

HEROINE OUT OF FOCUS:

*media images of
Florence
Nightingale*

PART II:
FILM, RADIO,
AND
TELEVISION
DRAMATIZATIONS

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Film, radio, and television dramatizations of Florence Nightingale's life are particularly important in projecting a leading nurse's image to the public because they dramatize her actions within her social world and provide a role modeling effect that can be very useful in acquiring support for the nursing profession. Such productions do not "mirror" reality, but create an impression of reality. Like other forms of artistic and cultural expression, they blend fact and fiction, history and

myth. This process is the result of both conscious design on the part of actors, directors, and producers and their unconscious integration and reproduction of cultural paradigms. Through representations of Miss Nightingale, these productions have conveyed implicit theories, beliefs, criticisms, and legitimations of the nursing profession's founder. Ideas about Nightingale arising in one generation are thus transformed and, in turn, exert an influence on public perceptions within a changed historical setting. These forms of cultural expression provide resources of meaning about nursing that should be reinterpreted and adapted to new circumstances.

Florence Nightingale has inspired three feature film versions of her life — a remarkable record for a medium that rarely delves into full-scale biography. Given the

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ability of filmmakers to create realistic, powerful, and lasting images, it is not surprising that, of all the dramatizations of Nightingale's life, the motion picture versions offer the best and most complete narratives. The first cinematic biography, entitled *Florence Nightingale*, appeared in 1915, just five years after Miss Nightingale's death, making it the first dramatization in any form [1]. This four-reel, silent feature was produced in England and starred Elizabeth Risdon in the title role; promotional material declared it "biographical rather than dramatic" in nature[2]. Based on Sir Edward Cook's recently published biography, the film presented Nightingale's life in a series of scenes, beginning with her birth in Italy in 1820 and ending with Florence as an old lady. This film, unfortunately lost to modern viewers, remains the only dramatic effort to have attempted such a comprehensive review of Nightingale's life. Yet, though the filmmaker emphasized the educational rather than entertainment aspect of the work, we must hesitate over considering it a true documentary, as all the scenes were necessarily recreations of episodes suggested by Cook. Furthermore, those assigned the job of selling the film capitalized upon Nightingale's wartime activities and her role as inspiration for the Red Cross in order to increase the film's relevance in the early years of World War I. In fact, the film may have served to encourage young women to volunteer their services to the British Red Cross. The film emphasized the development of Florence's charitable nature and presented only highlights of her life of concern for others. A still photograph from the film shows Nightingale raising her hand, warning a group of dissolute soldiers and women to cease their revels. In all, the film clearly kept intact the Nightingale legend; Risdon's Florence, whose remarks had to be confined to periodic titles, necessarily emerged as a two-dimensional, legendary character, despite the reliance on Cook for narrative detail.

In 1936, Hollywood produced its version of Florence Nightingale's life, *The White Angel*, and legend, embellished by cinematic technique, dominated the approach to Nightingale's life [3]. Full-scale film biographies have been rare in American film history, but during the 1930s, Warner Brothers enjoyed success with the depiction of such famous men as Louis Pasteur and Emile Zola, both produced and directed by William Dieterle. Dieterle's approach was, above all, inspirational: the deeds of great men and women would be recounted in exultation of the human spirit. Despite this frankly hagiographic approach, Dieterle insisted upon historic veracity. For *The White Angel*, somewhat ironically, Dieterle's scenarist drew upon Strachey's essay, literally following it line for line in search of episodes to film. However, none of Strachey's "demonic frenzy" touched Kay Francis' interpretation of the role of Florence Nightingale.

Set design, costuming, lighting — all the artifice of



Elizabeth Risdon played Florence Nightingale in the first dramatization: a silent film version, 1915, entitled *Florence Nightingale*. In this still, Florence postures as a moral crusader, warning soldiers and camp followers to cease their revels. A caption subtitled the film, "Founder of the Red Cross," although Nightingale did not found the Red Cross, in popular imagination she was closely associated with it.

the film industry — contributed to a realistically portrayed story. The medium of film, by its ability to present broad vistas and facial close-ups, and to rely on clever editing, can often suggest much more than dialogue confined to the restrictions of a proscenium arch. Both Reid and Berkeley cited the disrepute of nurses in England at the time that Florence took up her work, but Dieterle could show the contrast between the drunken, dirty, undisciplined women who worked in the hospital and the clean hospital world envisioned by Nightingale — without a spoken word. So too, the scenes of hundreds of men, realistically bandaged and scattered about the huge sets, conveyed more of Nightingale's challenge at the barracks hospital than playwrights could ever attempt. The visual power of film in such efforts as *The White Angel* overcame many flaws in other respects. One critic noted that the film was rather episodic in nature and not truly compelling. The most serious flaw in the film appeared to be the casting selection of Kay Francis.

Kay Francis' popularity — at its height in 1936 — rested upon her portrayal of well-dressed, big-city sophisticates. The role of Florence Nightingale called for greater range and more nuance than Miss Francis possessed. She did her best to demonstrate righteous indignation at needless suffering and to affect a noble, tranquil mien at other times. An unfortunate lisp and American accent did not help. The fact that the film ends at Miss Nightingale's return from the Crimea did aid Miss Francis' interpretation, as the demands of portraying a middle-aged invalid might have destroyed all credibility. As it was, Miss Francis appeared as a pretty, enthusiastic, and likeable Florence Nightingale; if she did not do justice to the role, she did not disgrace herself.

As noted earlier, Dieterle paid close attention to the historic record; nevertheless, certain deviations from it and the structure of the film itself did affect the au-

dience's perceptions of Miss Nightingale's efforts. For example, in *The White Angel*, Florence profits from an alliance with her father, who is depicted as a reform-minded, active man who supports his daughter's efforts to free herself from her mother's social world. Although the real William Nightingale did not offer the resistance that his wife did, he also did not help Florence to achieve her goals; he simply retired from the fight into a world of books and hobbies. Thus, Dieterle downplayed the family conflict, letting Florence remain a good and appreciated daughter to at least one of her parents and at the same time diminishing the struggle that she put up to achieve her independence. In addition, the film ends with Florence's return from the Crimea, when she receives the gratitude of both the common people and her sovereign, Victoria. The finale, where Florence recites her oath (a blatant anachronism, since the oath was written by an American many years after Florence's meeting with Victoria) and is overheard by Victoria and Albert, suggests that, as easily as the Queen and Prince Consort were won to Nightingale's cause, so, too, would be others. Thus, the film ends on an unrealistic note of triumph, failing to recognize that Nightingale's life work really began only after her return from the Crimea and that she faced enormous opposition. By ending the film at this point, too, Dieterle avoided having to depict Florence and her controversial relationship with Sidney Herbert — controversial with regard to her demands on him that contributed to his death. The Florence envisioned by Dieterle would be forever young and pretty and popular.



William Dieterle's 1936 film, *The White Angel*, offered a reverential, sentimental portrayal of Miss Nightingale as a pretty, noble, popular young heroine of the people. This photograph captures the spotless, refined, even aristocratic demeanor offered by actress Kay Francis. The film ended with Miss Nightingale's return from the Crimea, saving Miss Francis from the problem of portraying an aging invalid; Dieterle's Nightingale would be forever young and sympathetic.

The personal virtues and qualities exhibited by Dieterle's Nightingale included the standard treasure-trove of womanly virtues as well as the not-so-common attributes of a determined reformer. As the title implies, Florence has no earthly faults, and others respond to her goodness with acts of devotion: soldiers kiss her shadow as she passes by with her lantern; crowds in London cry during her sickness and cheer her recovery; good-hearted men and women all recognize her value and follow her lead. Florence also acts the surrogate mother for thousands of soldiers. She writes their distant mothers to tell of dying moments. She visits their graves. She comforts their last hours, and she nurses them with gentle touches and a soothing voice. Of course, the energy and hard work required to turn a filthy barracks into a clean hospital are shown, but Florence remains ever soft, gentle, and modest. She can lead her nurses to storm the supply office for needed blankets, and she can put her case to the military authorities in noble words, but she never seems less than womanly and never abuses her moral authority. Dieterle's Florence exerts enormous self-discipline over her own emotions and a tight control over her own chosen nurses. Scene after scene depicts her boundless energy and constant attention to all matters, trivial and transcendent. Finally, she shows the mental and physical toughness that carried her through her ordeals.

In sum, Dieterle's *White Angel* presents a loving, reverential view of the founder of the nursing profession. Dieterle clearly meant to associate her with nursing above all, and the precipitate end of the film, as noted, emphasizes this with her recitation of the anachronistic but effective oath. Although the film follows the facts of Nightingale's life with great fidelity, it does not introduce any of the biographers' controversies into the narrative. Dieterle did not seek to enlighten or shock or even stimulate his viewers into re-examining their assumptions. He did mean to appeal to preconceived notions of Miss Nightingale, acquired through the prominence of her legend, and to support the legendary figure of Florence Nightingale with a factually accurate narrative of her life. For all Dieterle's sentimentality and Kay Francis' limitations as an actress, the film remains an important component of the regeneration of the Nightingale legend. And Dieterle succeeded in showing Nightingale's significance: the extent to which one dedicated person can make a difference in human history.

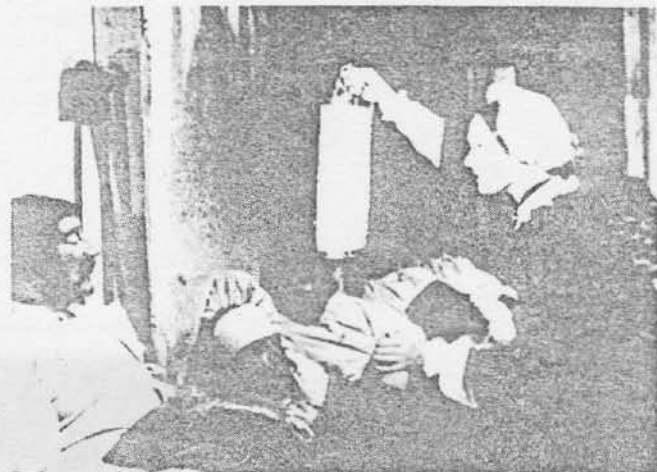
Hollywood has not seen fit to try to surpass the Dieterle film, but in 1952, English producer-director Herbert Wilcox and his wife, actress Anna Neagle, undertook a new, full-scale screen biography. The Wilcoxes came to the project with a great deal of success and experience in filming authentic and artistically moving film biographies. They had already done two films about Queen Victoria, the story of Edith Cavell, the story of British aviatrix Amy Johnson, and the story

of Odette, a French resistance fighter. A biography of Florence Nightingale seemed inevitable. The film, *The Lady with the Lamp*, makes no original observations about Florence Nightingale but does render her story with loving attention to period detail; it manages to project something of the aura that must have surrounded Nightingale [4]. Anna Neagle, although a little too old for the part, conveys the inner strength that carried Miss Nightingale through so many ordeals. In every respect, Miss Neagle surpasses Kay Francis in the role; Miss Francis simply could not suggest the complexity and depth of character that Anna Neagle manages simply by her posture and tone of voice.

The Wilcox production enjoyed the distinct advantage of being able to shoot much of the film on location at sites actually figuring in Nightingale's life — such as Lea Hurst, Embley, and Palmerston's old estate. The film credits Reginald Berkeley's play as its source but, in fact, there is little of Berkeley's actual scenario or theme included in this screen version. The unrealistic Berkeley romance between Florence and Henry Tremayne is mercifully excluded; the film does name Richard Monckton Milnes, at last, as Florence's suitor, but allows him to fade with dignity into Florence's background after her refusal of his proposal. In addition, the embittered relationship between Florence and Lady Herbert found in the Berkeley play enjoys no reprise. The film does follow Berkeley's general organization: a four-part division of her life into pre-Crimean life, her mission in the Crimea, her active life in England before Herbert's death, and old age. Finally, Neagle's interpretation of the role never hints at the acidic, truculent Florence of Berkeley's play. Although the Wilcox-Neagle Florence can be tenacious, even single-minded, in pursuit of some reform or improvement, she remains ever diplomatic and soft-spoken.

This film, unlike Berkeley, includes scenes emphasizing Nightingale's own role as a nurse in the Crimea. In addition to her supervisory responsibilities and her concern with finding supplies, several scenes depict Miss Nightingale at work among the patients. She comforts the dying moments of a soldier who used to be a gardener at her home, Embley; she speaks to the soldiers individually, calling them by their names.

Neagle's Florence Nightingale remains intensely feminine throughout her life. The viewer can sense that Florence feels the same attractions and passions as other women and that her sympathies can be aroused quite easily for the misfortunes of others. Yet Neagle's interpretation demonstrates this intensely sympathetic woman as keeping a firm — not necessarily tight or inhibiting — control over her own emotions so as to allow her masterful intellect to concentrate upon solving problems. Florence's relationship with Sidney Herbert is quite aptly developed. This Herbert is no weakling driven by Nightingale; he shares her interests in full measure. The viewer can see Herbert growing weaker



Producer Herbert Wilcox and his wife, actress Anna Neagle, created the most authentic dramatization of Nightingale's life to date, in their 1952 film, *The Lady with a Lamp*. This photo illustrates the accuracy of both settings and props — the lamp is a replica of Miss Nightingale's — which characterized the film, as well as the depiction of Florence involved in direct nursing care.

and less able to withstand the pressures imposed upon him in his efforts to persuade fellow members of Parliament of the need for War Office reforms; the viewer can also see that Florence simply does not understand Herbert's intensive work in Parliament and thus might forgive her apparent lack of concern for his health. She herself remains an invalid and continues her work — snugly tucked up in her comfortable hotel; she can't see why others cannot overcome physical ailments as she does. However, her grief at Herbert's death leaves no doubt in the viewer's mind that she cared deeply about Herbert and does, herself, accept part of the blame for his death. The final scenes of the film faithfully capture the true context of her last years. Younger men from the government drive to her home on South Street to deliver her Order of Merit. The older of the two recounts Nightingale's lifelong work, noting "how little those know about her who only know the lamp." While a secretary displays many of Nightingale's writings to the gentlemen, the elderly Florence, upstairs in a rocking chair, lives on, only partly in touch with the world around her.

In sum, the Wilcox-Neagle version of the life of Florence Nightingale remains the best dramatization. Interestingly, some of the disagreement apparent in historical accounts of Nightingale's personality affected critical reactions to the film. *Variety*, not one known for its literary reviews, criticized the Wilcox production because "Neagle plays the character in the legendary style of a determined yet gentle woman, rather than as the flaming personality she was" [5]. Apparently the Lytton Strachey version of Nightingale's demonic frenzies has been accepted as the gospel. A *New York Times* article on the film noted that, in London, two important dailies differed markedly over the film; one praised it, while one did not, claiming that "it was no more than 'the old fiction of the Victorian Lady Boun-

tiful calling with the soup" [6]. The *New Statesman and Nation* also commented that portraying Florence Nightingale as "a lady in the best sense of the word" was "outdated" [7]. Cecil Woodham-Smith's biography, appearing at about the same time as the film's release, added to the sense that the Wilcox version was too sympathetic and sentimental; it was not what the reading public had come to expect from a "realistic" treatment of Florence Nightingale.

Radio and Television Plays About Florence Nightingale

With one exception, radio and television plays about Nightingale have been superficial and unoriginal accounts of her work in the Crimea. Radio especially has treated Nightingale biography with little creativity, relying upon noted celebrities to compensate for poorly written scripts. All the radio plays were limited to 30 minutes in length; given this short format, little of depth could be attempted. In addition, many of the radio treatments attempted to make Nightingale more appealing to audiences by casting her in the mold of a romantic and tragic heroine, disappointed in love. The only exception to these short and superficial broadcasts has been a single television play, the last and in many ways most original dramatization of Nightingale's life story. Unfortunately, this television play, which reached millions of American viewers, offered a controversial and unfounded interpretation of Nightingale's character.

During the 1940s, American radio producers made at least four 30-minute stories of Nightingale's life. Two of the radio plays, "The Lady with a Lamp" on *The Helen Hayes Theatre* (CBS, 1941) and "Lady of the Lamp" for *Favorite Story* (syndicated, 1948), were reworkings of the 1929 play by Berkeley, with much of the abrasiveness removed [8,9]. The Helen Hayes version was much superior to the later effort, which starred

Edna Best. Both of these productions emphasized the romantic relationship, ending in tragedy, that affected Nightingale's life. In the Helen Hayes version, more faithful to Berkeley's scenario, the heroine is shown at various stages of her life, and the audience is given the full spectrum of Nightingale's life work, ending in 1907 with her receipt of the Order of Merit, when all of her accomplishments are recited. Helen Hayes' Florence Nightingale reveals none of the acerbic wit or bitterness evident in Berkeley's play. Although the episodes taking place during the Crimean War do feature Nightingale in conflict with the obstreperous Bamford, the purveyor, threatening him with dismissal, Miss Hayes' voice always conveys gentleness and determination, and never viciousness or acidity. One presumes that the producers of this version sought to make Nightingale more sympathetic to popular audiences by emphasizing the romantic angle while ignoring Berkeley's corollary of a frustrated Florence covering her romantic disappointments in work and irony. As if to make Florence's love of Henry Tremayne more paramount to her story, no mention is made of Sidney Herbert in the entire play. Thus, the complicated and somewhat incomprehensible nature of her relationship to a married man, who became her most intimate friend during his lifetime, never mars the audience's perception of Florence as a romantic and somewhat tragic heroine.

The *Favorite Story* version produced a weaker and less sympathetic Florence Nightingale. The love story between Florence and her suitor, Mark (another alias for Milnes), figures prominently in the first few minutes of the story, recounting her rejection of his proposal. At her acceptance of the mission to the Crimea, she announces her preparations and determination even as she confesses her terror — something no other Florence Nightingale ever did. At Scutari, Edna Best's Florence wrangles with recalcitrant purveyors, and on one occasion appeals to a lieutenant for help, in a voice full of feminine distress. When Mark appears as a patient in her ward, she reacts with the same frantic desire to cure him as seen in all of Berkeley's adaptations, but this version proceeds with a peculiar twist. When a medical officer offers to send Mark home on the quickest ship out of Turkey, she refuses, insisting that she cannot ask special favors for Mark. Soon thereafter she, too, falls ill and is sent home to England. Waiting for Mark's ship to arrive in England, Florence begins to cry when she learns of his death aboard ship. Also, she breaks into tears during her audience with Victoria and Albert. In all, Florence's persona in this version emphasizes a certain feminine weakness and inconstancy, as if Florence could not be loved if she appeared strong and able to control her emotions.

An interesting dramatization on *Hallmark Playhouse* (CBS, 1950) featured Irene Dunne in a 30-minute story based directly on Cook [10]. Not surprisingly, the episode is told mostly in the form of letters written by



PHOTO COURTESY OF MBS

The story of Florence Nightingale entered American homes by way of several radio productions of the Nightingale biography, most dating from the 1940s. In these short plays, the character of Miss Nightingale emerged as a rather commonplace romantic heroine who turned to work after the death of her beloved. Shown here is Edna Best.

Florence (found in Cook) and read by Irene Dunne. The story emphasizes Florence as a nurse first and foremost, and really mentions nothing of her other concerns and projects. The early part of the story consists of a letter from Florence to her father, written during her period of study in Kaiserwerth. She announces her intention of establishing a Training School for Nurses when she returns, and her plans to apply for the job of Superintendent in a London hospital for women. In letters from Scutari, her nursing efforts are described both by her and by others, with a lot of attention given to the sentimental legends of her work. Of course, the nightly walks through the wards, lantern raised, while soldiers kiss her passing shadow are recounted. Five patients declared hopeless are nursed through the night and given a chance to live by Florence's efforts alone. While Florence is ill with the fever, her family takes comfort in the words of Longfellow's poem (an anachronism) about her, read by her rejected suitor, George (an alias for Milnes). The end of the story describes her receipt of a brooch of recognition from Queen Victoria and the establishment of the Nightingale Fund, subscribed by the common soldiers, to start a Training School for Nurses. In the original broadcast, after the story ended, James Hilton, the narrator, and Irene Dunne, the star, discussed the current "acute nursing shortage" and the needs of the Red Cross.

In sum, the Irene Dunne version of Florence Nightingale is intensely womanly and gentle. She is portrayed as an attractive woman who places humanity's needs above her domestic comfort. As a nurse, she is a nurturing, comforting presence whose idea of nursing means cleanliness, prayer, offers of encouragement, and assistance to doctors in surgery. The soldiers all see their Florence as an angel, somewhat above the earthly concerns that plagued her. The conflicts that characterized the historic Florence's life, both at home and in her work of reform, are only briefly mentioned.

A juvenile radio program (syndicated, c. 1946), *Your Story Hour*, featured a short summary and dramatization of Nightingale's life and work [17]. Although the narrators are called "Uncle Dan" and "Aunt Sue," the episode, entitled "Angel of the Crimea," gives a fairly accurate and realistic account of Nightingale's achievements. The narrators describe Florence's education and social circle, noting that, even as a young girl, Florence felt different and unsettled in her life.

Florence, at 32, at last finds her chance to exercise her talents, and she proceeds to study nursing on her own terms. When war breaks out in the Crimea and the *Times* publishes accounts of the terrible hospital situation, Florence is prepared to go and direct the nursing establishment. Her trip to Scutari, with the stop at Marseilles to buy supplies, is described, as are the fearful conditions faced by the nurses upon arrival. This version faithfully describes Florence's discipline over herself and her nurses; for instance, they are forced to



PHOTO COURTESY OF NBC

Perhaps the most controversial interpretation of Nightingale's life in dramatic form occurred in James Lee's teleplay, "The Holy Terror," which appeared on The Hallmark Hall of Fame in 1965. Julie Harris received an Emmy nomination for her work in portraying Nightingale as a religious fanatic, whose sense of divine mission made her insensitive to the feelings of others.

await a physician's request before they can set to work in the wards. The story goes on to describe Florence's trip to the front lines, her bout with fever, and her devoted services to the wounded throughout the ordeal. With her health impaired, she returns home at the end of the war to a grateful nation that subscribes to a fund to found a Training School for Nurses. Very little of the story is dramatized (that is, spoken in dialogue form), but the overall impact of the story on young audiences would have been one of inspiration and education.

Television did not attempt a dramatization of Nightingale's life until 1965, when James Lee wrote "The Holy Terror" for *The Hallmark Hall of Fame* (NBC) [12]. As the title suggests, this version does not depict a gracious Lady Bountiful, but rather a driven fanatic, somehow sanctified by the strength of her divine calling. Although no credit was given, Lee clearly based his screenplay on the Woodham-Smith biography. The telltale signs include a depiction of the Nightingale women (excluding Florence) as insipid and selfish, and the inclusion of certain details not given in either Cook or Strachey's version of Florence's experience in the Crimea: the discovery of a putrefying Russian corpse in the nurses' quarters, and women living in the cellars and sewers of the barracks hospital. Furthermore; according to Woodham-Smith, Florence staged her attacks of ill health to keep her pestering family at a distance; in Lee's version, Florence's first attack occurs just at the time she needs it to thwart her father's efforts to obstruct her work. More than these details, the Florence of Woodham-Smith was a chilling human being who lacked any warmth and feeling for others, despite the surface wit and sense of fun. Lee's Nightingale, played by the accomplished actress Julie

Harris (who received an Emmy nomination for her work), reveals little gentleness of spirit or manner. This version of Nightingale emphasizes the Joan of Arc in her nature, the sense of divine calling that set her apart from others and explained, to some extent, her disregard of the feelings of her family and friends. Following Woodham-Smith's outline of the situation, Lee's version of the Crimean mission also exaggerates the obstacles put in front of Nightingale and the venality and shortsightedness of the medical men and even of the British ambassador.

The turning point in the play comes upon Florence's recovery from the fever; at this point, she reviews her efforts and finds that she has been too deferential to the feelings of others; she determines that nothing and no one will hinder her work in the future. As if to prove this, Lee sends Florence to a special dinner party at the Ambassador's residence in Constantinople, where she intends to regain control of the *Times* fund. Although Nightingale did visit the Ambassador's residence during her stay in the Crimea, she did not behave in the outrageous manner depicted in the play. In this version, Florence fails to persuade the Ambassador to return the funds — he wants to build a church with the money. Sidney Herbert is inexplicably and unhistorically present, although he says very little and does nothing to support Florence's request. To get her way, she sets about affronting the sensibilities of all present with gory details of the barracks hospital and, finally, by revealing her bald head, an aftereffect of the fever (again exaggerated — her hair was cut short, but it never fell out). At this uncouth display, Florence wins her point but is deserted by her ambassador, by Herbert, and even by her doting Aunt Mai.

The final act of the play finds Florence back in England. After blackmailing her family into granting her independence by conveniently becoming paralytic, this Florence proceeds to hound and bully both friend and foe into serving her reform interests. Dr. Poole, who fought her efforts in the Crimea, continues his attempts to thwart her Army reforms. She calls him the Knight of the Crimean Burial Grounds to his face. (This description, in fact, was written to Herbert at the height of her frustration in the Crimea, when she heard the doctor had been awarded the K.C.B.) A sick and weakened Sidney Herbert is convinced to continue his efforts despite his declining health. He notes to Aunt Mai before leaving that he persists, despite his years of service to her, in wondering whether Florence is a charlatan or a saint. Aunt Mai, who has been present at Florence's divine calling, which opens the play, states that she never doubted her Florence, whom she is firmly convinced is an angel incarnate. The play, in keeping with the *Hallmark Hall of Fame's* tradition of excellence, was well produced and superbly acted by Julie Harris. How unfortunate that this last production, seen by millions of American viewers, should have presented

this exaggerated portrayal of Nightingale.

Conclusion

In reviewing the treatment of Florence Nightingale in dramatic works, one fact emerges that has ameliorated flaws of dramatic construction or interpretation. In almost all dramatic productions, extremely able actresses have been chosen to portray Miss Nightingale. Most of these actresses enjoyed fame both in the legitimate theatre and in film; they include some of the greatest English-speaking actresses of the twentieth-century: Edith Evans, Helen Hayes, Irene Dunne, Anna Neagle, and Julie Harris. These actresses shared similar traits, often playing noble ladies in parts that emphasized the womanly virtues of self-sacrifice and moral courage. Their stature, the lofty intonation of their speech, their association in the public mind with a certain type of noble suffering and courage, helped to imbue their characterizations of Florence Nightingale with a power and significance above and beyond the dramatic vehicle in which they appeared. Thus, Edith Evans undoubtedly managed to soften the truculent image of Nightingale in Berkeley's *The Lady with the Lamp*. In the same sense, Julie Harris, in "The Holy Terror" television play of 1965, might have pulled off a degree of sympathy for the dislikeable woman described by Lee.

The impact of these several Florence Nightingales on the image of nursing has been remarkably consistent. Despite exaggeration or underplaying of Nightingale's personal flaws, every dramatization makes clear the enormous value of her efforts to establish nursing as an honorable and worthy profession for women. From Elizabeth Risdon to Julie Harris, the Florence Nightingale character has always been identified as an important reformer in the field of health care. For obvious dramatic reasons, the Crimean venture, although only a small fraction of Nightingale's life, has always been the focal point of dramatic productions and, consequently, the image of the infant nursing profession has been associated with bravery, nobility, and selfless dedication. Yet the exact details of what constitutes a modern nurse, a Nightingale nurse, have always been rather vague. The only constant features emphasized in all dramatizations have been the nurse's role in maintaining the physical cleanliness of her patients and her hospital, and her obligation to accede to the strict discipline governing her professional and personal actions. These two facets were revolutionary in their time and were quite sufficient to set the Nightingale nurses apart from ordinary hospital nurses of the day, who were drunkards and worse. Nevertheless, today's nurses may not find enough inspiration in recreations of Nightingale's achievements that necessarily emphasize the traditional nursing virtues, such as self-sacrifice, obedience, and menial service.

Of course, the great leadership, courage, and tenaci-

ty demonstrated by Nightingale in all productions do reflect positively upon the nursing profession. But no other nurse character in any of the dramatizations ever rivals Miss Nightingale for viewer sympathy or appears to share Miss Nightingale's particular genius. The best support nurse characters, such as Sister Columba in *The White Angel* or Mrs. Roberts in the film *The Lady with a Lamp*, appear in a sympathetic light only because of their unfailing loyalty to Nightingale and because the viewer can see that Nightingale trusts them, thus suggesting their competence. For the most part, the viewer can conclude that Florence Nightingale, who never provided direct nursing care again after the Crimea, remains the exceptional, atypical nursing figure. Her legacy to her nurses would be summed up in the Nightingale oath — recited by Kay Francis in *The White Angel* — which emphasizes the nurse's obligation to remain pure, discrete, loyal, and dedicated to the welfare of others.

Despite limitations in the presentation of Nightingale's particular ideas of nursing, Florence Nightingale still offers a great deal as a female role model — a woman who overcame enormous social obstacles to achieve independence and influence. With a couple of notable exceptions, dramatists have been unable to present Nightingale as a strong-minded yet sympathetic woman. The fact of her femininity has lured too many playwrights into distorting her character either into a tragic, romantic heroine or a frustrated spinster. Reginald Berkeley attempted both in his 1929 play. He could not accept a strong yet attractive woman who, by an act of will, decided upon a career of service to humanity over a career of domestic bliss. Thus, his Florence pays a heavy price for her refusal of marriage; she becomes frustrated and bitter, and turns her romantic disappointment against others. The radio productions of the 1940s portray Nightingale as a rather commonplace romantic heroine who turns to work after the death of her beloved. James Lee's "The Holy Terror" never addresses the issue of Florence's romantic life; by his neglect, he not only defeminizes her, he dehumanizes her entirely, suggesting that she simply was not like other mortals. The two film versions, *The White Angel* and *The Lady with the Lamp*, handle this aspect of Florence's life in the most positive way; these Florences turn down romantic and domestic satisfaction; they are not thereafter haunted by the ghost of their beloved or turned into repressed spinsters.

These two films remain the best dramatizations overall, perhaps because they could show more of the texture of Nightingale's work and suggest the impact that she had on all sorts of people, from common laborers to the queen. Also, both of the films rely most heavily on the historic record for the construction of stories, emphasizing the total scope of her efforts as well as providing concrete evidence of the legend incarnate. The theatrical and radio plays have tended to pro-

mote more thematic and narrow views of the heroine (not surprising, given the greater limitations of these media). In keeping with the narrower focus of the plays, the full historic record becomes telescoped, while great attention is given to interpretation of Nightingale's personality. In these plays, Nightingale frequently is reduced to a romantic heroine, tragically lost to love by the death of her beloved; or she is exaggerated in her intolerant and demanding nature.

The interplay of legend with biography has produced interesting results. Each dramatization has taken a particular stance vis-a-vis the Nightingale legend. Reid, in 1922, wanted to contrast the legend with reality, and her Florence provided a whole new list of positive attributes to complement rather than destroy the legend. Berkeley, a few years later, sought to expose the falseness of the legend by presenting Florence as a frustrated harridan, masterful and intelligent but ultimately insensitive. Dieterle's 1936 film, *The White Angel*, used the biographical facts available to illustrate the legend. The Wilcox-Neagle film, *The Lady with a Lamp*, let the heroine bask in the aura of legend and sympathy surrounding her character, while showing Florence battling politicians and bureaucrats after Crimea — thus, the Wilcox-Neagle version presented the legend and then went beyond the legend into the unknown realm of Nightingale's later works. The radio plays, much shorter and less ambitious than the stage or screen dramatizations, never questioned the legend of Florence Nightingale; they simply recounted the most famous elements of it. And, finally, James Lee's "The Holy Terror" faced down the legend with all the iconoclasm expected of the 1960s; Lee's Nightingale became almost a parody of the legend itself.

No new dramatization of Nightingale's life has appeared in over 17 years, and the current lack of interest in this potent female figure may be the most significant feature in the history of the Nightingale legend. Between 1915 and 1965, the public received a steady, if occasionally confusing, diet of Nightingale drama. These dramatic productions were stimulated both by the revelations of biographers and by the success of earlier dramas about Nightingale. Historic interest in Nightingale dried up after the publication of Woodham-Smith's "definitive" but unsatisfactory biography in 1951, and even the nursing profession has done little to preserve the legend of its founder. Although Florence Nightingale is one of the few female historic figures identifiable by most men and women, the public's memory is not so strong that it will preserve a fading image forever.

The only way to promote interest in Florence Nightingale once more is to write about her, hoping that somewhere a television or film producer will become curious. The nursing profession should encourage further investigation into Nightingale's life — a fresh look at a figure often misrepresented by well-meaning but

uninformed biographers and dramatists. If qualified historians and nursing professionals do not enter the arena of Nightingale biography, the field will be left to the popularizers and the hacks. A 1978 work of fiction, *The Private Life of Florence Nightingale*, posed the supposition that Florence Nightingale, an efficient, energetic health care reformer, happened to be a lesbian — again revealing an inability to accept Florence as simply a strong-minded but otherwise normal woman [13].

The recent and highly pretentious "biography" of Miss Nightingale, F.B. Smith's *Florence Nightingale: Reputation and Power*, is most disturbing in its indictment of the heroine's character [14]. From the initial sentence, "Florence Nightingale's first chance to deploy her talent for manipulation came in August 1853," to the concluding paragraph, "The mystery of that divided self which had impelled her to fight, to cheat, to bully, to boast and to save lives," the reader is led through a polished exercise in character assassination with highly sexist overtones. By cleverly quoting extracts from selected Nightingale letters and failing to erect a framework within which to evaluate Miss Nightingale's nursing career, including such organizational factors as her feasible power base and limited work environment, along with her personal behavior constraints, such as female Victorian sex roles, expectations, and lifestyles, this "biography" offers a portrait of nursing's founder as a "boastful," "lying," "cheating," and "egotistic" woman. In short, "Miss Nightingale served the cause of nursing less than it served her" (p. 178). All the qualities of leadership that would be praised in a male as examples of effective management are rendered highly negative when applied to Miss Nightingale's behavior. What is more, Smith apparently decided that he could evaluate Miss Nightingale without reference to recent scholarship in the history of nursing, women's history, or the history of medicine. Thus, this biography is full of errors of fact, for example, *Notes on Nursing* was "wholly directed to home, not hospital, nursing" (it was used as a text in early nurse training schools), "the practice of nursing was never among Miss Nightingale's prime concerns" (she corresponded extensively on this subject and planned the "Nightingale ward" to facilitate nursing practice), and "she preferred patronage and surveillance of nurses' lives to guiding their professional work" (strict standards for nurses were an essential component of Miss Nightingale's concept of the sanitary movement in health care and she viewed nurses as soldiers in battle with communicable disease). Perhaps the most that can be said of F.B. Smith's effort is that by constituting the ultimate insult to Florence Nightingale, it serves as a rallying point for leaders in nursing to mobilize to encourage a more equitable modern account of the profession's founder.

The nursing profession has a vested interest in pre-

serving Florence Nightingale's reputation and in promoting the positive association evoked by her name. If much of the Nightingale legend—the emphasis on self-sacrifice, discipline, and obedience—no longer appeals to nursing leaders, Nightingale's life remains a fertile field for the discovery and examination of the powerful scientific and creative forces that helped to shape the modern nursing profession. Florence Nightingale remains a strong role model for professional nurses, as well as for the female population in general; her value and fame ought to be used for the advancement of the profession and not shelved as out-of-date.

References

1. *Florence Nightingale*. 35 min., B & W Released: 11-20-15. Distributor: Ideal. Director: Maurice Elvey. Screenplay: Eliot Stannard, adapted from Edward Cook, *The Life of Florence Nightingale*. Cast: Elizabeth Risdon, Fred Groves, A. V. Bramble, M. Gray Murray, Beatrix Templeton, Pauline Peters.
2. *The Moving Picture World*, November 20, 1915, p. 1509.
3. *The White Angel*. 75 min., B & W Released: 6-2-36. Distributor: First National. Director: William Dieterle. Screenplay: Michel Jacoby, Mordaunt Shairp, adapted from a chapter, "Florence Nightingale," from Giles Lytton Strachey, *Eminent Victorians*. Cast: Kay Francis, Ian Hunter, Donald Woods, Nigel Bruce, Donald Crisp, Henry O'Neill, Billy Mauch, Georgia Caine, Charles Croker-King, Halliwell Hobbes, Eily Malyon, Barbra Leondard, Vesey O'Davern, Phoebe Foster, Harry Cording, Ara Gerald, Lillian Cooper, Ferdinand Munier, Tempe Pigott, Egon Brecher, George Curzon, Montagu Love.
4. *The Lady with the Lamp*. 110 min., B & W Released: October, 1951. Distributor: British Lion. Director: Herbert Wilcox. Screenplay: Warren Chetham Strode, adapted from the play by Reginald Berkeley. Cast: Anna Neagle, Michael Wilding, Gladys Young, Felix Aylmer, Sybil Thorndike, Peter Graves, Julian D'Albie, Arthur Young, Edwin Styles, Barbara Couper, Helen Singler, Helena Pickard, Rosalie Crutchley, Maureen Pryor, Henry Edwards, Andrew Osborn, Clement McCallin, Monckton Hoffe.
5. *Variety*, October 3, 1951.
6. *New York Times*, October 28, 1951.
7. *New Statesman and Nation*, September 22, 1951.
8. *The Helen Hayes Theatre*, "The Lady with the Lamp." Adapted by Thiro Higley from the play by Reginald Berkeley. Broadcast: April 1941, CBS. Cast: Helen Hayes, Les Tremayne.
9. *Favorite Story*, "Lady of the Lamp." Writers: Jerome Lawrence and Robert E. Lee. Broadcast: c. 1948, syndicated. Host: Ronald Colman. Cast: Edna Best.
10. *Hallmark Playhouse*, "Life of Florence Nightingale." Based on biography by Sir Edward Cook. Broadcast: 1950, CBS. Host: James Hilton. Cast: Irene Dunne.
11. *Your Story Hour*, "Angel of the Crimea." Syndicated juvenile series.
12. *The Hallmark Hall of Fame*, "The Holy Terror." Writer: James Lee. Broadcast: April 7, 1965, NBC. Producer, Director: George Schaeffer. Cast: Julie Harris, Denholm Elliott, Torin Thatcher, Kate Reid, Leveen MacGrath, Alan Webb, Brian Bedford.
13. Gordon, R. *The Private Life of Florence Nightingale*. New York: Atheneum Publishers, 1978.
14. Smith, F. B. *Florence Nightingale: Reputation and Power*. New York: St. Martin's Press, 1982.