifies Berkeley's Florence in the Crimea. Miss Nightingale (with some justification, no doubt) bullies and blackmails the purveyor into doing her bidding; by threatening to have him fired, she finally wins his grudging cooperation. From Bamford, she turns her attention to a nurse who has inadvertently provided information for an article in the *Times* on the doctors' failures. The nurse, frightened and penitent, begs to stay, but Florence insists upon a dismissal. The dismissal itself can be comprehended, but Florence's abrupt, unfeeling handling of it cannot; she orders the nurse to leave, without even a word of thanks for the work she has already done. Although the historic Florence was strict, demanding, and tenacious in pursuing her goals, she was also aware that gentle words and charm had their place. Berkeley does present to the audience Nightingale's formidable obstacles and her iron will, but he renders her unlikeable in the process.

Florence's relationship with Henry Tremayne (the alias for Richard Monckton Milnes) is perhaps the weakest point in the entire play, for it undermines the audience's understanding of Nightingale's ability to make a decision and remain true to it. The love scene in the first act features Florence and her suitor talking of their emotions through the dubious intermediary of a fountain; their conversation reveals that Florence is tempted by the joys of domestic happiness and yet able to resist. So far, the play reflects what we suspect to have transpired between Florence and her last, most ardent suitor—despite the unbelievable dialogue. Berkeley, however, does not allow Florence's refusal of this marriage proposal to be indicative of a mature, fully decided mind. In an unrealistic and unhistorical scene in the barracks hospital, Florence is reunited, albeit briefly, with her love and promises to go away with him forever. Tremayne's timely death saves Berkeley from having Florence change her mind yet again, but it introduces a false note in the audience's perception of Florence Nightingale's commitment to her life of service and work.

Even Florence's friendship with Sidney Herbert includes unhistoric and unflattering images of the heroine. Berkeley invents a long-simmering conflict between Florence and Elizabeth Herbert over their respective roles in a somewhat hapless Lord Herbert's life. Not only does Berkeley's Florence drive poor Sidney to his death, without a shred of sympathy for the man's efforts, as suggested by Strachey, but Berkeley also squares off Florence against Liz, reflecting poorly on both women. Florence emerges as a condescending, demanding woman who resents Liz's natural concern for her husband's well being; she patronizes Liz's jealousy: "Liz dear, I'm really very, very sorry for you. It must be awful to be unable to dissociate men from the seraglio." Liz, for her part, appears a vicious and petty woman, unable to compete with Florence intellectually so that she accuses her

of base emotions. Berkeley's last transformation of Florence from a frustrated, bitter virago into a benign old lady sinking into senility also follows Strachey's suggestions. Berkeley uses Florence's prolonged old age and gradual debilitation as a sort of punishment for her sins of intolerance. In one of the last scenes between Liz and Florence, many years after Sidney's death, Liz warns Florence that the Lord might have his own plans for her. Florence clarifies the threat: "Do you mean one might live on and on—unable to work and unable to die?" Liz agrees that it might be her "purgatory. Which we must all endure."

To fulfill this prophecy, Florence does live on and on, unable even to fully comprehend the honors done to her throughout the world. In the finale, unable to do more than sit in her chair, Florence is surrounded by dignitaries from around the world gathered to recite the litany of her achievements and to shower her with tributes. In an alternative ending, the playwright revealed his own purpose more clearly. Florence, lying in her bed a few hours before her death, is tended by two nurses. The older nurse represents the popular attitude toward the legendary heroine: "She's a saint." The younger nurse perhaps voices the author's own opinion: "Saint! Oh, I know these saints. They're usually sinners who've gone soft on it . . . I don't believe in making idols of people. They've got their faults like you and me. Why not be frank about it?" The older nurse simply responds, "I never heard anyone say before that Florence Nightingale had a fault."

Today's dramatist has never had a better opportunity to present Florence Nightingale to the public than now, as most women and men are less sexist, more politically aware, and willing to comprehend the complex character of Miss Nightingale and her world. With a large potential audience with interest in successful female role models, nurses and playwrights have an excellent opportunity to refocus public attention on one of the great heroines of civilization.

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