

The Inherent Influence of Travel on an Emerging Feminist Icon: Florence Nightingale Abroad

By

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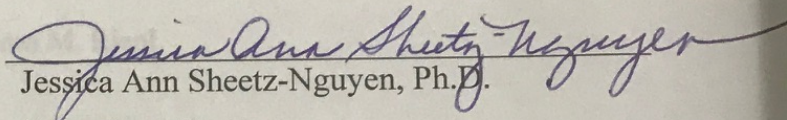
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THESES APPROVAL

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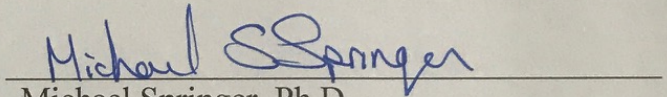
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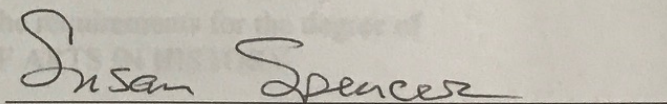
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I would like to dedicate this thesis to Dr. Jessica Sheetz-Nguyen for her unflinching support of my endeavors.

ABSTRACT OF THESIS

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TITLE OF THESIS: The Inherent Influence of Travel on an Emerging Feminist Icon: Florence Nightingale Abroad

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ABSTRACT: The primary intent of this research is to evaluate and deduce events leading up to, during, and after the travels of Florence Nightingale abroad in Europe and the near East. This work examines the perception of how enforced idleness brought about the madness of many Victorian women while others sought to find freedom outside the home. My scholarship investigates the influences on Florence Nightingale and what encouraged her to step outside the predetermined Victorian life set up by her family.

The nineteenth century proved to be a pivotal period in the development of what would later become the women's movement. The goal is to show how Nightingale's heightened education, close relationship with her father, and specifically her extensive travel tendered the courage she needed to succeed in her lifelong call to service. Nightingale spent several years traveling with family friends, Selena and Charles Bracebridge, a couple who gave her unfettered freedom to explore the ancient cities of Rome, Athens, and Alexandria. In her youth she and her family took the Grand Tour and exposed her to Italian and French intellectuals and exiles during the Risorgimento in Italy.

Most prior research on Nightingale focused on her life after she gained recognition for her work during the Crimean War and contribution to the fields of medicine and nursing. This focus inadvertently undermines the significance of unfettered movement and intellectual ventures that influenced her determination change the face of modern medicine.

This research draws upon mostly primary sources including memoirs, published letters, and travel journals written by Florence Nightingale. The British Library and Wellcome Library of Medicine house two of the most comprehensive collections of Nightingale writing. The Wellcome Library has a wonderful collection of Florence Nightingale papers, including copies from the Verney Collection at the Claydon House. The Verney Collection is the contribution of Parthenope Verney (née Nightingale) and the most complete collection of Nightingale papers available.

The scholarship on this subject has been exciting. Travel became an escape from gender roles and oppression for many Victorian women travelers. They became travel writers or accompanied family and friends on the many tours now available since the end of the Napoleonic Wars. Many female travelers identified with the people of the land as objects of study. They related to the native people because as women they were also objectified in Europe. As I delve deeper into the role of education and travel into women of the period a common thread begins to emerge, the most important being their insatiable thirst for knowledge. Nightingale saw wonders and experiences that no human will ever have these cultures and times are long past. What powerful forces she explored to become a founding feminist, a pioneer in medicine, and a staunch advocate for constant scholarly pursuits.

Primary sources reflect the public statements and correspondence of Florence Nightingale. These particular sources are indicated the British Library, the Wellcome Library,

and the London Metropolitan Archives. The British Library consisted of a majority of correspondence letters, some within manuscripts and other published. A considerable number of published sources from the archives at the Claydon House that now reside at the Wellcome Library. To this effect, the archives within Wellcome and published works within the British Library have contributed a host of rare and unique sources attributing to this research.

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INTRODUCTION

Sweetness is to woman what sugar is to fruit. It is her first business to be happy - a sunbeam in the house, making others happy. True, she will often have "a tear in her eye", but, like the bride of young Lochinvar, it must be accompanied with "a smile on her lips." Girls and women are willing enough to be agreeable to men if they do not happen to stand to them in the relation of father, brother, or husband; but it is not every woman who remembers that her *raison d'être* is to give out pleasure to all as a fire gives out heat.¹

"Travel" is a small word that allows the mind to expand past borders and enter a world unknown, ready for discovery. In the Victorian era, the key to travel lay in the Grand Tour, a feat as immense as it sounds and rooted in the eighteenth century; an excursion to all the treasures and relics of Europe. The feats of the intellectual had been solely the dominion of the male mind for centuries. Later in the nineteenth century, after the wars on the continent had settled, some women broke from these mandates and took up the distinctly male privilege of traveling the continent to develop mind, spirit, and body.² Modern feminist historians still search for past models of the perceived liberated woman; female travelers and travel writers became an excellent place to begin their search. The emergence of certain premises, having been unrealized, remain of serious interest: the assertion of the feminine as a psychological principle of importance; the right of women to legal, economic, educational and professional parity and how travel allotted for such opportunities.

Brian Dolan discusses the roles of female travelers in his book *Ladies of the Grand Tour*. He claims that by the end of the eighteenth century and when the "New Grand Tour" was taking place, that many women who had the chance to travel were changing the course of common

¹ E. J. Hardy, *Manners Makyth Man* (New York: C. Scribner's Sons, 1888), 15.

² Brian Dolan, *British Women in Pursuit of Enlightenment and Adventure in Eighteenth century Europe* (New York: Harper Collins, 2002).

assumptions – personally and socially – in polite society.³ His assertions on the influence of travel on opportunities and rights to education ring true for many, yet his observations on why these women travel do not address one woman: Florence Nightingale. This is not to say that many of his claims on why women traveled cannot apply to her. She did fear a mundane life of domestic circumstances. Yet many men during this time, according to Dolan, took a woman's desire to travel personally, as if they were somehow inadequate. One theme rings true for all women involved in continental travel – this was their escape. As he so succinctly put it women's travel narratives record diverse experiences concerned with individual growth, independence, and health. Travel provided education, entertainment, physical exercise, and an escape route for a wide range of women in the eighteenth century and forward.⁴

The Grand Tour of the eighteenth century was not so different from the “new” Grand Tour taking place in the early to mid-nineteenth century. Dolan's research shows that many women who had the chance to travel were changing the course of common assumptions and showing others how travel could help them arrive at a new position – personally and socially – in polite society.⁵ The eighteenth century “ladies of letters” set a precedent for women in the future.

The French Revolution and Napoleonic Wars, 1789-1815, caused a halt to most inter-continental travel for women. Mary Wollstonecraft was among the brave few who remained and for that we are grateful, as some of her most important publications were written amidst the deep political turmoil in Paris. With the signing of the peace treaties in 1815, women eventually returned to Europe.

³ Dolan, *Ladies of the Grand Tour*, 5.

⁴ Dolan, *Ladies of the Grand Tour*, 11.

⁵ Dolan, *Ladies of the Grand Tour*, 5.

How did these travelers know where to go or what roads to take? From the 1820s guidebooks written by earlier travelers regained popularity. Such guidebooks were so popular, Thomas Pynchon implies, that this new tourism of the guidebook suppressed the identities of the native inhabitants, flattening them out into functions within the business of tourism.⁶ Due to the inability to travel the continent during Napoleon's expeditions, the English created many travel replacements at home. Throughout the nineteenth century, panorama buildings sprung forth into existence.⁷ For many, these replacements did not provide the same stimulus as immersing oneself in faraway cultures. Instead of whittling down the desire to travel, it fanned the flames for a new kind of European excursion.

A prevailing social attitude persisted for both centuries: women should not be traveling. Instead, they should remain at home to keep house and raise a family. The women of the eighteenth century sought to be path makers and expand their horizons; nineteenth century women went abroad to begin their education and improve their sophistication to be a quality wife to the landed gentry. This not to say all women traveled for this reason, yet it seems this could have been a typical response by their fathers as to why they should be permitted to travel. Every circumstance has its exceptions. Florence Nightingale's family proved to be no different. They allowed her to travel abroad at great length in hopes it might quell her desire to become a nurse and satisfy her intellectual needs so that she would return and marry. Escape from her family, personal exploration, and private study of nursing practices abroad were Nightingale's reasons for traveling, things she could tell only her journal and her confidante, Selina Bracebridge. In

⁶ David Seed, "Nineteenth Century Travel Writing: An Introduction," *The Year Book of English Studies* 34 (2004): 3.

⁷ Dietrich Neumann, "Instead of the Grand Tour: Travel Replacements in the Nineteenth Century," *Perspecta* 41 (2008): 49.

travel, she could see herself as an intellectual equal to the men she encountered growing up in her father's study, for she would stand in the very locations they had described to her.

Florence Nightingale's time abroad on the Grand Tour during her youth and later in her adult travels with family friends traveled across Italy to Egypt, a feat most men of the day did not attempt. Traveling abroad introduced her to a world of freedom and possibility that many Victorian women never knew. In her early writings, she seems resigned to an ordinary life mandated by her parents and society. Her travels, from her childhood until the end of her life, show her in search of her soul. International travel molded her into a powerhouse of new ideas and new ways of thinking thus opening a door for women that had previously been welded shut.

Social historians chronicle the changes in the position of women and the politics of the suffragist movement, and biographers gave us revisionist studies of Mary Wollstonecraft and the literary women, but scant attention has been given England's three great nineteenth century pioneers of social reform – Josephine Butler, Octavia Hill, and Florence Nightingale.⁸ How the history has changed since Nancy Boyd first wrote her introduction in *Three Victorian Women who Changed Their World: Josephine Butler, Octavia Hill, and Florence Nightingale* on three burgeoning feminist icons. Since this publication appeared in 1982, hundreds of books have been written about Victorian women, feminists, travelers, nurses such as Mary Seacole, in addition to Florence Nightingale. Boyd's assertion was correct, and her book became a forerunner in the growing field of women's history; her analysis is a worthy contribution to a subject matter that had been little studied. Even over thirty years later, new information and interpretations are coming about on these women, although their lives have been fully dissected numerous times by

⁸ Nancy Boyd, *Three Victorian Women who Changed Their World: Josephine Butler, Octavia Hill and Florence Nightingale* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1982), xi.

a multitude of historians. As each generation has greater access to new information, they have a greater magnitude of information upon which to draw for further examination. These women saw taking journeys as a pathway to enlightenment and as a means to carve out their own niche in society.

Nevertheless, scholars have not addressed the question of the transformative role of travel in the life of Florence Nightingale. Her extensive personal journals, correspondence, and publications at the British Library proved particularly useful in understanding the frustration Nightingale felt at being denied access to the furtherance of her education and access to nursing. To date, this is the most comprehensive collection of Nightingale papers at any one site. It is in these letters one can begin a psycho-history her thoughts and feelings while traveling abroad. The manuscripts from this trip are of particular interest to biographers as they include her diary as well as letters to her family. The reader finds two Florences: the calm dutifully loving, scholarly daughter of the letters, and the passionate, distraught penitent of the diaries. When one correlates the entries in the diary with the dates of the letters, the torment the young woman felt becomes apparent. One realizes the degree to which the inner self that tormented her was kept hidden behind the outer self she displayed to her parents. The isolation and the ignorance of each other, which she deplored about British family life, had with the Nightingales reached its most extreme manifestation. In a letter to Parthenope, she laments how “Our position to one another in our families is, and must be, like that of the Moon to the Earth. The Moon revolves around her, moves with her, never leaves her. Yet the Earth never sees but one side of her; the other side remains forever unknown.”⁹

⁹ Undated loose journal page, ADD MS 45794, ff 40, BL.

For further insight, one must consult Lynn McDonald's enormous volumes titled *The Collected Works of Florence Nightingale*. It is the most extensive published collection of Nightingale papers. While selected letters by the editor, the collection includes sixteen volumes. *The Collected Works of Florence Nightingale* makes available Nightingale's major published books, articles, and pamphlets (many long out of print), and a vast amount of heretofore unpublished correspondence and notes. Extensive databases, notably a chronology and names index, and the original, unedited, transcriptions, will also be published in electronic form. This will permit convenient access to scholars interested not only in Nightingale but other major figures of her time.¹⁰

In contrast with the comprehensive publication of Nightingale's letters from Rome, almost none of her many, lengthy, and interesting letters from Greece have been published today. One set of her diary entries from the Greek trip (the continuation of her Egyptian travels) have been published in full, in Michael D. Calabria's *Florence Nightingale in Egypt and Greece: Her Diary and "Visions,"* the other, which only resurfaced in 1999, not at all.

Boston University's Howard Gotlieb Archival Research Center (HGARC), has digitized more than 2,000 of Nightingale's letters, which are available for viewing online. This collaboration is a direct result of a project that embarked on an international collaboration two years ago with the Florence Nightingale Museum, the Royal College of Nursing, and the Wellcome Library to create a comprehensive digital database of Nightingale's voluminous correspondence. Named Florence Nightingale Digitization Project, the database will offer

¹⁰ The Collected Works of Florence Nightingale. <http://www.uoguelph.ca/~cwfn/>.

researchers access to the history of nursing and public access to letters that had long been held in private collections.¹¹

The Nightingale Papers at the Wellcome Library are different indeed. While the most illustrious and sought after documents are kept under strict access at the Claydon House, the collection photocopied most of the anthology and now resides at the Wellcome. Claydon House is a collection of Nightingale's earlier letters from her childhood belonging to Lady Parthenope Verney, Florence's sister. Many of these letters showcase a whimsical side of her that she embraced since youth.

Many documents relating to Nightingale's travels, her youth, and other life circumstances have been lost over the years. Her travel journal from her European tour with her family was lost by biographer Ida B. O'Malley. Sir Edward Cook misplaced many letters that have never been recovered. Some of the best material from her early trip comes from a largely unknown set of letters published in a Swedish journal in 1944, according to Lynn McDonald, who published Nightingale's letters in an eight-volume set titled *The Collected Works of Florence Nightingale*. The originals have disappeared.¹²

This history on Florence Nightingale's transformative years is important for many reasons and contains unanswered questions. Most importantly, what factors led women living under the strictures of Victorian society to articulate reasons to escape from their predetermined plight? Many publications on Nightingale discuss her life as a chronological series of events without offering any real insight on the influence of travel on the development of her mind nor

¹¹ Samantha Pickette, "Making the Work of Florence Nightingale," *BU Today* | Boston University, *BU Today RSS* (January 1, 2016). <https://www.bu.edu/today/2016/making-the-work-of-florence-nightingale-available/>.

¹² McDonald, *CWFN* vol. 7, 19.

the mental anguish that brought her family to its breaking point. By following the available letters, journals and other publications produced by Nightingale one can trace the rise and fall of her psychological well-being as she attempted to find her voice and place in the world. Clearly, she captured the imagination of many talented and scholarly biographers, most notably Sir Edward Cook who provides a substantial chronological framework for her life, Cecil Woodham-Smith who provides a hagiographical account, and Ida B. O'Malley who partially contextualizes her life.¹³ Perhaps the most searing account of her life, written by Lytton Strachey, whose sharp criticisms of the "Eminent Victorians" left none of his subjects unscathed. Succinct in his work, Strachey admonishes that the woman was more interesting in legend than life; and she was clearly less agreeable in her private life than her public personal revealed.¹⁴

The history of historical writing on Nightingale begins with the earliest biographies. Her first biographer, Sir Edward Cook, lost several other documents about Florence's younger years in regards to her mystic experience at age seventeen.¹⁵ While offering a thorough and full discovery of primary source documentation, the two-volume *The Life of Florence Nightingale* is very much written from a man's point of view and lacks true insight into the frustrated mind of a young woman seeking to find her place in the world. Many to this day still consider Cook's version to be one of the best biographies written about her. Since a great number of documents used by him have been either lost or destroyed, his study is close to being a primary source;

¹³ Ida B. O'Malley, *Florence Nightingale, 1820-1856: A Study of Her Life Down to the End of the Crimean War* (London: Thornton Butterworth Limited, 1931); Sir Edward Cook, *The Life of Florence Nightingale, (1820-1861)* vol. 1 (London: Macmillan and, Limited, 1913); Cecil Woodham-Smith, *Florence Nightingale* (London: Constable, 1951).

¹⁴ Lytton Strachey, *Eminent Victorians: Cardinal Manning, Dr. Arnold, Florence Nightingale and General Gordon* (New York: Harcourt, Brace & Co., 1918), 1.

¹⁵ Sir Edward Cook, *The Life of Florence Nightingale, 1820-1910*, vol.1 (London: Macmillan and Co., 1913).

letters and journals referenced in his texts have become the only mention of some important activities in her early life.

Sir Edward Cook published his two volume, *The Life of Florence Nightingale*, shortly before Lytton Strachey's scathing portrayal of Nightingale as a religion crazed woman in his *Eminent Victorians*.¹⁶ Strachey had a different idea in mind when he showcased the life of Florence Nightingale. At the outset, he put aside certain popular and long-entrenched ideas about this almost mythical figure of romance and heroism and placed firmly in the foreground a new conception of her in which her mind was pre-eminent.¹⁷ Strachey points out the erroneous conception that her career ended with her return from the Crimea and discusses how her life was but a commentary of an irresistible female reformer who met an immovable bureaucracy and undermined it by "the proper use of tact, shrewdness, publicity, 'pull,' and other devious methods."¹⁸ He mocks the notion that everyone accepts the popular concept of Florence Nightingale – the saintly popular conception that everyone knew. The saintly, noble woman, the well-to-do damsel of high pedigree who cast off the luxuries of life of ease to care for the less fortunate, needy and sickly; this pious "Lady with the Lamp."¹⁹ However, his truth was different. The Nightingale of record was not this. In fact, she toiled in a different manner, and towards another end. Nightingale was the only women among Lytton Strachey's four *Eminent Victorians*. He succeeded in restoring, through a varnish of irony, the formidable character of a hitherto sentimentalized "angel of mercy." Strachey attempts to convey a side of Nightingale not

¹⁶ Lytton Strachey, *Eminent Victorians: Cardinal Manning, Dr. Arnold, Florence Nightingale and General Gordon* (New York: Harcourt, Brace & Co., 1918).

¹⁷ HWM, "The Life of Florence Nightingale by Edward Cook," *American Journal of Nursing* 42, No. 9 (September 1942): 1102-3.

¹⁸ W.J. McNiff, "The Life of Florence Nightingale," *The Mississippi Valley Historical Review* 29, no.4 (March 1943): 584.

¹⁹ Strachey, *Eminent Victorians*, 95.

known to the public. He did not see her as an altruistic nurse, willing to sacrifice herself. He viciously attacks her, describing her at the end of her life “as a bulky form of a fat old lady” and claiming that she drove her friend, Sidney Herbert, to his death.²⁰ Her enemies were in a sense his enemies; for he was writing in 1918, at the end of a war which had witnessed blunders worthy of her own Crimea. When Strachey completed his account of her, she was both more impressive than before and at the same time diminished. Her occasional ladylike responses belong to the era which Strachey satirized. Strachey makes a point of noting when at eighty-seven she received the Order of the Merit – the first women to be honored – she murmured “Too kind- too kind,” as she was no longer able to understand what was going on.²¹ Her words sound on Strachey’s pages a note of mild farce. He had a gift for making the illustrious departed look foolish.²²

Twenty-seven years later, Ida B. O’Malley published her account of Nightingale and was granted access to family papers before they went to the British Museum. O’Malley lost many documents, such as her early travel journals, including her personal diary, *La Vie Rossignol de Florence*, the travel journal Nightingale kept when her family first visited the continent in 1837. This resulted in O’Malley’s account left as the only reference. Again, incredibly informative, a proper examination and assessment of the influences on Nightingale are left out. These early biographies have been widely cited amongst contemporary scholars of Florence Nightingale. O’Malley writes tediously, rarely making an effort to put context to Nightingale’s thoughts and actions.

²⁰ Strachey, *Eminent Victorians*, 160.

²¹ Strachey, *Eminent Victorians*, 161.

²² Elizabeth Longford, *Eminent Victorian Women* (New York: Alfred P. Knopf, 1981), 85-86.

Cecil Woodham-Smith, *Florence Nightingale, 1820-1910*, became the first biographer to draw upon significant bodies of manuscript material since Ida B. O'Malley, in 1951. Granted access to papers that descended through her sister, Parthenope, and Sidney Herbert, a close friend, he did not have the same the restrictions the Nightingale family imposed on Cook. Neither he nor O'Malley made use of many of these documents, and while full access was at his disposal, there was a condition that he give no offense to living persons still alive in 1910. Over thirty years later his *Florence Nightingale*, enriched with Nightingale's diaries and "private notes," added new evidence to the evolving Nightingale biography.

In retrospect, histories written about Nightingale seem to have furthered the notion of the befouled nurse. Biographers, such as Woodham-Smith, tended to establish the extent of Nightingale's achievements by exaggerating an incompetent and degraded character of nursing before the Crimean War. Woodham-Smith writes that in "1825 it was practically unknown for a responsible woman to become a hospital nurse" and that "superior nurses did not exist."²³ Charles Dickens' portrayal in *Martin Chuzzlewit* often led to older nurses being branded Sarah Gamps or "Gampies."²⁴ This historical interpretation reinforced the drive – almost monomania – of the early twentieth century nurses to be acknowledged as professionals.²⁵ However, there is much more to be said on Woodham-Smith's account of Nightingale. Often hailed as one of the most pre-emptive biographies written on her, *Florence Nightingale, 1820-1910*, Woodham-

²³ Woodham-Smith, *Florence Nightingale*, 58 & 125.

²⁴ Charles Dickens, *Martin Chuzzlewit* (London: Hurd and Houghton, 1868); Dr. Ernest W. Heygroves, "The Medical Profession and Midwives," edited by Dr. Dawson Williams *The British Medical Journal* 1 (January-June 1901): 180-1.

²⁵ Carol Helmstadter and Judith Godden, *Nursing before Nightingale, 1815-1899* (New York: Routledge, 2011), xi.

Smith claims that use of unpublished material allowed her to present “a complete picture of Miss Nightingale for the first time,” a claim which has been widely allowed.²⁶

Recent publications on Nightingale offer insightful analysis of her home life and familial relationships and include Gillian Gill’s *Nightingales: The Extraordinary Upbringing and Curious Life of Miss Florence Nightingale* and Mike Bostridge’s *Florence Nightingale: The Making of an Icon*.²⁷ Gill’s work is the most readable, with coherent notes and insights into the possible frustrations of Nightingale’s youth and early adult life. Like many biographers, they follow her timeline, offer facts and little interpretation on her mysticism and “dreams” Nightingale often refers to in her letters and journals.

These sources give evidence of a woman of considerable complexity. This differs from earlier studies as it attempts to create a psycho-history of Florence Nightingale’s formative years. Rebelling against her parents, she remained in their household for seventeen years. A woman for whom faith was the overriding concern, she confessed that she did not believe her own convictions. The weight of her accomplishments and the speed with which she brought them to fruition attest to her energy. Proclaiming the rule of reason, she was destroyed by her emotions. Creating a new life for women, she rejected many contemporary feminist causes. This country house that many English women found so refreshing was to Florence Nightingale deadly and oppressive.²⁸ To the end of her life, she continued to rail against the tedium and stupidity of

²⁶ Woodham-Smith, *Florence Nightingale*, vi.

²⁷ Mike Bostridge, *Florence Nightingale: The Making of an Icon* (New York: Farrar, Straus and Giroux, 2008); Gillian Gill, *Nightingales: The Extraordinary Upbringing and Curious Life of Miss Florence Nightingale* (New York: Random House, 2005).

²⁸ Nancy Boyd, *Three Victorian Women Who Changed Their World: Josephine Butler, Octavia Hill and Florence Nightingale* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 198).

life's usual conventions. How can one account for this reaction and apparent series of contradictions?

While the prodigious biographical story of Florence Nightingale as “The Lady with the Lamp” captured the hearts and minds of many for years, investigations into the evolution of modern nursing have been lacking. Nevertheless, with the emergence of micro-histories, the concern to correct past neglect has risen in regards to scholarship on the subject. The early history of nursing is worthy of study, especially the social stigma associated with such a needed profession.

In the early nineteenth century, nurses were little more than servants and common women without family or known for sexual improprieties and their love of alcohol. This is reflected in the characterization of Sarah Gamp in Charles Dickens' *Martin Chuzzlewit* (1843) and Grace Poole in Charlotte Brontë's *Jane Eyre* (1847), who had “a fault common to a deal of them nurses and matrons – *she kept a private bottle of gin by her, and now and then took a drop over-much.*”²⁹ Fanny Nightingale flatly denied her daughter's request to spend a few months training as a nurse. The popular stereotype that Charles Dickens' portrayed in Sarah Gamp had its basis in truth. Detailed historiographies of nursing history now preface all major works on the subject and illustrate how far the discipline has evolved since the days of Pavey and her glorification of Nightingale.

What of the truth behind Dickens' Sarah Gamp? Many mid-nineteenth century nurses worked as midwives, a profession with an existing stigma. Anne Summers offers new interpretations of midwifery history; she suggests that female control of birthing sent fear down

²⁹ Charlotte Brontë, *Jane Eyre* (New York: Harper and Brothers Publishers, 1899), 332.

the spines of male doctors and the church. Sadly, many midwives suffered the fate of witches.³⁰ Anne Marie Rafferty argues that domiciliary nurses too, had been autonomous practitioners, but their reputation was blackened while hospital nurses, with reasons to be grateful and deferential, came under the thumb of domineering doctors and inculcated into proper lower class subservience.³¹

Without her dream of a life of service, would Florence Nightingale have been as adamant to escape her life and travel become her vessel to do so? The deep interest in her as a historical subject has fed on a voluminous collection of documents; official papers, letters, and diaries, many of which have been annotated by Florence Nightingale herself.³² A review of the biographical publications on Nightingale's interpretations on these qualifications for a happy and industrious life illustrates how her life has been taken out of context and never mention how influential travel was on her character. By omitting the subject of her travels, early biographers overlooked a major contributing factor to the success of Florence Nightingale, something that gave meaning to her life. To fully understand the significance of the many social, cultural and external factors of the transformative nature of travel on Florence Nightingale, certain questions must be asked and addressed. This thesis is organized in the following way.

CHAPTER I – THE DEATH SENTENCE IN AN UNHAPPY FROM A MYSTIC CALL TO A EUROPEAN TOUR

This project is a departure from prior studies as it seeks to address the mentality of the Victorian era and how that applies to the fracturing mental state of Florence Nightingale. Nightingale's successes came only after she had experienced tremendous psychological and

³⁰ Anne Summers, *Lives, Moral States Women, Religion and Public Life in Britain, 1800-1930* (Newbury, Berks: Threshold Press, 2000), 37.

³¹ Anne Marie Rafferty, *The Politics of Nursing Knowledge* (London: Routledge, 1996), 40.

³² Boyd, *Three Victorian Women*, xvi.

spiritual anguish. For many years before her mission in the Crimea, she struggled to find meaning in her life and desperately sought a way to manifest her perceptions of God's will.³³ Throughout her youth, her mother and sister punished the behavior they saw as different; the pair deemed her thoughts and ways of speaking to others as too bold, too intelligent, and beyond what a girl her age should be projecting. Her mother, Fanny, feared she would turn out like her Great Aunts Julia and Patty Smith – old, outspoken spinsters the family avoided. Her mother encouraged her to conform and calculate all things necessary to run an impervious Victorian household. In her mind, this sounded like a death sentence, a life doomed to petty conversation. Her mother and sister abused Nightingale by today's standards. To fully understand the family's revulsion at her desire to do more with her life one must first investigate the predetermined notions of women within Victorian society and the cult of domesticity. Nursing was not a recognized profession until Florence Nightingale made it so. Severe class consciousness drew sharp lines between what a proper woman could and could not do during this epoch. The origins of this disparity must be examined to fully understand the vehement nature of responses to such a request as to care for the sick.

CHAPTER 2 – THE CURIOUS UPBRINGING OF FLORENCE NIGHTINGALE

Sitting on a bench in the family garden, Florence Nightingale describes the light and voice of God washing over her calling her to service of the needy. Often alluding to hearing the voice of God on many different occasions, she received direction and guidance towards her life's work. When coupled with her family's departure for Europe, just as she reached the age of seventeen, it made a tremendous difference in her perceptions of the world. The transformative

³³ Michael D. Calabria, *Florence Nightingale in Egypt and Greece: Her Diary and Visions* (Albany: State University of New York Press, 1997), 1.

nature of travel both helped and hindered Nightingale in her constant battle to find herself and her lifelong attempts to find her sanity. Later in life, while in Egypt and Greece, she further discusses how, as she travels, she no longer hears the calling and is divided on whether this is good or bad. This chapter addresses the cultural influences and travel as a means of understanding the foundation necessary for Florence Nightingale to become the unwilling powerhouse of social justice and medical change she would become in her later years.

CHAPTER 3 – A CONTINENTAL AWAKENING

The Nightingale family embarks upon their European adventure with no concept of the life altering effect this journey would have on Florence. Through her father's European contacts, the young Nightingale made influential lifelong friendships, as well as being exposed to true strife as a result of war, politics, and poverty. Treated as an intellectual equal among the many illustrious scholars she met, Nightingale blossomed into a strong mind. During this journey, her prowess as a statistician, something that would define her career later in life, began to blossom as she cataloged the sights and people they passed. With the fires of change lit, this journey built the platform for Florence to take the plunge into changing history and nursing.

CHAPTER 4 – A DEATHBED FOR FLORENCE NIGHTINGALE

After Nightingale's return from the European Tour, she found herself more determined than ever to devote her time and studies to become a nurse and to change the circumstances of people like the poor soldiers she saw left behind from the wars that had ravaged Europe for decades. Nevertheless, her family held different plans for her. Forced into court, pushed into engagement with her cousin, denied her chance to study at a hospital with a family friend who was the head practitioner, Florence fell into a deep despair. The fights between mother, sister,

and herself had escalated in physical matches and verbal assaults. Fanny cried Florence was murdering them and she, in turn, suffered in silence till her body and mind could no longer take it.

CHAPTER 5 – A SAVIOR IN ROME ON A NILE CROCODILE

Fearful of her death, the family suggested she travel with family friends, Charles and Selina Bracebridge, on an extended tour through Rome, Egypt, and Greece. Hoping that this would allay her desires to continue being a nurse by being a temporary caregiver to the elderly couple they sent her off for years. Nonetheless, this would prove the most transformative trip of her life. For the first time, she tasted the same freedoms men of her age experienced. Now she finally had a context for all the languages, history and art she had studied so diligently. Nightingale spent extensive time with the Sisters of Mercy and instigated one of the most influential friendships of her life, that with Sir Sidney Herbert (who would later ask her to head the nurses in Crimea). The change in her personality and convictions on religion, politics, and spirituality are apparent in her personal writings during the period of 1840-1848. In a few years abroad, Florence Nightingale was transformed.

Different than prior research on Nightingale, this thesis asserts the transformative nature of travel. Her biographies tend to focus on the latter half of her life, depicting her as the saintly “Lady with the Lamp” and relegated to only a nurse. Her youth was filled with travel, education, adventure. As an attempt of the psycho-history on Florence Nightingale, this study analyzes hundreds of pages of family correspondence, journals, and private letters. More than the sum of her parts, Nightingale truly was a pioneer of her time, and like other path makers before her, her driving influence lay somewhere in experiences in her youth. For her, that transformation lay in the freedoms of travel abroad.

**CHAPTER 1 – THE DEATH SENTENCE IN AN UNHAPPY EXISTENCE, FROM
A MYSTIC VISION TO A GRAND TOUR**

Girls blush, sometimes, because they are alive,
Half wishing they were dead to save the shame.
The sudden blush devours them, neck and brow;
They have drawn too near the fire of life, like gnats,
And flare up bodily, wings and all. What then?
Who's sorry for a gnat . . . or girl?
I feel the hot brand upon my forehead now.
Strike hot, sear deep, as guiltless men may feel.
The felon's iron, they say, and scorn the mark
Of what they are not. Most illogical,
Irrational nature of our womanhood.
We cannot be equal of the male,
who rules his blood but a little.¹

Travel became an escape from gender roles and oppression for many Victorian women travelers. They became travel writers or accompanied family and friends on the many tours now available since the end of the Napoleonic Wars. Not always the case, women first had to battle the ensuing “cult of domesticity,” an invisible prison that held many ladies of the Victorian Era prisoner. Some would find an escape in work or education. Some found their freedom in travel. In this thesis, the examination of the transformative nature of travel will be addressed. To understand what a great undertaking this truly was, first, we must examine the origins of the “cult of domesticity.”

After the French Revolution, an event the rest of Europe watched in horror, the idea of what nobility and propriety meant began to change. The fear of revolution also brought about a re-examination of women's role in society. Aristocratic women became scapegoats. The ladies at the court took the blame for all the intrigues that had blocked reform, the salons for the debilitating mockery of the church. Scores of books written called upon women to give up their

¹ Elizabeth Barrett Browning, *Aurora Leigh* (New York: C.S. Francis & Co., 1857), 62.

former sway over society and to retreat into their homes. Mary Wollstonecraft, in her *Vindication of the Rights of Woman*, urged women to achieve education so that they could become better wives and mothers, revealing profoundly middle-class bias.² Nightingale makes mention in her journals of reading Wollstonecraft and makes a note of feeling influenced profoundly by her.³ She believed some women were destined for marriage, but that it ought not to be women's only goal. In 1846, she wrote:

I don't agree at all that a woman has no reason (if she does not care for any one else) for not marrying a good man who asks her, and I don't think Providence does either. I think He has a clearly marked out some to be single women as He has others to be wives, and has organized them accordingly for their vocation. I think some have every reason for not marrying, and that for these it is much better to educate the children who are already in the world and can't be got out of it than to bring more into it. The Primitive Church clearly thought so too and provided according.⁴

At the onset of the nineteenth century, Europe was in a state of flux as the region settled down at the end of the Napoleonic Wars. A great notion spread through the upper class that they needed to set the standards of morality for the lower classes to follow so that crises, such as the French Revolution, could never happen again. It fell to the upper-classes to set a proper example for the poor to follow. Women were to stay at home while then men provided for the family.

² Graham, *Women in the 18th Century*, 302.

³ Undated journal entry, Embley, Florence Nightingale Papers, Correspondence ADD MS 43397, ff 240-2, British Library (BL)

⁴ Cook, *Nightingale* vol. 1, 100-1.

Freedom, even in activities as simple as walking alone, were no longer suitable for the proper woman.

Pre-revolutionary writers, such as Mary Wollstonecraft and even Jean-Jacques Rousseau, would argue that women need to be educated to become better counterparts to men. In the mid-nineteenth century, cracks began to show. They took their roles as angels quite seriously. Hence, they stepped out of the home and slammed the door on the devil's workshop of idleness; they set forth, protected by moral superiority in which domestic idealism had cloaked them, to do good in more dangerous wellsprings of evil like army hospitals, poor houses and city slums.⁵ How did the concept of the woman being the "angel in the house" become so popular?

The answer is the French Revolution and the Enlightenment. Great writers like Voltaire and Rousseau brought revolutionary ideas to the forefront, an encouragement they could not have possibly foreseen would turn into the revolution it did. To twentieth century feminists, Rousseau is the *bête noire*, the founding father of male sexism in the western world. According to them some of the *philosophes* had a good word regarding women, provided they were privileged to education; but Rousseau is said to have led the counter-revolution against enlightened feminism.⁶ Not absent before this, suddenly there was an influx of female writers of all kinds writing pamphlets, books and literature expressing the nature, desires, and rights of women. Rousseau influenced women during the French Revolution to write pamphlets to ask for social and political rights. Rousseau's *Émile* (also known as *On Education*), undertakes the

⁵ Bridenthal and Koonz, *Becoming Visible*, 300.

⁶ Simone de Beauvoir, *The Second Sex* (New York: Vintage Press, 1970), 99; Eva Figs, *Patriarchal Attitudes: Women in Society* (London: 1970), 94-103. *Bête noire* means "black beast" in French.

fundamental political and philosophical questions of the between the individual and society, a quintessential aspect of the Enlightenment.

France in 1789 was in complete distress, economically and socially; society had been completely turned upside down. Most notably the question of the individual might retain what Rousseau saw as innate human goodness while remaining part of a corrupting collectivity. Its opening sentence: “Everything is good as it leaves the hands of the Author of things; everything degenerates in the hands of man.”⁷ Many advocated one cure: Rousseau’s regeneration of *moeurs* or morality.⁸ This idea continued into the nineteenth century as the noble classes carried on the idea that it was their responsibility to reform the poor as well as setting an example for them of what proper society should be. Certain ideas were held by middle-class Victorians themselves, particularly their assumption that there was no morality without religion.

In book five of *Émile* Rousseau addresses the concept of educating women. Albeit brief, this depiction of female education sparked great debate, one that continued well into the time of Florence Nightingale. Mary Wollstonecraft, noted feminist, author, and activist, titled a section of *A Vindication of the Rights of Woman* “Animadversions on Some of the Writers who have Rendered Women Objects of Pity, Bordering on Contempt” in which she attacked Rousseau, most notably this passage:

In what they have in common, they are equal. Where they differ, they are not comparable. A perfect woman and a perfect man ought not to resemble each other in mind any more than in looks, and perfection is not susceptible of more or less.

In the union of the sexes each contributes equally to the common aim, but not in

⁷ Jean-Jacques Rousseau, *Émile* (Paris: E.A. Lequien, 1821), 10.

⁸ Ruth Graham, “Rousseau’s Sexism Revisited,” in *Women in the 18th Century and Other Essays* edited by Paul Fritz and Richard Morton (Toronto: Samuels, Hakkert & Co., 1976), 128.

the same way. From this diversity arises the first assignable difference in the moral relations of the two sexes.⁹

Enter here the first discussion of men and women having differing spheres of existence and responsibility. This developed in two ways: first the “cult of domesticity,” with which society is still afflicted by today, a notion that women best-serve society and man by running a well-maintained home. Secondly, with the change in poor laws, introduction of workhouses and voluntary hospitals, as the illness was frequently seen as a punishment by God. For example, prostitutes would often end up with syphilis, a prevalent disease at the time, and society equated that as punishment for their lascivious behavior.¹⁰ Turning on their sex as corrupted by luxury and devoted to frivolity, the women of the Third Estate blamed the *ancien regime* and looked toward the constitution to regain their natural role.¹¹

Almost unanimously they called for better education of women so they may become better wives and mothers, whose natural task was to educate the children of both sexes, an idea that all but dissipated after the end of the revolution. Ladies, inspired by *Émile*, had their feelings of “Humanity” and “Maternity” ignited. Perhaps Florence Nightingale found herself reading *Émile* or maybe any of the pamphlets written by women during the Revolution. Could this be how she first garnered the notion of women deserving the right to work or have freedoms?

Many of the pamphlets from the turn of the eighteenth century wanted laws to protect them from marital abuse, property rights and give them some control over their families. Because

⁹ Mary Wollstonecraft, *A Vindication of the Rights of Women* (Boston: Peter Edes, 1792); Rousseau, *Émile*, 358.

¹⁰ Ruth Y. Jenkins, *Reclaiming Myths of Power: Women Writers and the Victorian Spiritual Crisis* (Toronto: Associated University Press, 1995), 163.

¹¹ Graham, *Women in the 18th Century*, 129.

women held “moral” superiority over men; as Rousseau, claimed they were entitled to rights undreamed of by him. As a meditation on the relationship between individual frustrations and the working out of a divine plan, it constitutes Nightingale’s contribution to understanding – and resisting – the place that women were allotted in mid-nineteenth century Britain.¹²

Pamphlets called for drastic social change, especially in the area of education. Not that they wished for educated women to usurp the authority of men. For example, in the sciences would make women “mixed beings” who were rarely faithful wives or good mothers of families.¹³ An angrier woman’s pamphlet reproached men for giving them a narrow education which was the basis for men’s prejudice and responsible for extinguishing women’s talent.¹⁴ According to these pamphlets, woman’s moral ascendancy over men, a gift of nature, entitled them to *political rights*, which was not what Rousseau had in mind.¹⁵

To understand the significance of travel one must first observe the emerging “cult of domesticity” in the nineteenth century. As Nightingale so aptly puts it, “We do the best we can to train our women to an idle superficial life; we teach them music and drawing, languages, and *poor peopling* – ‘resources’, as they are called, and we hope that if they don’t marry, they will at least be quiet.”¹⁶ The Industrial Revolution opened the doors for middle and upper-class women to experience greater leisure. No longer did they need to assist in shops or any other controlling capacity outside of the household. Men sought to give their wives and daughters a life of leisure,

¹² Poovey, *Cassandra*, vii.

¹³ Christine Fauré, *Cahier des représentations & doléances du beau sexe...*; Requête des dames à l’Assemblée Nationale, 1789.

¹⁴ Graham, *Women in the 18th Century*, 130.

¹⁵ Christine Fauré, *Cahier des représentations & doléances du beau sexe, adressé au Roi au moment de la tenue des Etats-Généreaux*, 1789.

¹⁶ Florence Nightingale and Mary Poovey, *Cassandra and Other Selections from Suggestions for Thought* (New York: New York University Press, 1992), 66.

and many succeeded in removing them from employment and encouraged them to be as beautiful, delicate, and as cultured as money, good fortune and application allowed.¹⁷

Nevertheless, desirable the notion was of having a cultured, leisured wife, the idea of idleness being the work of the devil still plagued their minds. The morality aspect came into play as the question was asked: how were wives to be good and virtuous if they were idle? The answer was that they should strive to be better spouses and mothers.

During the nineteenth century, the Industrial Revolution transformed Britain. In 1801, at the time of the first census, only about twenty percent of the population lived in towns.¹⁸ By 1851 the figure had risen to over fifty percent. In 1881 about two-thirds of the population lived in towns. Between 1801 and 1851, the population of England and Wales is estimated to have doubled. More to the point during the first half of the century, this population became increasingly concentrated in the industrial cities of the north and in London.¹⁹ Because these demographic changes were rapid and completely unregulated, the mushrooming urban centers were utterly inadequate to the influx of new populations and the capacity of cities like London and Manchester to supply the requisite housing and sanitation.²⁰ In the furtherance of the Industrial Revolution, factories became more and more common. The desire for quality and mass produced items skyrocketed as many people began moving to the cities for work.

At first glance, it seems ironic that middle-class men, who extolled the virtues of hard-work, tried so much to make their wives and daughters leisured. Most men and their class saw this female disengagement from domestic and business employment as a social necessity, as the

¹⁷ Renate Bridenthal and Claudia Koonz, *Becoming Visible: Women in European History* (Boston: Houghton Mifflin, 1997), 299.

¹⁸ www.nationalarchives.gov.uk/census.

¹⁹ Poovey and Nightingale, *Cassandra*, xiv.

²⁰ Poovey and Nightingale, *Cassandra*, xiv.

imperative symbol of increasing economic and political power. “To live nobly” meant being leisured, being free to pursue a pleasurable, sociable, cultural and intellectual activity. They could and did remove their women from employment and encouraged them to be as beautiful, as delicate and as cultured as money, good fortune and applications allowed.²¹ This idea culminated in the “cult of domesticity,” according to which the home became a sanctuary and women its guardian angel. This ideal dominated thinking about women in England, on the continent and in America and helped to make the gulf between the male and female sphere of work and politics and the female sphere of society and home all the wider.

This mentality would persevere and survive to the modern day, but women had minds, and not all of them accepted their creativity being shuttered. The cornerstone of Victorian society was the family; the perfect lady’s sole function was marriage and procreation (the two, needless to say, were considered as one). If the devil had been alive and well in the nineteenth century France and England, idle hands and brains would by no means have been his most potent weapons. Only a select portion of the population would have had time to suffer the affliction of idleness. Increasingly, these afflictions fell upon middle-class women.²² All her education was to bring out her “natural” submission to authority and innate maternal instincts. These ladies were trained to have no opinions lest they seem too formed and too definite for a young man’s taste, and thereby unmarketable as a commodity.²³

The transformative nature of travel is something that is often seen more as a side effect than a cause of change in some Victorian women. Most people, when thinking of the Victorian

²¹ Bridenthal and Koonz, *Becoming Visible*, 299.

²² Bridenthal and Koonz, *Becoming Visible*, 298.

²³ Vicinus, Martha ed. *Suffer and Be Still: Women in the Victorian Age* (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1972), 2.

woman, conjure an image of big hats, uncomfortable bustles and total obedience. In the midst of this stereotype, a small group of adventurers emerged. These ladies, strange in their behaviors, sought to battle the cult of domesticity and instead find adventure in the world.

Florence Nightingale changed many things in Great Britain from medical treatment to political reform but before all that, she was a prisoner of the “cult of domesticity,” and as such she never found happiness in its arms and sought to find her higher calling, one given to her by God. Many female travelers identified with the people of the land as objects of study. They related to the native people because as women they were also objectified in Europe.²⁴ When Nightingale first arrived in Egypt she found herself completely horrified with the way the Egyptians lived; she found them dirty and living like animals.²⁵ Nevertheless, the longer she stayed in the country, her love for their life and culture grew to the point that by the time she departed, she lamented that she might never see the tops of the pyramids again (albeit she had also described them as odes to tyranny). This relation of marginalization allowed feminist travelers to advance the status of European women by showing gender hierarchy in another context.

Anti-feminists identified with the native women to support the idea that European women were losing their femininity.²⁶ In *Women Travelers in Colonial India: The Power of the Female Gaze*, Indira Ghose examines the special status British women held when traveling due to being the dominant race, but like the native women they encountered had relatively less power regarding of gender. Few female travelers exhibited sympathy to the cause of native peoples. In

²⁴ Indira Ghose, *Women Travelers in Colonial India: The Power of the Female Gaze* (Calcutta: Oxford University Press, 1998), 9.

²⁵ Molly Youngkin, *British Women Writers and the Reception of Ancient Egypt. 1840-1910: Imperialist Representation of Egyptian Women* (London: Palgrave-MacMillan, 2016), 39.

²⁶ Ghose, *Women Travelers*, 53.

the case of many women travel writers, the practice of objectification rather than identification became the normal method of study of locals. By studying indigenous peoples, women showcased their abilities to rise to the status of the white male in scholarly writing and literature.²⁷ Barbara Korte argues that nineteenth-century travel writing was characterized by its self-consciousness and by its promotion of values (expedition, heroism, and so on) central to the empire.²⁸

Nightingale's content rich letters and travel journals should earn her the title of travel writer, albeit she may never have been considered one in her time. A pioneer who transformed Victorian social expectations of women, changing them from passive to active engagement in the society, Florence did not view herself as such. Without these experiences, she could not arrive at this without antecedents and cultural tendrils of influence who made her become "the Lady with the Lamp." Nightingale did not exemplify the archetype described by Korte. As a backdrop to the focus of this thesis, which is to explore the transformational nature of travel, the following scholarly approaches are essential: biography, cultural histories, gender analysis and travel guides.

The issue of women's rights also caused dilemmas for Nightingale. As a Christian, she affirmed the rights of the powerless; she also, Nevertheless, placed self-giving and service to others above the striving for power. As a woman in Victorian London, it was difficult for her to

²⁷ Aziza Ahmed, "Victorian Women Travelers in the 19th Century," *Postcolonial Studies @ Emory*, May 1998; Antoinette Burton, *Burdens of History* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina, 1994); Ann McClintock, *Imperial Leather: Race, Gender, and Sexuality in the Colonial Contest* (New York: Routledge, 1995).

²⁸ Catherine Matthias, *English Travel Writing from Pilgrimages to Postcolonial Explorations* (Basingstoke: Macmillan, 2000), 84.

press for her own self-advantage, often finding herself falling into depression when denied by her mother and sister the chance to answer her calling.

From a personal perspective in the Anglo-European study, travel represented a path toward freedom for middle and upper-class Victorian ladies. Many studies from the 1970s onward have demonstrated the ways in which women's gendered identities were negotiated differently "at home" versus "away," thus showing women's self-development through travel.²⁹ The recent post-structural turn in studies of Victorian travel writing has focused attention on women's diverse and fragmented identities as they narrated their travel experiences. Nightingale often found herself becoming dramatically attached in her close female friendships as a result. A prime example is this excerpt from a Nightingale letter written in 1847 after knowing Selina Bracebridge for only a few months. Unknown to Nightingale, Selina Bracebridge would prove later to be her most ardent supporter and a most instrumental friendship. She writes to her friend, Mary Clarke:

Mrs. Bracebridge, who is ever my Ithuriel. She is a thorough woman of the world without ever having had a worldly thought – give me the woman, who has built her unworldliness upon the rock of the world, against which the childish boat of unconsciousness has gone to pieces. I have known many more intellectual, many more brilliant, but I never knew such a union and harmony of opposite qualities, she has the heart of a woman, the judgment of a man – she is practical & poetical – the habits of a man of business, the imagination of an artist – the hand of earth, the soul of heaven. She pursues one object with unfaltering steps, yet is ready with her

²⁹ Karen Morin, "Victorian Women Travelers," *Encyclopedia of the Great Plains*, 2011.

sympathy to respond to all. She has the steadiness of the Conqueror and the lowliness of the servant.³⁰

In this framework, the emphasis placed on women's sense of themselves as women in new locations, but only as they worked through their ties to nation, class, whiteness, and colonial and imperial power structures.³¹ Throughout her life, Nightingale formed emotionally dependent relationships with women who sympathized with her ambitions. When they failed to support her unconditionally, she never forgave them. In numerous letters, she subsequently condemned all women as selfish and unreliable.³² Fear called upon women to give up their former sway over society and to retreat into their homes but not Florence Nightingale.

Much recent work has examined Victorian women travelers' culpable involvement in British empire building, most notably regarding their ambivalent relationships with indigenous peoples in Asia, Africa, and India. Current views concerning Victorian femininity still echo the nineteenth century concept of domestic purity and the associated figure of the ideal woman, the “angel in the house,” carrying out her mission as a wife, mother, and daughter.³³ This should not perpetuate the particular mentality of Victorian femininity to blind us to the existence of different, sometimes conflicting, versions of female respectability in this period.

³⁰ Letter from Florence Nightingale to Mary Clarke, Embley, 10 July 1847, ADD MS 43397, ff 292-95, (BL); Ithuriel is reference to the archangel Ithuriel, the angel of self-love and self-development that leads you gently towards letting go of everything you no longer need in your life which is holding you back from reaching your full soul potential. This angel is supposed to find the love and peace in your heart and nurtures your inner light until it is a bright and shining star confidently learning and growing and sharing your being with others.

³¹ Linda Alcoff, “Cultural Feminism versus Post-Structuralism: The Identity Crisis in Feminist Theory,” *Signs* 13, no. 3 (Spring 1988): 405-36.

³² Vicinus, *Suffer and Be Still*, 22.

³³ J.A. Banks, *Feminism and Family Planning in Victorian England* (New York: Schocken Books, 1964), 94.

Extensive dispute by Victorian feminists on what constitutes “womanliness” raged during the nineteenth century. Frances Power Cobbe, an Irish writer, and social reformer argued in her essay “Criminals, Idiots, Women, and Minors” that an essentialist or biological understanding of sexual difference and the nature of woman granted her a distinctive moral status because of her special gifts of compassion and nurturance.³⁴ This formed the basis of the unique moral status that she reasoned for women’s work and responsibilities into the public sphere. Sexual difference was, of course, central to the “Woman Question” debate in the Victorian era. Margaret Oliphant, a Scottish novelist, and historical writer agreed that there existed an essential, biological womanliness, and therefore a womanly identity common to all women.³⁵ *The Daughters of England* by Sarah Stickney Ellis is a mid-nineteenth century text providing guidance on young women's character and behavior. Ellis published several other popular works on women's role, including *The Women of England*, and in each, she outlines that women must provide a virtuous influence on men - as wives, mothers, and daughters - as part of their contribution to society.³⁶

More notably, it is necessary to understand the role of women in the working field. Nursing, which was Nightingale’s dream, was not a respectable profession until she made it so. The origins of modern nursing are shrouded in stereotype. To understand its development, or hospitals and the care of the sick one must first look at the social and literary work that defined society’s ideas on the subject. For centuries, neither doctors nor nurses were in fashion. People feared illnesses and looked on the sick and infirm as people suffering from the displeasures of

³⁴ Susan Hamilton, ed., ‘*Criminals, Idiots, Women, and Children*’: *Victorian Writing by Women on Women* (Ontario: Broadview Press, 1995), 14.

³⁵ Margaret Oliphant, “Mill on the Subject of Women,” *The Edinburgh Review* 129 (January 1869): 291.

³⁶ Sarah Stickney Ellis, *The Women of England: Their Social Duties and Domestic Habits* (New York: D. Appleton and Co., 1843); Sarah Stickney Ellis, *The Daughters of England: Position in Society, Character, and Responsibilities* (New York: D. Appleton and Co., 1843).

God, and therefore removed from the plane of sympathy.³⁷ Evangelical valorization of suffering coincided with the mid-Victorian domestic ideal and that it would be difficult to overestimate the sway that their reading of pain had over Victorian representation of illness.³⁸ Until the second half of the nineteenth century, Victorians perceived nurses as callous, filthy, and iniquitous. The upper-class described the nurses' work as all the usual duties of servants, waiting on and cleaning the patients, the beds, the furniture, wards, and stairs; clearly, this attitude provides an example of extreme class consciousness relating to workhouses and voluntary hospitals.³⁹

Nightingale established a system of training characterized by strict discipline under the ultimate control of a matron, a belief that nursing was first and foremost a vocation for women to care unselfishly for the sick, and that nurses should be unquestionably obedient to more senior colleagues and doctors. A crucial aspect was religion and that it assumed to be for the well-being of the nation that contemporaries wanted an accurate profile of religious faith to set alongside their statistical measurements of crime, disease, and poverty. The majority of attendants, asserted Horace Mann, were poor or working class.⁴⁰

Nightingale did not consider herself a feminist and often argued against the concept later in life. Nevertheless, she often expressed this same frustration in her travel journals, especially while in Egypt, on how she could achieve her freedom once she returned home. She exhibited the same free spirit that one would see in other female writers, journalists and travel writers of the day. In a letter to her mother she writes:

³⁷ Edward Henry Sieveking, "Training Institutions for Nurses," *The Englishwoman's Magazine* 7 (1852): 294.

³⁸ Maria H. Frawley, *Invalidism and Identity in Nineteenth century Britain* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2010), 33.

³⁹ Guy's Hospital Collection, London Metropolitan Archives H09/GY/A71, 54.

⁴⁰ Poovey and Nightingale, *Cassandra*, xiii.

My God what is to become of me? It is now a year and a half since hope rode high and my great effort was made to crucify the old Flo and to break the habits entailed upon me by an idle life of not living in the present world of action but in a future one of dreams to die and live again. That effort failed – what have I had not offered in making it I have not yet discovered I am not sorry I tried, but it was an epic miscarriage.

41

Later in life, after Nightingale had returned from the Crimea, she wrote a series of essays compiling her feelings, thoughts, and theories she made on religion and philosophy titled *Suggestions for Thought to Searchers of Religious Truths*.

She records her frustration at gender-based restrictions upon social and spiritual empowerment in her fragmented, semi-autobiographical essay “Cassandra.” Nightingale held that women had the same rights to develop abilities, to become perfect, in her terms, as men. The bitterness is palpable in the sentiment that lays the platform for “Cassandra” and stems straightforwardly enough from her own life as an upper-middle-class daughter who had her hopes for happiness and purpose dashed time and again by her parents and sister. When reading Florence Nightingale’s arguments in “Cassandra” and in her other writings, such as *Nursing: What It Is and What It Is Not* begs the question, what kind of literature did she have access to in her youth as she shares these same ideals explain the classical tradition associated with “Cassandra” in mythology? Her fiery desires to not only follow her calling by God but to work and for this placed her squarely in the camp with Evangelical social reformers, such as William Wilberforce, the abolitionist, and John Wesley, the cleric. The character Cassandra, also known

⁴¹ Journal Entry, Embley, 25 December 1850, ADD MS 43402, ff 53-4, BL.

as Alexandra or Cassandra, was a daughter of the King of Priam and Queen of Hecuba of Troy in Greek mythology.⁴² In modern usage, her name is employed as a rhetorical device to indicate someone whose accurate prophecies are not believed by those around them. It is possible she chose this title as a parallel her feelings in relation to her calling to service by God and the denial of that by her family.

Mirrored in other women, the aggravation at her predicament and experience of her class in mid-nineteenth century England became overwhelming. She wrote that these ladies could find no outlet in “a cold and oppressive conventional atmosphere” to satisfy their “passion, intellect, and moral activity.”⁴³ They were “never supposed to have any occupation of sufficient importance not to be interrupted,” and so they frittered away their days in looking at prints, doing worsted work, reading out loud and taking drives in the carriage.⁴⁴ At night they paid the price for their inactivity with “the accumulation of nervous energy makes them feel when they go to bed as if they were going mad.”⁴⁵

Nightingale seems to have been remarkably free of gender role stereotyping. When she wanted women to become nurses rather than doctors this seemed unconventional. In Britain, there were scarcely any trained women nurses outside of religious orders. She held to the conviction that nursing, which would include midwifery, was more useful than medicine.⁴⁶ She never resolved her contradictions on the place women had in society. Nightingale believed they were incapable of perseverance and convinced that they only pursued personal ends, and were

⁴² Des Places, “Sibylline Oracles,” *New Catholic Encyclopedia*, 2nd ed., vol. 13 (Gale, 2003), 100.

⁴³ Nightingale, *Cassandra*, 77.

⁴⁴ Nightingale, *Cassandra*, 77.

⁴⁵ Nightingale, *Cassandra*, 86.

⁴⁶ Nightingale, *Cassandra*, 69.

unable to understand public responsibilities. She appears to have looked to men for her intellectual challenges and thought herself a woman born with a “male intellect.”⁴⁷

A thought put forth later in her life, after her return from Crimea, with her spirit crushed and health barely intact, her voracious appetite for learning and desire to change her stars blazed forth in an unflinching flame. At the time, she wrote “Cassandra,” before the Crimean War, the lust for learning sprung forth at every turn and opportunity and her anger and being denied her dream for forever collecting knowledge manifested in this lethal composition of thought. She says, “Women often strive to live by intellect. The clear, brilliant, sharp radiance of intellect’s moonlight rising upon such an expanse of snow is dreary, it is true, but some love its solemn desolation, its silence, its solitude — if they are but *allowed* to live in it; if they are not perpetually balked and disappointed. A woman cannot live in the light of intellect. Society forbids it.”⁴⁸ She goes on to say, “what wonder if, wearied out, sick at heart with hope deferred, the springs of will broken, not seeing clearly *where* her duties lies, she abandons intellect as a vocation and takes it only, as we use the moon, by glimpses through her tight-closed window-shutters?”⁴⁹

The Victorian era saw gender roles in society, and the home becomes more clearly defined than at any previous time in history.⁵⁰ In earlier eras, it was common for wives to work with their husbands in the family business. Living “over the shop” made it easy for ladies to help out by serving customers or keeping accounts while also attending to their domestic duties.⁵¹ As

⁴⁷ Vicinus, *Suffer and Be Still*, 31.

⁴⁸ Nightingale, *Cassandra*, 69.

⁴⁹ Nightingale, *Cassandra*, 88.

⁵⁰ Leonore Davidoff and Catherine Hall, *Family Fortunes: Men and Women of the English Middle Class, 1780-1850* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1987).

⁵¹ Kathryn Hughes, “Gender Studies in the 19th Century,” *Discovering Literature: Romanticism and Victorians*, British Library website.

the Industrial Revolution progressed, men found themselves more often need to commute to their place of work. Women stayed at home all day to oversee the domestic duties that were increasingly carried out by household staff. Beginning in the 1830s, women adopted a new style of dress, wearing items such as the crinoline, a large bell-shaped skirt that strictly limited their movement and made cleaning or other ordinary tasks virtually impossible without tipping over.

The two sexes now inhabited what Victorians thought of as “separate spheres,” only coming together at breakfast and again at dinner. The ideology of separate spheres rested on a definition of the “natural” characteristics of women and men. Society considered women physically weaker yet morally superior to men, which meant that they were best suited to the domestic sphere.⁵² Nightingale laments, “In the conventional society, which men have made for women, and women have accepted, they MUST have none, they MUST act the farce of hypocrisy, the lie that they are without passion---and therefore what else can they say to their daughters, without giving the lie to themselves?”⁵³ Their job consisted of being the balance between the moral quandary of the public sphere, in which their husbands and fathers worked all day and to prepare the next generation to follow the footsteps laid out by their forefathers and to continue this way of life.

Having such grand influence at home was a common argument used against giving women the right to vote. The Women’s Anti-Suffrage League in England claimed, as part of its manifesto, that women should not vote because of the spheres of men and women, owing to natural causes, are principally different, and therefore their share in the public management of

⁵² Eugène Beckland, *The Marriage Guide* (Philadelphia: W.A. Leary, Jr., 1865); "Gender Roles in the 19th Century." The British Library. <http://www.bl.uk/romantics-and-victorians/articles/gender-roles-in-the-19th-century>.

⁵³ Nightingale, *Cassandra*, 57.

the State should be different.⁵⁴ They go on to say in their manifesto that men have a specialized knowledge of such things as politics while women are too busy having and raising children to be bothered with such business.⁵⁵

Throughout her life, Florence wrote hypothetical letters to her mother, cousins, and others she felt had attempted to keep her locked in the cult of domesticity. In December 1845 she wrote, “As for me, all my hopes for this winter are gone & all my plans destroyed. My poor little hope, *requiescat in pace* no one can know its value to me no one can tell me how dear a child Nevertheless, infantine is to its mother, nor how precious an idea, tho’ it was an uninformed one – but between the destruction of one idea and the taking up of another I can understand now how a soul can die.”⁵⁶ For Nightingale, “Cassandra” represented an alter-ego, a version of herself she dreamed of achieving, a chance to say all the things she always wanted to say but never could. The essay itself is a scathing attack on what her mother and sister deemed most important: being a good wife, mother, and the concept of family. Her mother would attempt, throughout her life, to mold Florence into herself, to *make* her love the “joys” of being a wife and mother. This proved to be an issue Florence struggled with her entire life. In an undated, private journal entry in 1851, Florence writes:

I what am I that I am not in harmony with all this, that their life is not good enough for me? Oh God, what am I? The thoughts and feelings that I have not – I can remember since I was six years old. It was not I that made them. Oh God, how did they come? Are they the natural cross of my father and mother? What are

⁵⁴ Mary Augusta Ward, "Women's Anti-Suffrage Movement." In *Selected Articles on Women's Suffrage*, edited by Edith Phelps, (White Plains: H.W. Wilson &, 1916), 256.

⁵⁵ Ward, *Selected Articles*, 257.

⁵⁶ Journal Entry, Embley, 5 December 1845, ADD MS 43402, ff 35, BL; “*requiescat in pace*” means rest in peace.

they? A profession, a trade, a necessary occupation, something to fill and employ all my faculties, I have always felt essential to me, I have always longed for, consciously or not. During a middle portion of my life, college education, acquirement I longed for – but that was temporary – the first thought I can remember and the last was nursing work and in the absence of this, education work, but more the education of the bad than of the young.⁵⁷

In this journal entry, one can see the origins of “Cassandra.” The bitterness in “Cassandra” is palpable and stems directly from her experiences during her youth.

Always different than other upper-middle class daughters, she possessed extraordinary intellectual gifts and took her calling from God seriously, albeit her family sought to keep her from achieving her dream of becoming a nurse. To Nightingale, frustration at her own plight was reflected in the experience of other women of her class in Victorian Britain. These women, she wrote, could find no outlet in "a cold and oppressive conventional atmosphere" to satisfy their “Passion, intellect” and “moral activity.”⁵⁸ They are “never supposed to have any occupation of sufficient importance not to be interrupted, and so fritter away their days in looking at prints, doing worsted work, reading out loud, and taking drives in the carriage.”⁵⁹ At night they pay the price for their inactivity: “the accumulation of nervous energy ... makes them feel ... when they go to bed, as if they were going mad.”⁶⁰

Florence wrote in “Cassandra” that “Women dream till they have no longer the strength to dream those dreams against which they so struggle, so honestly, so vigorously, and

⁵⁷ Florence Nightingale, Private notes, undated 1851, ADD MS 43402, ff 79-83, BL.

⁵⁸ Nightingale, *Cassandra*, 48.

⁵⁹ Nightingale, *Cassandra*, 48.

⁶⁰ Nightingale, *Cassandra*, 48.

conscientiously, and so in vain, yet which are their life, without which they could not have lived; those dreams go at last.”⁶¹ Dominated by the long nineteenth century concept of domestic purity, current views concerning Victorian femininity continue to be the associated figure of the ideal woman, the “angel in the house,” carrying out her mission as a wife, mother, and daughter.⁶² We should not allow this particular conception of Victorian femininity to blind us to the existence of different, sometimes conflicting, versions of female respectability in this period. Nightingale’s writings from this period have locked her into history as a woman who changed the concepts and practice of nursing. They do not look at Florence the traveler, a woman breaking societal norms traveling to lands seen by few from the European world.

Many present-day readers identify Nightingale with different nineteenth century campaigns, but the two most prevalent would be either her role in the creation of modern nursing or her unknowing feminist writings that argued against the enforced idleness of middle and upper-class women. Nightingale’s reform of nursing and her personal demonstration that women could work outside the home were undoubtedly her most visible accomplishments, but Nightingale’s reflections reveal that all of her activities were expressions of a complex and unorthodox religious philosophy, which developed before Nightingale left for the east in 1854.⁶³ World travel helped open the gates for her to find the courage to exercise her call to service.

Nightingale’s writings reveal her lifelong struggle with the restrictions set upon women. In her journals, she often contemplates the virtues of hard work, female modesty and the value of service. Florence had no compassion for those less dedicated, but she acknowledged the privileged nature of her life. Feminists did not fare well in the mainstream Victorian press.

⁶¹ Nightingale, *Cassandra*, 48.

⁶² Ahmed, “Victorian Woman Travelers.”

⁶³ Nightingale, *Cassandra*, vii.

Routinely ridiculed, frequently attacked, silenced or given only minimal coverage, feminists did not find it a simple matter to speak out about a women's place in Victorian culture.⁶⁴ She once wrote her father, "Why cannot a woman follow abstractions like a man? Has she less imagination, less intellect, less self-devotion, less religion than a man? I think not."⁶⁵ Because of the connection that middle-class Englishmen assumed between religious observance and morality, this last revelation was especially disturbing. In large measure, it reflects the failure of all organized churches to keep pace with the dramatic demographic and social changes of the first half of the century.⁶⁶

How is one to measure the enormity of Nightingale's choices to go beyond a predetermined path without a full understanding, as she put it, of the perceived inertness of the life of a housewife? The problems of the social stratosphere to which women belonged treated them all as such that were always portrayed as financially, intellectually and emotionally dependent on their male counterparts. Possibly the most important, and most broadly felt pattern dominating the life of the Victorian woman was what the reformer Jane Addams once called the "family claim."⁶⁷ According to this, women, far more than men, were regarded as possessions of their families. They were encouraged to perceive themselves as "relative creatures," whose path

⁶⁴ Hamilton, *Criminals, Idiots, and Minors*, 9.

⁶⁵ Letter from Florence Nightingale to WE Nightingale, Embley, 17 January 1846, Florence Nightingale Collection (1820-1910), Wellcome/Claydon MS 8992/122, Wellcome Library (WL). The Wellcome/Claydon collection differs in provenance to that of just letters reserved for the Wellcome Library. The Claydon House is location to the Verney Family Papers, in relation to Parthenope Verney nee Nightingale. The Wellcome Library has copies of the Claydon bundles. Access to the Claydon House is highly restricted to only the most professional historians and must have a letter of recommendation for access. From here out the difference will be such as the Wellcome Library will be WL as the Claydon Bundles will be referred to as Wellcome/Claydon.

⁶⁶ Nightingale, *Cassandra*, xiii.

⁶⁷ Jane Addams, "Domestic Service and the Family Claim," in *The World's Congress of Representative Women 2*, ed. May Wright Sewall. (Chicago: Rand, McNally & Co., 1894): 626-31.

in life was to nurture the family and to provide unstinting support for the head of the household.⁶⁸ The absence of feminist voices in what was recognize at the time as one of the key political debates of the century – the discussion on “The Woman Questions” – could have proven disastrous to the range of social and political claims that Victorian feminists committed to making for women. The topic of “Woman” – as a worker, spinster, citizen, moral guide, and prostitute – glutted the press from about the mid-1860s.⁶⁹

This is reminiscent of the *manus* and concept of the *pater familias* of ancient Roman and Greek times. Frequently published during the eighteenth, nineteenth, and even well into the twentieth century books and pamphlets described how a woman could keep a proper house, home, and happy husband if they subscribed to certain mindsets. Per *Feminine Attitudes in the Nineteenth century*, the typical woman of any period is a creature governed by fashions, customs, and habits.⁷⁰ Many researchers within women’s history have aimed to create a nuanced interpretation of the specific ways in which such factors influenced women’s identities.

Women of the Victorian Age should not be seen as victims with no ability to shape their lives. While patriarchal ideologies reigned supreme, we begin to see the seedlings of the feminist movement, especially with Queen Victoria coming to the throne in 1837. The crusade to see women as individuals would gain momentum later in the century at the hands of Emmeline Pankhurst and Susan B. Anthony. The idea of separate spheres, as pointed out by historian Kathryn Gleadle, has long dominated the historical inquiry into Victorian female life.⁷¹

⁶⁸ Jane Addams, “Domestic Service and the Family Claim,” in *The World’s Congress of Representative Women 2*, ed. May Wright Sewall. (Chicago: Rand, McNally & Co., 1894): 628.

⁶⁹ Hamilton, *Criminals, Idiots, and Minors*, 10.

⁷⁰ Cunnington, *Feminine Attitudes*, 4.

⁷¹ Kathryn Gleadle, *British Women in the Nineteenth century* (New York: Palgrave/Macmillan, 2001), 52.

Over the span of her life, Florence frequently found herself at odds with the constraints culture put on Victorian women. In *Suggestions for Thought* Nightingale queries, ““For joy that a *man* is born into the world, Christ says. And that *is* the subject of joy. But a woman must be born into the *family*. If she were born into the *world*, it would be a joy too. What joy is there in her being born into the smallest of all possible spheres, which will exercise no single one of her faculties?”⁷²

Nightingale would not have long to ponder what this call to service meant as not long after her family was off for the Grand Tour of Europe. Seven months after her vision her father lost a bid for Parliament after which the family decided it was time to take the fashionable Grand Tour. Now that the Napoleonic Wars were over it was once again safe to travel across Europe. The primary value of the Grand Tour was exposure to the cultural legacy of classical antiquity and the Renaissance in addition to meeting the aristocratic and fashionably polite society of the European continent. Brian Dolan reminds us that wealthy women found their way to Europe, taking them out of the staid Victorian society and opening a world of different food, clothing, music, mores, and landscape.

Without literature from great minds like Wollstonecraft, Rousseau, Martineau, and Browning, the platform for all the fury developing in Nightingale would be lost in translation without a firm understanding of her education and influences. The “cult of domesticity” and enforced idleness she fought so desperately against proved to be forces that forged her into a force to be reckoned with in the second half of her life. Her eyes wide open, embarking on a grand trip to Europe would soon open a floodgate of questions and desire within her.

⁷² Nightingale, *Cassandra*, 69.

CHAPTER 2 – THE CURIOUS UPBRINGING OF FLORENCE NIGHTINGALE

Earnestly recommended to the mind of young womankind as a subject they are bound to inform themselves. Do nothing of the sort, young ladies! Don't come to any conscientious convictions. Don't be persuaded to believe that you are more interestingly and lastingly concerned in your professional position as a woman.¹

Before Nightingale went to the Crimea, she led the customary life of unmarried upper-class Victorian women. Flo, as her family called her, was an outsider. Many historians today think Nightingale should fall into the category of the many English travel writers of the day, albeit during her time she did not consider herself to be such. Not really like her clever dilettante father in temperament, but she did have his brains. Nor did she resemble her beautiful mother Fanny, whose highest ambition was to shine in society. She could not be more different from her sister, either. Parthenope proved to be less gifted, often described as the homelier of the two sisters. Nightingale's tumultuous family life set the stage for difficult escape from normalcy. How did this peculiar family dynamic shape Nightingale?

Her mother, without openly admitting it to Florence, disapproved of her rambunctious child, often acting resentful of her behavior, as evidenced in her treatment of her youngest daughter. While Fanny took Parthenope with her everywhere, Florence lived with extended her family and their homes. In 1828, she wrote to her mother, in a sad attempt to gain acceptance from her, "I think of you every day. The day you went I finished my exercises and took Mr. Millegen a walk to the pond."² One can see in the many letters Nightingale wrote her mother, she was a child in desperate need of her approval. Self-consciously, she wrote home at the end of

¹ Margaret Oliphant, "The Conditions of Women," *Blackwood's Edinburgh Magazine* LXXIX (February 1858): 143.

² Letter from Florence Nightingale to Fanny Nightingale, Embley, 12 August 1828, MS 8991/13, WL. Mr. Millegen was the family gardener. No first name provided.

February 1830, “I think I am got some thing more good natured and complying.”³ In another, she describes diligently doing her future wifely duties, “I finished my housewife at the forest (that is to say, put on the strings and cassimere) and I began another.”⁴ She also writes, “I wrote my sermon in freehand and this letter. I have not quarreled with my sister.”⁵ Most heartbreaking of all, in an undated letter she told her mother, “How thankful you should be that your daughter for the first time in her life is doing some little good in her generation; do not grudge it her.”⁶

While Fanny Nightingale traveled and enjoyed herself, Florence was trying hard to be good. She was ten years old now, and their governess, Miss Sarah Christie, had led her to think very seriously about life. She tried to be very conscientious about little things, such as washing herself.⁷ Even as a young woman, Florence felt constantly trapped under the scrutiny of her mother, as evidenced by many diary entries. The hysterics she would go into later in life over the idea of Florence becoming a nurse proved legendary in their family. In a private journal entry, written in 1851, Florence quips:

My mother is a genius. She has the Genius of Order, to make a place, to organize a parish, to form a Society. She has obtained by her own exertions, the best society in England – she goes into a school and can put this little thing right which is wrong – she has a genius for doing all she wants to do & has never felt the

³ Vicinus, *Suffer and Be Still*, 14.

⁴ Letter from Florence Nightingale to Fanny Nightingale, Embley, 12 August 1828, MS 8991/13, WL. Housewife was apparently a “game” the sisters played where they practiced all the duties a good wife would perform, such as organizing, needlepoint, drawing, music, etc.

⁵ Letter from Florence Nightingale to Fanny Nightingale, Embley, 12 August 1828, MS 8991/13, WL.

⁶ Letter from Florence Nightingale to Fanny Nightingale, Embley, 12 August 1828, MS 8991/14-15, WL; Letter from Florence Nightingale to Fanny Nightingale, Embley, 16 October 1828, 8991/16, WL.

⁷ O’Malley, *Florence Nightingale*, 26.

absence of power. She is not happy. She has too much fatigue & too much anxiety – anxiety about Papa, about Parthe’s health, my duties, about the Servants, the parish. Oh, dear good woman, when I feel her disappointment in me, it is as if I was becoming insane.⁸

Nevertheless, after having read many letters and journal entries, it appears that Florence’s dreaming ultimately kept her mother at bay in her heart and mind.⁹ She could not share these dreams with anyone; not even to her cousin Hilary Bonham-Carter, with whom she had grown incredibly close. She was in torment. Her frustration with her mother would last her entire life. From youth to adulthood, she retreated into her journals to cope with her mother’s harsh criticisms. In such instances, she had imaginary conversations with her mother, saying all the things she wished she could bring herself to say. For example, in 1851 she wrote:

My dear, you think that with my ‘talents’ and my ‘European reputation’ and my ‘beautiful letters’ and all that this family may interfere in my matters, drawing me all my life – I shall not look out for work...you must look at me as your son, your vagabond son without his money. I can’t have you near so much as a son would have me. I haven’t had much yet, except Egypt and Rome. It would have been easier for you if I had married or become a nun! You must wonder why I haven’t

⁸ Florence Nightingale, Private Notes, 1851, ADD MS 43402, ff 79-83, BL.

⁹ From my own research and readings, I have come to this conclusion. Fanny frequently discussed her distaste for Florence’s whimsy in letters to her sisters. In addition, the numerous letters where a young Florence is begging her mother for a letter in return to the daily ones she sent to Fanny showcase the neglect that she showed her youngest daughter. The quotations provided I feel support this thought as one reads heart wrenching pleas from a seven-year-old girl begging for the love of her mother.

become married or a nun. Wouldn't you have rather had all your experiences than not? What are you to do with yourself now?¹⁰

Her sister, Parthenope, proved to be less gifted, always riding her skirt-tails wanting a share of her sister's success and all of her devotion. Nightingale often referred to her sister as Parthe, or Pop, in her letters. Parthenope shared only one talent, and that was to make herself ill when thwarted. She wished to enslave Florence, as she was later to enslave others, specifically the domineering way she ruled her husband. There was a love of power for its own sake running through the Nightingale women. After Parthe had a mental breakdown in 1852, Florence wrote "A physician once seriously told a sister who was being Devoured that she must leave home in order that the Devourer might recover health.... That person was myself."¹¹

From an early age, the two Nightingale girls were acculturated to take over the domestic control of their household as evidenced in the many letters written to Fanny during their early childhood.¹² This life did not appeal to Florence Nightingale. She laments that she felt trapped in many of her personal writings. In a private note, she writes woefully yet firmly of her ended courtship with Sir Robert Monckton Milnes, "I know I could not bear his life...that to be nailed to a continuation, an exaggeration of my present life without hope of another would be intolerable to me – that voluntarily to put it out of my power ever to be able to seize the chance of forming for myself a true and rich life would seem to me like a suicide."¹³

¹⁰ Private note of imaginary dialogue with Fanny Nightingale, 7 December 1851, ADD MS 43402, ff 66, BL.

¹¹ Florence Nightingale, Private Note, 1852, ADD MS 45793, ff 127, BL.

¹² In a letter to Fanny dated 12 August 1828 – Embley, she writes, "Dear Mama, I finished my housewife at the forest (that is to say put on the strings and cassimere) and I began another." MS 8991/13, WL.

¹³ Florence Nightingale, Private notes, June 1849, ADD MS 43402, ff 53-4, BL.

Under the care of their governess, Miss Christie, William Edward Nightingale [WEN] saw his lively, pert, accomplished, and infinitely curious little Florence turning into a gloomy, sanctimonious puppet, mouthing the sentimental pieties of her Unitarian upbringing.¹⁴ This greatly alarmed him; his heart heard Florence's pitiful cries for help, as it often would, and he took the unusual step of trespassing upon his wife's sphere and taking an active role in his daughter's lives.¹⁵ The Nightingales could not find a governess to satisfy WEN's intellectual requirements for his children, therefore, received an exemplary education from their father, a graduate of Cambridge. As Florence matured, he provided instruction in German, French, Italian, Latin and classical Greek as well as history, philosophy, and rudimentary science. WEN, as to be expected, was a demanding teacher and Florence rose to those challenges while her sister Parthenope did not. He discussed politics and religion with both girls. Deeply appreciative of the education he achieved at Edinburgh and Trinity College, Cambridge, he encouraged his daughters to think, to argue, to speak, and write clearly.

WEN enjoyed travel, books, and good conversation and he became a charming dilettante whose chief interest was in speculative problems, which he discussed with her throughout his life.¹⁶ Ever more important part of Florence's world, he read such books as *Hamlet* and *Old Mortality* to Florence while simultaneously teaching her Latin and Greek. He placed books into Florence's hands, little calf-bound volumes from the library at Embley. As a father, he was a very thoughtful man who liked to talk about his ideas, and the earnest, the responsive child, gave him a sympathy which he had hitherto only met with from his sister Mary. He and Florence drew

¹⁴ William Edward Nightingale, or WEN, will be referred to as WEN as he signs the majority of his letters in this manner and his family and friends refer to him as such.

¹⁵ Gill, *Nightingales*, 121-2.

¹⁶ Vicinus, *Suffer and Be Still*, 14.

closer together as she became his chief companion.¹⁷ By exposing Florence to a higher level of education, he helped broaden her horizons. These languages and readings would prove invaluable to her travels abroad.

Florence and her father shared a close communion, for they both had a passion for accuracy and abstract speculation. WEN once wrote to his brother Sam, “Florence astonishes me more and more. She is not like other folk of a truth, and I shall be her.”¹⁸ With this level of intelligence, a certain level of grief followed. In her own recollection, she was only six when the pointlessness of her home life began to dawn on her.¹⁹ Unusually, she frequently found herself a guest in their drawing with WEN and his friends.²⁰

Unfortunately, the close bond she shared with her father led to him becoming the most damaging relationship in her life, as evidenced in a letter to her father in 1851 where she writes, “My dear Father, on my 32nd birthday I think I must write a word of acknowledgment to you. I am glad to think that my youth is past and rejoice that it never, never can return, that time of follies and of bondage, of unfulfilled hopes and disappointed *inexperience* when a man possesses nothing, not even himself.”²¹ Dominated by an insensitive wife, he gave his affections to and shared his interests with his favorite child, Florence. The education of his daughter, whose abilities so closely paralleled his own, was inherently important to him. To her education, he brought intellectual energy and imagination, yet in other aspects, such as defending Florence’s proclivities to Fanny, he was a weak man.

¹⁷ O’Malley, *Florence Nightingale*, 38-9.

¹⁸ Letter from WE Nightingale to Sam Nightingale, November 1844, MS 8992/69, Wellcome/Claydon.

¹⁹ Nightingale, “Lebenslauf,” 1; O’Malley, *Florence Nightingale*, 21.

²⁰ Nightingale, “Lebenslauf,” 1.

²¹ Vicinus, *Suffer and Be Still*, 54.

WEN continued with his goals of improving his estate, caring for his health, reading aloud and imparting his dreams to Florence. She listened and learned eagerly; she was working at Cicero, translating Tasso into French, and she studying French history. She knew enough Italian to sympathize with Parthe in her delight over *I Promissi Sposi*. Greek opened the door to Plato and entirely new lights on the pattern set up in Heaven.²² These scholarly endeavors proved to be useful tools later in life, first when the family embarked on their tour of Europe and in her adulthood when she traveled with the Bracebridges through Egypt, Italy, and Greece. WEN encouraged her to travel and to follow her dreams (although he would later refuse to defend them).

An important aspect of the Nightingale's life is that of their religion. A minority religion and sometimes scorned by other Christian groups, Unitarianism was a potent force in the religious, educational, cultural, social, economic, and political life of those places in which it flourished, particularly Britain. In England, it emerged from eighteenth century Rational Dissent. As an open religion, insistent on the right of all to free enquiry in religion, Unitarianism had no set creeds and throughout the nineteenth century was subject to varying internal divisions. Yet Unitarians were characterized by their denial of the Trinity and of original sin, their affirmation of applying reason to the scriptures as to everything else, and their quest for moral order and perfection, a point worth mentioning as Florence very much believed in these. A deep belief in rational education as a prerequisite for all if they were to obtain true morality and religion underpinned their huge commitment to educational ventures and social reform, including greater equality for women than was the norm. This explains Florence's father, WEN, and his absolute insistence on educating his two daughters and treating them as his peers. At the same time, since

²² O'Malley, *Florence Nightingale*, 40.

their leaders tended mostly to come from the new urban commercial and industrial elites, their social philosophy was pervaded or tinged with social and economic prejudices that indicated their class, as evidenced by Fanny and Parthenope's extreme reactions to Florence's decision to go into a life of service as a nurse, a position far below their status. The contribution of Unitarians to theology, education, culture, social reform, economic thinking, and local and national politics, particularly in Britain, makes a study of them essential for understanding nineteenth century history.

Ground into her as a child, Nightingale desperately laments as an adult was the enforced idleness she endured. She began a diary shortly after the arrival of Miss Sarah Christie, their new governess, and her first entry was November 15, 1829, "I obliged to sit still by Miss Christie, till I had the spirit of obedience. Carters and Blanche here, not allowed to be with them. Mama at Fair-Oaks ill. Myself unhappy, bad eyes, shade, and cold."²³ After this experience, she felt so sad that she wrote no more in that volume. Her governess as a child was harsh and critical. In her curriculum vitae she writes:

I had a sickly childhood. The climate of England did not suit me, after that of Italy (Florence) where I was born. I could never like the play of other children. The happiest time of my life was during a year's illness which I had when I six years old. I never learnt to write till I was eleven or twelve, owing to a weakness in my hands, and I was shy to misery.

At seven years of age we had a governess (Miss Sarah Christie), who brought me up most severely. She was just and well intentioned, but she did not understand

²³ Florence Nightingale, "Lebenslauf", 6.

children and she used to shut me up for six weeks at a time. My sister, on the contrary, she spoilt.²⁴

Before the age of seven, she found herself frequently accompanying her nurse, Mrs. Frances Gale, to visit ladies in town and to check on their well-being. These happy days lived long in her memory, but she also cherished a story of heroism she had heard at Betley Hall in Cheshire. As cited by O'Malley, "One of Caroline's sisters [Georgiana] had once hurt her arm badly and had concealed the fact, because she did not want to have her music lessons stopped. When at last pain had forced her to tell, the doctor had said she would die if she did not have her arm cut off. She had gone *all alone* to Chester and submitted to the operation."²⁵ The story appealed to Flo, and she looked at Miss Georgiana with awe. It was also in these early journals she noted the curious things the adults did to stay healthy. One autumn, one of Miss Christie's friends paid a visit which Florence watched her in awe because she had a fever and was obliged to drink a bottle of wine every day to preserve her life.²⁶

Florence Nightingale, named after the town of her birth in Italy, seemingly lived the life of a vagabond child. Shuttlecocked frequently between the family home and the homes of her extended family, she never knew if she would find herself at Lea Hurst in Derbyshire or at the family home at Embley Park in Hampshire. She spent more time each year in London as she grew older. Born with every advantage of wealth, she showcased unusual tendencies as a child and had many struggles with accepting restrictions put upon her by family. Her remarkable

²⁴ Florence Nightingale, "Lebenslauf" for *Kaiserswerth Source* "Lebenslauf," original at Kaiserswerth Diakoniewerk, published in Anna Sticker, "Florence Nightingale: Curriculum Vitae" (Kaiserswerth: Diakoniewerk, 1954), 6.

²⁵ O'Malley, *Florence Nightingale*, 18. O'Malley does not provide the last names of Caroline and Miss Georgiana listed with this story and I infer it was a close friend of nurse Gale's.

²⁶ O'Malley, *Florence Nightingale*, 22.

abilities of imagination and analysis combined to form a passionate heart and dominating will. Her spirit yearned to be taken seriously, desperately seeking the freedom to develop a powerful intellect all the while relying on the security and balance that comes from discipline.

In her youth, she visited many relatives, traveled abroad for extended periods and was expected to be at the call of her parents. Nevertheless, unlike her sister and cousins, Nightingale was not content. As often as she could, she would sneak away to visit hospitals and to work in the village; she spent long hours studying government documents and statistics; she wrote letters to confidantes about God's purposes, especially for her.²⁷ World travel helped open the gates for her to find the courage to exercise her call to service. This trip abroad could not have come at a more difficult time in her life.

Her first spiritual awakening took place shortly after her "call to service," 7 February 1837.²⁸ The call, in turn, occurred after a conversion in 1836; we know little about it except but the book that prompted it, by American Congregational minister Jacob Abbot, *The Corner-stone, or, a Familiar Illustration of the Principles of Christian Truth*.²⁹ O'Malley makes small discussion of this, but additional biographies have not examined it in detail. Florence's mystical experiences prove to be especially interesting as before this she made no mention of any interest

²⁷ Vicinus, *Suffer and Be Still*, 3.

²⁸ O'Malley, *Florence Nightingale*, 15. Cook says that in a private note written in 1867, of which I was unable to locate, that Florence Nightingale first recorded on 7 February 1837 that God had called her to service. Woodham-Smith says that in another note from 1874, also unable to locate, that Nightingale recorded hearing voices four times in 1837 at Embley, 1852 while traveling in Egypt, in 1854 upon arriving at Scutari Hospital in the Crimea, and 1861 when she returned. Woodham-Smith is quite clear that Nightingale had what Catholics term an "audition." O'Malley says that though Nightingale referred many times in her private papers to her 1837 call, "no records survive of the form in which it reached her," 43.

²⁹ Reverend Jacob Abbot, *The Corner-stone, or, a Familiar Illustration of the Principles of Christian Truth* (London: R.B. Seeley and. Burnside, 1834); McDonald, *CWFN* vol. 7, 5. This "conversion" is only mentioned twice in her journals with zero elaboration on what she means by it other than it happened.

in mysticism. Her Unitarian beliefs promoted anything but spiritual visions and communications. It is from this point onward, that by her account Florence Nightingale became a tortured soul, torn in her belief that she truly had mystic experiences with God and how to fulfill his requests. This belief, which she held so strongly would ultimately be the foundation upon which she built her empire in nursing. She has not read accounts of medieval mystics at this stage in her life, but these readings will prove influential in adulthood.

An imaginative child from a young age, Florence frequently set up hospitals for injured animals, bugs, and whatever else she stumbled upon in the garden. Nightingale began to desire to help sick people, ever since she had stayed with her cousins the Nicholsons and had seen their good governess, Miss Johnson, helping and advising all who needed it.³⁰ Her greatest interest would be when any of her older cousins or aunts brought their babies around. Nightingale had a sweet nature and referred to any infants as “our baby” and referred to her young baby cousin, William Shore, as her baby frequently, whereas the entire family simply reference him as Shore.³¹ Babies were certainly the greatest consolation of all she once wrote.³² She found them to be quite pleasant but also gave her an opportunity to be truly useful to the adults. When her grandmother Shore came to stay at the end of March in 1828, Nightingale determined that she would read to her every day, emulating her older cousin Hilary Bonham-Carter. After a little consideration, she felt she might do more than this; she might do everything – well, no, not

³⁰ O'Malley, *Florence Nightingale*, 22.

³¹ Letter from Florence Nightingale to Fanny Nightingale, Embley, 16 October 1832, MS 8991/16, WL.

³² Letter from Florence Nightingale to Fanny Nightingale, Embley, 16 October 1832, MS 8991/16, WL.

everything, but nearly everything that Aunt Julia did for Grandmama, and be almost as patient and kind.³³

It appeared Florence was destined from a young age to become a nurse, albeit she could not have foreseen the immeasurable change she would implement, but her mother was intent on keeping her from this profession. During that spring she, her torment eased as she became more useful than ever before. She not only helped the family by not only nursing the sick at home; she worked diligently among the poor in town. Just when things were at their worst, when the pressure was greatest, she had thought that a call had sounded in her ears. She did not know where it would lead her but follow it she must.³⁴

Few friends were aware of the inner turmoil within Nightingale, as her external-self bounced between the pleasure of shining intellectually in social circles and the desire to do something practical that would fulfill a deeper need.³⁵ In her father's study she first heard of Kaiserswerth-am-Rhine, a Catholic-run hospital staffed almost entirely by nurses. While still an adolescent, she tired of this privileged and purposeless life, and at age sixteen she wrote in a private note that God had called her into service. Instinctively she knew that service to God meant service to humanity, but the precise means of doing so eluded her. She sought advice from a friend, Christian von Bunsen, an Egyptologist and the Prussian ambassador to the British court asking him: "What can an individual do, towards lifting the load of suffering from the helpless and the miserable?"³⁶ It turned out he was the one first to give her the little pamphlet on

³³ O'Malley, *Florence Nightingale*, 35.

³⁴ Martha Vicinus, ed., *Suffer and Be Still: Women in the Victorian Age* (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1972), 43.

³⁵ Vicinus, *Suffer and Be Still*, 3.

³⁶ Baroness Frances von Bunsen, *Memoirs of Baron Bunsen*. Second edition, abridged and corrected. Vol. II (London: Longmans, Green, and Co., 1869), 12.

Kaiserswerth. In his memoirs, Bunsen wrote about him and his wife meeting Florence. He valued her character. On a few occasions, he glimpsed her soul which he believed required an opportunity to develop.

Her energy required nothing and occurred peculiarly to rouse and reveal the soul which subsisted in her, in the fullness of its energy, or the powers which only waited for an opportunity to be developed.³⁷ Bunsen and his wife wrote fondly of Nightingale and in their memoirs described “her calm dignity of deportment, self-conscious without either shyness or presumption, and the few words indicating deep reflection, just views, and clear perceptions of life and its obligations.”³⁸ The Baron went on to say, “that trifling acts showing forgetfulness of self and devotedness to others, were of sufficient force to bring conviction to the observer, even before it had been proved by all outward experience, that she was possessed of all that moral greatness which her subsequent course of action, suffering, and influential power, has displayed.”³⁹ Nightingale revered the Baron and his wife and kept company with them whenever they visited. In response, Bunsen gave her the yearbook of the Institution of Deaconess in Kaiserwerth, Germany, a hospital and orphanage served by Protestant sisters. Bunsen had gone there in 1844 to find qualified nurses for the German hospital he had established in London; if he had only known then how prolific this small pamphlet would become to Nightingale.⁴⁰

Soon Florence would get to put all this new knowledge to practice as a journey of immense proportions loomed on her horizon. Finally, her pursuits of knowledge and worldly understanding would find a place where she could exercise them and be treated as an equal and

³⁷ Bunsen, *Memoirs of Baron Bunsen*, 12.

³⁸ Bunsen, *Memories of Baron Bunsen*, 12.

³⁹ Bunsen, *Memories of Baron Bunsen*, 12.

⁴⁰ Bunsen, *Memories of Baron Bunsen*, 13.

not an inquisitive child. Her curious upbringing set a solid foundation for her to enter the world ready to absorb every inch of what she saw and heard. The cage created by her family, specifically her mother and sister, no longer could contain her. The enforced idleness of her life had barriers that would soon be broken. No one could know what a profound effect travel would have on a young mind so thirsty for experience.

CHAPTER 3 – A CONTINENTAL AWAKENING

Do you not see how necessary a world of pains and troubles is to school an intelligence and make it a soul? A place where the heart must feel and suffer in a thousand diverse ways?¹

In 1834, when Florence was fourteen, her father ran for Parliament for Andover. The Nightingale children, out on a cold, seaside excursion at Ryde, received a letter announcing their father's candidacy. It was not meant to be for WEN refused to pay the large sums associated with running.² In the aftermath, the family decided it would be a good time to take a Grand Tour of the continent as a treat for all the efforts they had invested into their father's campaign. The Nightingales hoped this might also give both girls a patina of European sophistication as they were to be introduced at court upon their return. A Continental tour offered a combination of culture and exercise, self-improvement and entertainment, lonely reverie and high society that was synonymous with Fanny's family's way of life.³ The irony of Fanny's thinking on how this might change Florence, with whom she was still not satisfied, would not become apparent until fourteen years later. In a private note, written in 1852, titled "The Butchered Roman Holiday," Florence wrote:

Women don't consider themselves as human beings at all. There is absolutely no God, no country, no duty to them at all, except family...I have known a good deal of convents. And of course everyone has talked of the petty grinding tyrannies supposed to be exercised there. But I know nothing like the petty grinding tyranny

¹ John Keats and, Harry Buxton Forman and Maurice Buxton Foreman, eds., *The Letters of John Keats* (London: Reeves and Turner, 1895), 327.

² Letter to Florence Nightingale from Fanny Nightingale, Cowes, England, April 1834, MS 8991/73, WL.

³ Gill, *Nightingales*, 136.

of a good English family. And the only alleviation is that the tyrannized submits with a heart full of affection.⁴

To say the girls were excited was an understatement; for years, they had been practicing their French, German, and Italian. They entered a time of adventure; Florence finally had a personal context for all that she studied but also for her to reflect on her call to service and what it meant. During the following months, the reasons for going abroad grew stronger. First, English winters were hard and long. Second, and most significantly, influenza raged in the Nightingale household in 1836, as well in the village. Fanny had been worried about Parthenope's health since she was a baby and now that she had caught the flu, her worry only increased. One year after Parthe had entered the land of disease as a patient, Florence confirmed her vocation as a nurse. Mrs. Gale (the housekeeper) was ill, as was Shore Nightingale and Bertha (his nanny), who were staying with them. At this point, the young Florence wore herself out caring for members of her family. WEN was not very well and made himself (so Mrs. Nightingale said) worse than he needs by brooding.⁵ In her curriculum vitae, Florence describes the family illness: "When I was seventeen (it was the year of influenza in London) our whole family had it. I had to nurse fifteen servants in bed, my mother and two children of her brother, who were in the house. I had only one assistant, the cook, who was not ill."⁶ So off they went, on 8 September 1837, the Nightingale brood set off by carriage down to the Pyrenees.

On this European trip, Nightingale was only beginning to consider how to act on her call and how to deal with her reflections on life, God, visions, dreams, angels, purpose, and work.⁷

⁴ Private note titled "The Butchered Roman Holiday," 1850, ADD MS 43402, ff 88, BL.

⁵ O'Malley, *Nightingale*, 41.

⁶ Nightingale. "Lebenslauf," 10.

⁷ McDonald, Lynn, ed., *The Collected Works of Florence Nightingale*, Vol. 7 (Ontario: Wilfred Laurier Press, 2004), 1.

Before departure and a few months before her seventeenth birthday, Florence recorded that she had a mystical experience in her personal journal. She wrote that God had spoken to her and called her to His service, although what that was to be was unclear. This was the first of four such experiences.⁸ Clearly, Nightingale was not to be satisfied with the conventional life of a Victorian woman.⁹ Florence's peculiarities revealed themselves to her parents at an early age. Travel abroad induced inner reflection, a turn towards the interior self, one that proves self-reflection and future realization.

Of all the privileges of the English gentry, European travel most appealed to Florence. Here was a context for her studies in history, art, and the classics. At last, she became acquainted with a group of people who shared her interests fully. This interest is showcased in her descriptive letters home and travel journals. Nightingale truly had a gift for landscape painting, incisive analysis, and commentary on the physical and social landscape. Throughout her early life, Nightingale fought the notion of becoming a writer, but her travel journals and letters absolutely should be included in nineteenth century writing. Her descriptions of places, people, and things are so vivid they transport the reader, and one can journey with her. Unfortunately, these diaries, titled *La Vie de Florence Rossignol*, were lost by Ida B. O'Malley. It is worth mentioning that later biographies, such as the ones written by Mark Bostridge, Gillian Gill, and most notably Lynn McDonald, mention the loss of these papers by O'Malley and Sir Edward Cook in their introductions and question how this was possible. Perhaps, these were the journals where she reveals the content of her "dreams." Others were the travel diaries from her first trip to

⁸ Cook, *Florence Nightingale*, 15.

⁹ Vicinus, *Suffer and Be Still*, 17.

Europe. Immeasurably important historical artifacts that would lend insight to her life during these formative years have been lost to history.

In O'Malley's *Florence Nightingale* Chapter 3, titled "The Nightingales Abroad, 1837-1839," has itself become an archival resource. This chapter is one of the only published accounts of Florence's diaries from this trip, as letters are few and far between. In the first footnote of the chapter, O'Malley states "The chief sources of this chapter are the journals Florence wrote while abroad. There are comparatively few letters."¹⁰ She discusses how Nightingale's diaries were complete and had the same thoroughness her *La Vie Florence Rossignol* possessed. There is a stark contrast in the way O'Malley describes, in depth, the significance and experiences of this first European trip compared to her earliest biographer, Sir Edward T. Cook, who all but glosses over this important event in her life, dedicating a meager six pages in his two-volume work on Nightingale. It is important to note that, aside from her accounts on the scenery and art, it is a mixture of notes and statistics upon the laws, the land systems, the social conditions, and benevolent institutions of the several states and cantons.¹¹

In addition to her travel journals, she kept the second set of journals in which she regales every opera and performance they attended, commenting on everything from the richness of material used for the costumes to her extreme displeasure of actors and their poor performance. McDonald quotes Florence's *libretti* with her commentary on the costumes for *Beatrice di Tenda* as "the prima donna began with a white satin gown and train bordered with silver and ermine" and that by scene four she was "in purple satin bordered with white, white scarf around her waist

¹⁰ O'Malley, *Florence Nightingale*, 44.

¹¹ Cook, *The Life of Florence Nightingale* vol.1, 17.

and hair disheveled.”¹² In a letter to her friend Miss Strutt, Florence writes, “The opera here [Florence] is inferior to that of Genoa and La Blasis [Virginia Blasis]...is far from being a first-rate actress as the prima donna at Genoa.”¹³ Maybe the fascination lay in the fact that opera gave a small group of women great power. As Gillian Gill so succinctly puts it, opera gives us an insight into her nature.¹⁴ The opera stage was a rare place where a woman could use her talent to carve out a life for herself. It was the genre of passion and pleasure and torment. In an opera, the female voice soared, triumphant, even in death.¹⁵ Yet a love of opera is not all that came about during her time abroad.

The Nightingale sisters could scarcely contain themselves as they made their way to the mountains. The family followed a traditional travel route of many Europeans before them, possibly using one of the many travel guides available on the best ways to explore Europe. Across the English Channel, south down the Sienne to Paris, then taking a boat down the Rhone to Marseille, before taking a ship to Pisa where the family would catch a carriage to Florence before heading north to Switzerland and eventually following the same path back home. Everything they passed was all so curiously un-English. That was a delight to them, they experienced and felt the full excitement and indefinable exhilaration which the first days of foreign travel bring to the imaginative young. Each happy moment surpassed the last; the evening walk through the narrow streets of Le Havre, seeing all the gay, pretty people sitting at

¹² Excerpts from Florence Nightingale’s *Libretti* she kept on operas, March 1838, McDonald, *CWFN* vol. 7, 23.

¹³ Letter from Florence Nightingale to Miss Strutt, Florence, 26 March 1838, Claydon House Bundle 121.

¹⁴ Gill, *Nightingales*, 142.

¹⁵ Gill, *Nightingales*, 141.

the cafes.¹⁶ Not one to be caught up in balls and operas, Florence made frequent notes on the poverty and turmoil they passed through.

In Europe, Florence honed her skills as an adept statistician. Per Cook, she developed a love of statistical method, which became one of her most marked characteristics.¹⁷ The region was desperately poor, and Florence kept staggering records of what she saw on their travels. The impressions they made came so fast she could barely outline them in her journal. Astonished at the old women covered with flies sat in the street; children ran naked, old soldiers begged for food and misery engendered passivity and cruelty, Nightingale often cried at their plight.¹⁸ The impressions they made came so fast she could barely outline them in her journal. Everywhere she saw old soldiers of Napoleon, hardly believing that “the Emperor, the Emperor was dead.”¹⁹ Even for old Napoleon soldiers, Florence felt compelled to help them.

Yet when it came to the foreigners she met on her travels, she charmingly described the different kinds of people she met as they wound their way through society in Italy: “There were very few English besides a white lady six feet high, *dame d’honneur* of a Russian princess, the mother of eight [paper cut here] the whole evening and waltzed by far the most beautifully of anyone there. Before you [cut off] been to Nice many hours, you are being asked six times if you waltz by every person, that being the keynote here.”²⁰ Florence felt a keen sense of home while in Italy, and it is apparent in her writings.

¹⁶ O’Malley, *Florence Nightingale*, 45.

¹⁷ Cook, *The Life of Florence Nightingale* vol.1, 16.

¹⁸ Gill, *Nightingales*, 139.

¹⁹ Excerpt from lost Nightingale travel journal, O’Malley, *Florence Nightingale*, 46.

²⁰ Letter from Florence Nightingale to Marianne Nicholson, Nice, 20 December 1837, 8991/93, Wellcome/Claydon.

The Nightingales arrived in Genoa, Italy 13 January 1838 and stayed until 14 February, attending balls, the opera, visiting people and places, and themselves giving a successful soiree. She wrote to a family friend, Miss Strutt, in 1838, that, “Genoa is a paradise – I do not believe we shall ever like any town in Italy so well, certainly not Florence, and we have no desire to revisit France where we spent four months.”²¹ She exalts the beauty of Genoa, finally seeing many of the places and art she had only read about. In the same letter to Miss Strutt she goes on to say, “Everything there is magnificence: you walk up flights of white Carrara marble steps, each made of a single slab twenty feet long, to the paupers in the *Albergo dei Poveri*, where is the most beautiful bas-relief and most finished work of Michelangelo’s in existence, a little Pietà (the heads only) of the Virgin supporting her dead son.”²² Everywhere she went Nightingale chronicled every visual impact of her travels.

The two great themes to emerge in Nightingale’s writings are faith (Nightingale’s call to serve God practically in the world) and politics (her liberalism and passion for independence movements, especially Italian).²³ Following her father’s keen interest in politics as she traveled, the study of powerful men and their activities started to mean something different to her than what he explained them to be to her. With him, the realm of competing ideas and philosophies, and lively discussion. While they traveled, she began to apply political principals she had learned to what she saw and how it affected the people she encountered. She finally knew her calling.

²¹ Letter from Florence Nightingale to Miss Strutt, Florence, 26 March 1838, MS 8991/121, Wellcome/Claydon. Florence did not address her by first name, therefore that information is missing.

²² Letter from Florence Nightingale to Miss Strutt, Florence, 26 March 1838, MS 8991/121, Wellcome/Claydon.

²³ Letter from Florence Nightingale to Marianne Nicholson, Nice, 20 December 1837, MS 8991/93, Wellcome/Claydon.

On the banks of the Bidassoa, she was not too much taken up with Peninsular War to notice the dreadful effect of the strife then going on intermittently between Carlists and Cristinos for the throne of Spain. She pitied the miserable appearance of the wretched disbanded soldiers and the hardened, glazed look of the poor women.²⁴ She seized opportunities to visit charitable institutions, and she tried to find out about the French poor law and its effect on the people.²⁵

More than any opera Nightingale found herself captivated by the people passing on the road in Genoa. In a letter to her cousin Marianne Nicholson she says, “The Genoese were very kind to us, as they are not much troubled with English but, poor people, there is such a horrid system of espionage that they scarcely dare raise their voices. Our great friend [name not mentioned] had been in solitary *carcere duro* at Alexandria for several months for mere suspicion.”²⁶ Profoundly captivated in what she had read and been told about the Risorgimento by her father and his friends, and of the idea to form a United Italy, and one of her goals on this visit was to meet with Federico Confalonieri, the great patriot.²⁷

Despite the immense joy she felt going to the opera and seeing the great cathedrals, or as O’Malley quotes her saying, “All the sudden lovely sights such as new-fallen snow lying on the scarlet petals of blossoming geraniums,” Florence thought less of the joys of life and more and more of the woes of Italy.²⁸ She noted that in Genoa there were 30,000 inhabitants, of whom

²⁴ O’Malley, *Florence Nightingale*, 47.

²⁵ O’Malley, *Florence Nightingale*, 48.

²⁶ Unaddressed letter from Florence Nightingale, Pisa, 27 February 1838, MS 8991/95, WL.

²⁷ Federico Confalonieri (1785-1846) Italian politician, writer, and revolutionary, and close friend of WEN; Charles Klopp, *Sentences: The Memoirs and Letters of Italian Political Prisoners from Benvenuto Cellini to Aldo Moro* (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 1999); O’Malley, *Florence Nightingale*, 50.

²⁸ Excerpt from lost travel journal, O’Malley, *Florence Nightingale*, 51.

8,000 were soldiers, 8,000 priests and “that the spirit of the nobles was gone, though they were as proud as ever; they lived in excessive ignorance and the people in excessive poverty.”²⁹

She looked with horror at the fortress built by the King of Piedmont from which the whole town could be blown up in the case of insurrection.³⁰ The more time the family spent in Genoa, Florence felt her “calling” becoming clearer in her mind and what she needed to do. On February 9, Florence visited an institution for the “deaf and dumb.”³¹ Deeply interested in seeing their handiwork, she found herself reading their answers to historical questions of much the same nature as those she and Parthe had had to answer in their youth.³² It is not known who took her on the tour. The Genoese Institution for the Education of the Deaf and Dumb had been established in 1801 by a priest named Giam Battista and was currently run by Abbé Luigi Boselli.³³ She noted of the children there “that though they had singularly intelligent faces, they looked sickly and melancholy, and that the rooms in which they lived were cold and not very clean.”³⁴ This is a completely different description from what would later be presented to the New York State Legislature as they looked to this school as an example of how to run similar institutions in the United States, that described them as clean, efficient, and a very happy place to live.

²⁹ Letter from Florence Nightingale to Selma Benedicks, Place Vendôme, 28 November 1838, McDonald, *CWFN* vol. 7, 14.

³⁰ Letter from Florence to Hilary Bonham-Carter, Genoa, 2 February 1838, WL MS 8991/96.

³¹ Excerpt from lost travel journal, O’Malley, *Florence Nightingale*, 54.

³² Unaddressed letter from Florence Nightingale, Pisa, 27 February 1838, WL MS 8991/95.

³³ “List of All Foreign Books Received since the Eleventh Report,” *Sixteenth Report of the National Institution, for the Education of Deaf and Dumb Children of The Poor in Ireland* (Dublin: M. Goodwin, 1832), 55-7; “Appendix, 110. *Sui Sordo-muti Sulla loro istruzione ed il loro numero, memoria del direttore del reale istituto di Genova*, 1834,” *Twenty-Ninth Annual Report of the Directors of The New-York Institution for the Instruction of the Deaf and Dumb to the Legislature of the State of New-York for the Year 1843* (New York: Mahlon Day, Printer, 1835), 101.

³⁴ Journal excerpt from lost travel diaries, O’Malley, *Florence Nightingale*, 51.

These Italian exiles Florence met in her travels, were destitute, and Florence, who had never known anything but a life of comfort, saw the struggles survive of the people brought up like she. She looked at them with sympathy, which perhaps, held a shred of envy in it. In a strange sense she desired to live life – not the way she did at home but by feeling with her hands and working for what she had.

While in Genoa, she also visited an infant school with a man she met named Guicciardini. He had set up the school and Florence was so impressed with how he loved each child as his own.³⁵ Her journal and letters are so overflowing with descriptions of all the things she saw and people she met, and with such robust descriptions, one might feel transported. In a letter to her friend, Henrietta Wyvill in January 1838, she describes her departing views of Genoa, “The churches of Genoa are as rich in their way as the palaces, the walls literally *pietra dura*, the ceilings all in fresco. Marble pavements and columns are the order of the day and in Sant’Ambrozio, you will see when you come an exquisite Guido.”³⁶ This marked the end of their time in Genoa. Off the family traveled through the Apennines and towards the city to which Florence was named after.

On the road to Florence, Nightingale remarks in her journal, “The flourishing valley and luxurious vines, twined to the trees, belied the evidence which the strings of beggars reaching the greater part of the way from Pisa to Florence would seem to give.”³⁷ O’Malley’s extracts state that the Nightingales’ quarters at the Albergo del Arno in Florence, near the Ponte Vecchio, included a salon fifty feet long. Gale, their servant, was flabbergasted when she saw the frescoes

³⁵ O’Malley, *Florence Nightingale*, 52.

³⁶ Letter to Henrietta Wyvill, Columbia University, Presbyterian Hospital School of Nursing Archives and Special Collections, Auchincloss Florence Nightingale Collection, Box 2, C1. “Pietra dura” means solid rock.

³⁷ Unaddressed letter from Florence Nightingale, Pisa, 27 February 1838, MS 8991/95, WL.

of heathen gods depicted on the walls of her room.³⁸ The family spent much time visiting art museums, and churches, and made a point to attend the opera as much as possible. Of course, both girls recorded all the details of picture, plots, and singers.³⁹

Little evidence survives of this trip. Some of the lost correspondence is between Florence and a Swedish friend, Selma Benedicks (later Bjorkenstam), whom Nightingale met in Florence in 1838. These accounts offer wonderful descriptions of Venice and Paris. In McDonald's collection of Nightingale papers the letters are reproduced and range from joking discussions to serious comments on politics (English, Italian, French, and Swiss) and Italian history (especially the republic in Florence, art, and Swedish literature).⁴⁰

Nightingale had a solid background in Italian culture thanks to her father. She had read the poets Tasso, Ariosto, and Alfieri in Italian with her father and had analyzed Cicero's *Tusculan Disputations*. There are references to Alfieri's *Conquista dei Pazzi* and Guerazzi's *Assedio di Firenze*, then a banned book in Florence, for it described the siege of the city by the Medicis and Michelangelo's part in the defense.⁴¹ Looking down on the city from San Miniato late in April she wrote: "Poor Florence, whom he laboured so hard to save, lies below, so beautiful in the evening light that even without the *Assedio di Firenze* to stir one up, she would make one cry to think what she is now."⁴² She colorfully writes of their trip from Pisa to Florence:

³⁸ Unaddressed letter from Florence Nightingale, Pisa, 27 February 1838, MS 8991/95, WL.

³⁹ Unaddressed letter from Florence Nightingale, Pisa, 27 February 1838, MS 8991/95, WL.

⁴⁰ McDonald, *CWFN* vol. 7, 19.

⁴¹ Francesco Guicciardini, *The History of Italy* vol. X (London: Z. Stuart, 1763), 451; Cicero and W.H. Main, ed., *Tusculan Disputations* (London: W. Pickering, 1824).

⁴² Excerpt from lost travel journal written on the road from Florence, 1838, O'Malley, *Florence Nightingale*, 53.

An important day for us, arriving at our furthest distance from home and at the city where we expected most of interest, and felt most of enthusiasm – it being the scene of the great days of the republicanism of the thirteenth and fourteenth century. The rains fell from the time we left the walls of Pisa till we reached Florence; the floods had overflowed even the high river banks and the fertile valley of the Arno was thus for us deprived of its charms. Only dark towers of the days from those of the Romans to those of the fall of Florence, in the sixteenth century, showed pictures of time, perpetual contest between the vigorous republicans of Florence and Pisa.⁴³

Nightingale's vivid descriptions of her travels transport the reader, making them a passenger on her journey.

There are few letters that survive from this time abroad. Many were simply lost, others destroyed after a vicious feud that ensued after the family's return. In a letter to her Grandmother Mary Shore (her paternal Grandmother), she recounts their visit to Pisa and Venice, calling the Leaning Tower hideous and remarking on how poorly thought out the town of Venice was situated in the middle of a *laguna* (lagoon). Nightingale regaled her grandmother with stories of their drawing lessons with masters and the great improvement of her Italian. She closed a letter with a romantic description of mornings in Venice stating, "We have the most entertaining view of the quay under our windows – Greeks and Turks and women with veils and every night singing men and women..."⁴⁴

⁴³ Letter from Florence Nightingale to Miss Strutt, Florence, 26 March 1838, MS 8991/121, Wellcome/Claydon.

⁴⁴ Letter from Florence Nightingale to Grandmother Mary Shore, Fontainebleau, 6 October 1838, MS 8991/97, Wellcome/Claydon.

The entire trip seems to be nothing but a whirlwind of hosting guests, going to balls, ceremonies, museums, operas, and concertos – an irony to arise upon her return to London where she bemoaned the idea of ever going to another gala. Yet it was time for the family to head north again and Florence to make her most significant lifetime friendships.

O'Malley has the best account of the Nightingale's arrival in Geneva, Switzerland. Although Florence loved every second she was in Italy, it would be a couple of weeks before Geneva had a grip on her. WEN wrote home to his brother, Sam Nightingale:

We have been a week in Switzerland and our young ladies breathe nothing but regards for Italy, although the St. Gothard (??) moved us here in the finest entrance into the land of mountains. To tell of the vast variety of days work which we have done since leaving Milan. All this a distance of a very few miles, would be [goes into long description of the terrain] Alas! An interesting ride in the Alps, all the charm is gone and we love the native language and unintelligible tongue and we have found "the Diet" sitting here accordingly have had great success in finding great folks in Geneva – Lausanne, Sismondi, LC, also 3 or 4 Cretans of foreign ministers who have given us mind to talk on high matters of politics.⁴⁵

In Geneva, she met scholars from all over the world, exchanged conversation with Italian exiles, and was treated not only as an adult but in some circumstances as an equal, something for which she developed a taste. The situation the Nightingales encountered in Geneva in the summer of 1838 was different from anything else they had experienced. Here she heard tales from the

⁴⁵ Letter from WE Nightingale to Sam Nightingale, Geneva, 22 July 1838, ADD MS 42839 A, BL.

Italian exiles who had been there since the failed insurrection of 1821.⁴⁶ At home, a girl her age would have been ushered out as the revolutionaries told their tales of torture, loss of family, suffering, and imprisonment. Sensitive and violent subjects, a normal Victorian girl would not have been permitted to listen in on such graphic conversation, as it would have been deemed improper for a lady.

Geneva truly infected her with the revolutionary spirit. As she listened and learned it was impossible for her not to become an ardent supporter of the Risorgimento, which sought to remove the Austrian occupiers, correct the papal corruptness and usurp royal decadence. Many members of wealthy Italian families had been forced into exile and now lived in poverty to which Florence zealously recorded in her journals. According to David Seed, the very implication of wealth and leisure in the act of travelling, immediately sets up a distance from those encountered which might be exacerbated in the kind of discourse used to describe them.⁴⁷ However, these people Florence observed came from her same background and upbringing. A most notable impression, as made from her journals by O'Malley, charged that the exiles recognized they must train themselves and the younger generation, to exercise divine compassion, by which the soul grows in nations (and this would later ring true when Nightingale sought to help save her countrymen in the Crimea.)⁴⁸ She goes on to quote Nightingale as musing, "Almost all Italian patriots, whether at home or in exile, were interested in education, and those works of philanthropy which appeal to me so."⁴⁹

⁴⁶ David Seed, "Nineteenth century Travel Writing: An Introduction," *The Yearbook of English Studies* 34 (2004): 1.

⁴⁷ O'Malley, *Florence Nightingale*, 49.

⁴⁸ Excerpt from lost travel journals in Geneva, O'Malley, *Florence Nightingale*, 54.

⁴⁹ Excerpt from lost travel journals in Geneva, O'Malley, *Florence Nightingale*, 55.

In Geneva Nightingale made a most influential friendship with Madame Caterina Ferucci, the wife of an Italian philosopher and professor, and herself a noted poet and writer.

Nightingale's now missing diary recorded the political events surrounding the amnesty that the new Austrian emperor had granted to political refugees.⁵⁰ A good friend of theirs, writer and revolutionist Federico Confalonieri, had been chained up in solitary confinement for fifteen years. Another compatriot, revolutionary leader and writer, Giuseppe Ricciardi, had been locked in a madhouse in an attempt to break his will and spirit.⁵¹ For the first time in her life, Florence encountered inspirational people who had suffered for their political views. The contrast with the idle indifference of high English society impressed her greatly.⁵²

Florence and her father felt particularly at home in Geneva, finding themselves constantly surrounded with intellectuals. Since her father had an extended stay here in his youth, he had many luminous friends still residing there, none quite as impressive as Jean-Charles-Léonard de Sismondi. He is best known for his book *New Principles of Political Economy*.⁵³ His primary concern was what should a government do with its money once it has it, a question in which Nightingale found herself quite interested. Other notable exiles Florence met were Madame Mathilde Calandrini, whose infant schools Florence had visited in Pisa and Florence, and Filippi Ugoni, who also set up infant schools and hospitals and the ever-hospitable Helena Cramer, wife of Gustav Cramer, a notable merchant. A friend of WEN's from a trip he made there before his marriage to Fanny, Cramer was an interesting woman sharing the same mindset of Florence, with her distaste for enforced idleness, but that was the life of a merchant wife.⁵⁴ She also met a good

⁵⁰ McDonald, *CWFN* vol. 7, 32.

⁵¹ O'Malley, *Florence Nightingale*, 52.

⁵² Gill, *Nightingales*, 143.

⁵³ Gill, *Nightingales*, 144.

⁵⁴ Dr. Andreas Zangger, *The Swiss in Singapore* (Singapore: Editions Didier Millet, 2013), 50.

friend of WEN's, Count Luigi Porro, an Italian businessman, and politician, who was also forced into exile in Geneva but would later settle in London. The most notable of them all, Caterina Ferucci, who would prove to be a lifelong friend of Florence's.

Madame Ferucci came fully equipped with a mostly decorative, idle aristocratic husband and a holy terror of a daughter.⁵⁵ She was forced to take on the role of breadwinner for the family by giving Italian lessons to the Swiss, and Florence found herself strangely fascinated with this woman whose behavior seemed at such odds with her material circumstances. Madame Ferucci was so un-English, from her inability as a housekeeper, her inability to order a good dinner or even discipline her daughter, and it was apparent she never intended to learn how. How completely opposite of Florence she was, who at eighteen was a well-organized and empirical statistician. Madame Ferucci, who was actually a poetess, found herself enamored with the Nightingale girls, whom she called "Signorine Usignoli" and insisted that they were both actually Italian having been born in Italy.⁵⁶

Nevertheless, the most exciting aspects of their time in Geneva had nothing to do with the meeting of friends but the intense politics that were happening all around. The Austrian emperor, Ferdinand I, was supposedly going to grant amnesty to political exiles while in Milan for his coronation.⁵⁷ The fate of Napoleon's nephew, Louis Napoleon Bonaparte, of being turned out of Switzerland was a heated subject. Florence wrote in her journals that she felt strongly that if Switzerland complied it would no longer be regarded as the strong protector of the refugees and

⁵⁵ Gill, *Nightingales*, 144.

⁵⁶ O'Malley, *Nightingales*, 55.

⁵⁷ Ferdinand I (19 April 1793 – 29 June 1875) was Emperor of Austria, President of the German Confederation, King of Hungary, Croatia, and Bohemia (as Ferdinand V), as well as associated dominions from the death of his father (Francis II, Holy Roman Emperor) on 2 March 1835, until his abdication after the Revolutions of 1848.

might forfeit any moral integrity.⁵⁸ She closely recorded all the ups and downs of the following weeks adeptly in her diary, and per O'Malley, two entries stood out more than the rest. She quoted that Florence could never forget that morning when, "My friend Bossi came in pale and hardly able to speak, to say that amnesty was granted and that it was complete!"⁵⁹

To say there was a celebration that night would be an understatement. Immediately Nightingale and her sister ran to Madame Ferucci's to tell her the glorious news. This was the first-time Florence would experience celebrating freedom from Austrian rule with Italians. Accordingly, Florence listened to her gush the rest of the day about her efforts to save the Italians; how one of her songs of liberty was sung at the Opera House at Bologna; her attempts to make her husband fight for his country; or of her success in writing the whole of a patriotic newspaper when the staff and contributors had fled.⁶⁰ In the evening, every exile in Geneva made an appearance at the Sismondis' house. Upon arriving Madame Ferucci read aloud the amnesty decree for all to hear. The room was a blur of joy and exaltation. Florence later recorded in her journal that Sismondi himself climbed upon a table *pour dominer* as he said, and gave a lecture on Florentine history.⁶¹ Cook quoted her as writing on 12 September 1838, "A most stirring day, the most stirring day we have ever lived."⁶²

Sismondi was of great interest to Florence. A friend of her father, he sprang forth an intellectual fountain that she could seemingly drink from forever. She made a full note of him in

⁵⁸ O'Malley, *Nightingale*, 56.

⁵⁹ Journal excerpt from Florence Nightingale's lost travel journals, September 1838, O'Malley, *Nightingales*, 56.

⁶⁰ Journal excerpt from Florence Nightingale's lost travel journals, September 1838, O'Malley, *Nightingales*, 56.

⁶¹ Journal excerpt from Florence Nightingale's lost travel journals, Geneva, 12 September 1838, O'Malley, *Nightingales*, 57.

⁶² Journal excerpt from Florence Nightingale's lost travel journals, Geneva, 12 September 1838, Cook, *The Life of Florence Nightingale* vol.1, 17.

her diary. “All Sismondi’s political economy seems to be founded in the overflowing kindness of his heart. He gives to old beggars on principle, to young from habit. At Pescia, he had 300 beggars at his door one morning. He feeds the mice in his room while writing all his histories.”⁶³ Unfortunately, the political fallout from the situation with Louis Napoleon, the Austrians, and the Swiss (the Swiss refused to turn over Louis Napoleon and war seemed eminent) forced the Nightingales to leave Geneva, and so they sadly bid farewell to their new friends and began the journey north to France.

Paris would be the pinnacle of Florence’s trip abroad. Later in her life she recounted how this became the time of her great intellectual awakening. In Paris Nightingale fell in love, not romantic love, but in love with the idea of a woman showcasing her intellectual abilities with women *and* men coming to her salon to discuss politics and philosophy of the time. Mary Mohl (né Clarke), who ran the last of the great salons, was half Irish and half Scottish, and almost wholly French in her mannerisms, speech, and way of life. Florence described her as “a charming mixture of French vivacity and English originality.”⁶⁴ Mohl’s home constantly brimmed with intellectuals of every kind such as Victor Hugo, François Guizot, Prosper Merimée and Julius Mohl (who would later become her husband).⁶⁵ Clarke found the cultural oddities of the British a strain. As she saw it, English ladies were obsessed with sexual

⁶³ Journal excerpt from Florence Nightingale’s lost travel journals, Geneva, 12 September 1838, Cook, *The Life of Florence Nightingale* vol.1, 17.

⁶⁴ Journal excerpt from Florence Nightingale’s lost travel journals, Paris, October 1838, Cook, *The Life of Florence Nightingale* vol.1, 20.

⁶⁵ Victor Hugo (1802-1885) French poet, novelist and dramatist; François Guizot (1787-1874) French orator, historian and statesman; Prosper Merimée (1803-1870) French dramatist, historian and archaeologist; Julius von Mohl (1800-1876) Orientalist and historian.

shibboleths and accustomed to being both physically cosseted and intellectually snubbed by their menfolk.⁶⁶

The family owed their introduction to Clarke to their Aunt Patti Smith (Fanny's older sister). Upon arriving at the salon (which was rented out to Clarke and her mother by Madame Récaimer), the Nightingale girls could hardly believe their eyes. Mary Clarke had a children's day at her salon and upon entering they found themselves witnessing a small group of children playing a bewildering game of blind man's bluff with several elderly gentlemen, two men arguing by the fire on how to get the kettle going (later discovered to be Julius Mohl and Claude Fauriel), and a tiny whirlwind of a woman who later turned out to be Mary Clarke herself.⁶⁷ Here, at last, Nightingale became acquainted with a group of people who shared her interests completely. Mary Clarke, their leader, was kept in Paris by her mother's invalidism. In her company, Florence could give free rein to her humor and directness of speech – qualities in which in deference to her mother she quite often suppressed. Mary became an inherently important aspect of Florence's life, often supplementing the mother she wished she had and instead replaced with an incredibly close friendship.

During their time in Paris, the Nightingale sisters spent almost the entirety of it with Mary Clarke. While undoubtedly thrilled with the interest Clarke showed to her, Nightingale's primary interest in Paris lay in its hospitals and charitable sisterhoods. Although she had not heard the voice of God during her trip, she could still not shake the call that had come to her. For Nightingale, Clarkey (as the girls affectionately called her) represented a phenomenon too complex to easily describe and developed one of the passions for which she was notorious in her

⁶⁶ Mary Mohl, *Madame Récaimer, with a Sketch on the History of Society in France* (London: Chapman and Hall, 1862), 37.

⁶⁷ Gill, *Nightingales*, 145.

family.⁶⁸ The pair had much in common, and it comes as no surprise that Florence saw so many parallels between the two of them. Both had a love of art, science, history and language as well as a disdain for dressing up and fancy hairstyles. The both rebelled against the traditional gender roles set forth for women, and both had extreme love/hate relationships with their mothers. Nightingale observed with pleasure at how learned men received this lady's opinions.⁶⁹ There was a deeper side to Clarkey's character. Her passion of affection for her friends and her helpfulness for those who wanted help prevented the intellectual side, which was so strong, from ever getting hardened to the ways of the outside world. She was a survivor, almost the last, of the brilliant society that arose in Paris out of the ashes of the French Revolution.

Unfortunately, her time in Paris is left largely undescribed. Almost no letters survive from here, and O'Malley and Cook wrote little of her time in Paris. Her visit is described as cold, damp, and cloudy almost the entire time they were there. The family attended many Italian operas that Florence recorded in her *liberetti*. Both girls spent much of the end of their trip having a cold and taking vapor baths to treat themselves.

By the end of this whirlwind of balls, introductions, politics, art and opera Nightingale had come to one crucial conclusion. Her calling was destined to be a life of service to those deemed unworthy by society – the old, disabled and infirm. Upon her return to London, all the things she enjoyed so much on her vacation now represented a life of bondage as she was expected to live the same life as those who had hosted them while abroad. To her, this seemed a

⁶⁸ Florence was known to form strong, almost obsessive attachments to older women within her family, such as her aunt Mai Smith or cousin Hilary Bonham-Carter. At times when she felt rejected by them, she would go into despair, often pleading for their acceptance. This is probably due to the rejection by her mother as a child and later on in her young adulthood. Florence Never had a true female role model until she met Mary Clarke.

⁶⁹ O'Malley, *Nightingale*, 63.

torture. The sights, sounds, readings, conversations, and participation Florence had in such political and intellectual circles throughout her trip had her brimming over with enthusiasm to make her mark on the world. It had been since before they departed for Europe that Florence had heard the voice of God. What did this mean? She did not know. What she did know, however, was that she could never return to the small life she had led before. Those days were gone forever and a new Florence was desperately trying to emerge. The despair she fell into was palpable to any who came near her and almost led to her death. Not surprisingly travel brought her back from the edge of insanity a second time.

CHAPTER 4 – A DEATHBED FOR FLORENCE NIGHTINGALE

Her passionate, ideal nature demanded an epic life; what were many-volumed romances of chivalry and the social conquests of a brilliant girl to her? Her flame quickly burned up that light fuel; and, fed from within, soared after some illimitable satisfaction, some object which would never justify weariness, which would reconcile self-despair with the rapturous consciousness of life beyond self.¹

Upon her return from Europe, Florence felt rejuvenated in her call to service. She noted later in life how when she traveled she did not hear the voice of God and felt incredibly guilty about it.² After chronicling the suffering of the individuals she saw on her travels, she became determined to find a way to serve the less fortunate in her community. Although she had seen that the rich also are under the shadow of death, Florence found in confronting the sufferings of the poor a reality which, though terrible, held deep meaning for her. It swept away the cardboard scenery of life. She was depressed by the indifference she saw around her, “all the world putting on its shoes and stockings every morning all the same.”³ The Nightingales returned to England in April 1839; Florence was acutely aware that the voice of the Divine had not spoken to her amid the welter of Italian, French, and Swiss voices. There could only be one explanation. Gallivanting around Europe, she had become unworthy. Before leaving Paris for home, she resolved to eradicate the temptation to “shine in society.”⁴ Thus she and her family entered upon

¹ George Eliot, *Middlemarch: A Study of Provincial Life* (New York: Harper & Brothers Publishing, 1873), 266. George Eliot (also known as Mary Anne Evans) was a close, personal family friend of the Nightingales. When Florence would eventually move to Harley Street in 1853, her innermost circle of friends included Eliot, Elizabeth Barrett Browning, and Dr. Elizabeth Blackwell (the first female doctor). It seemed only fitting to begin this chapter with such an apt quote for Florence’s life circumstances from a close confidant.

² Longford, *Eminent Victorian Women* (New York: Alfred P. Knopf, 1981), 88.

³ Letter from Florence Nightingale to WE Nightingale, Lea Hurst, 1844, MS 8992/69, Wellcome/Claydon.

⁴ Judith Lissauer Cromwell, *Florence Nightingale, Feminist* (Jefferson, NC: McFarland & Company, Inc., 2013), 30.

a collision course which was to last fourteen years. Since her parents were unaware of Florence's secret decision, her refusal to marry seemed merely perverse. Her struggles were only about to begin and last fourteen years, broken into two parts. She would first languish for five years before she reached a level of certainty on what her call was to be. The second would be a nine-year battle with her family over her chosen vocation.

Nevertheless, her home life was rich in possibilities of pleasure and leisure; Nightingale was sure to be the perfect ornament for any household, her mother hoped, and that she would shine in any proper society. Nightingale alternated between exhilarating social success and burdensome doubts about what she ought to feel, what she ought to do, and where her destiny lay. In spite of consorting with some of the leading figures of the time, Nightingale remained oppressed by a growing restlessness that would not be satisfied for another twelve years.⁵

Presented at the Queen's drawing room upon the Nightingale's return to England in May 1839, Parthe and Florence began a whirlwind of activity revolving around society and suitors.⁶ A large house warming was held at the renovated Embley Park home for the extended family at Christmas.⁷ Her parents had no idea of the agony Florence suffered in and congratulated themselves on raising such a cultured and beautiful daughter. She would later write to her father, "Miss Martineau says the more the body falls in pain and weakness, the stronger the conviction of an independent and unchangeable self. She *should* have said, I suppose, "Here lies the difference between strong and weak ones."⁸ She was growing more and more discontent and

⁵ Vicinus, *Suffer and Be Still*, 19.

⁶ Letter from Florence Nightingale to Grandmother Mary Shore, Embley, 10 May 1839, MS 8991/102 WL.

⁷ Martha Vicinus and Bea Nergaard, *Ever Yours, Florence Nightingale: Selected Letters* (Cambridge, Mass: Harvard University Press, 1990), 19.

⁸ Letter from Florence Nightingale to WE Nightingale, Embley, January 1844, MS 8992/90, Wellcome/Claydon.

started to become unwell. If not for her Aunt Mai Smith (WEN's younger sister who lived at Combe Hurst) rescuing her that Christmas, she may have fallen into a deep despair. December found Florence to be bored and discontent. In an attempt to bring her out of her depression, Aunt Mai, who shared Florence's intellectual curiosity, humor, and philosophical interest began to spend more time with her. Mai shared the same qualities as WEN that made he and Florence so close. The pair developed a devoted friendship. Mai worshiped Florence as a pupil would a master. Nightingale went to stay with her Aunt Mai for several months, allowing her a much-needed break from the pressures of her mother. In March 1840, Mai wrote a cautious letter to Fanny saying:

Flo and I have a good deal to talk about the employment of time and so forth. I am much impressed with the idea that hard work is necessary to give zest to life in a character like hers, where there is great power of mind and more than common inclination to apply. *So* I write to ask you if you in anyway way object to a mathematical master, if one can find a clean middle-aged, respectable person.⁹

Together the two women studied mathematics, a discipline that Flo felt was good for her because of its concrete nature. Mai became a lifelong advocate of Florence and encouraged her dreams of service.

During the 1840s, various relatives summoned her to help with illnesses, births or impending deaths. Her mother had to be coaxed to let Florence go, or stay, and she was not pleased when her daughter preferred to help the family rather than attending a social event.¹⁰ In 1844 her father queried how she was handling care giving for her cousin. She wrote, "You are

⁹ Letter from Mai Smith to Fanny Nightingale, Combe Hurst, 16 March 1840, MS 9083/51, WL.

¹⁰ Letter from Florence Nightingale to Hilary Bonham-Carter, Lea Hurst, 16 May 1843, ADD MS 45704, ff 86-87, BL; Vicinus, *Suffer and Be Still*, 20.

curious for my ‘experience of the sickroom’ [at Waverly] so it would be very ungracious of me not to give it (though I have not yet set pen to paper). It is humbling enough.”¹¹ The predilections of her mother and sister, trapped Nightingale in the life of a caged bird. Yet it was a gilded cage of sorts. The setting of her life was such that many women would have envied her position. Since she had a great bit of time on her hands, Nightingale spent much of her time in the early 1840s not analyzing her call but completely enveloped in her daydreams and cataloging the contents of every cabinet and closet at Embley and Lea Hurst.

Two major issues arose that contributed to Fanny’s vehement dismissal of her daughter’s future plans. Florence turned down two viable suitors: her cousin Henry Nicholson and the first man Florence ever loved, Richard Monckton Milnes. The cornerstone of Victorian society was the family; the perfect lady’s sole function was marriage and procreation. Her education was to bring out her natural submission to authority and innate maternal instincts. Custom dictated that gentlewomen held no opinions lest they seem too formed and too definite for a young man’s taste, and thereby unmarketable as a commodity.¹² To make matters worse her cousin Henry Nicholson had fallen in love with her while Florence only cared to maintain her friendship with his sister, Marianne Nicholson. Her season became a saturnalia of pleasure and guilt – guilt over hurting Marianne by refusing Henry, guilt over Henry who she encouraged to keep close to his sister, and guilt over her general wickedness, which prevented the Voice from revealing her vocation.¹³ Her refusal of her cousin Henry’s proposal created a stark division within the family. The rejection ended her friendship with cousin Marianne, a betrayal Florence never got over.

¹¹ Letter from Florence Nightingale to WE Nightingale, Embley, January 1844, MS 8992/90, Wellcome/Claydon.

¹² Vicinus, *Suffer and Be Still*, 2.

¹³ Longford, *Eminent Victorian Women*, 88.

Nightingale did cry bitterly over her dismissal of Robert Monckton Milnes' proposal, yet she dodged a bullet. Of her refusal of Milnes' proposal she expressed her ambivalence:

I have a passionate nature which requires satisfaction and that would find it in him. I have a moral, an active, nature which requires satisfaction and that would not find it in his life. Sometimes I think I will satisfy my passional nature at all events, because that will at least secure me from the evil of dreaming. But would it? I could be satisfied to spend a life with him in combining our different powers in some great object. I could not satisfy this nature by spending a life with him in making society and arranging domestic things.¹⁴

While Milnes would later marry another woman, it came out that he was an aberrant homosexual and had in his possession at the time of his death a collection of pornography about which his biographer, Algernon Swinburne, wrote, "Milnes is *the* Sadique collector of European fame. His erotic collection of books, engravings, etc., is unrivaled upon earth."¹⁵ To think of our chaste and pious Florence being with a man of such proclivities seems grotesque. Having turned down two proposals, she worked ever harder to formulate a plan for her future. Her mother insisted she pick one of the two men and commit herself to a stable life as a wife and mother. Florence wrote back to her saying, "I am very long to find you and Parthe have differed in your explanations within your letters. Dearest mother, about what you wish me to do – I would rather suffer it."¹⁶

At the same time, a youthful habit of Florence's that she called "dreaming" now became an alarming addiction, spending hours every day completely lost in her own mind. What were

¹⁴ Private Note of Florence Nightingale, 1849, ADD MS 43402, ff 43, BL.

¹⁵ James Pope-Hennessy, *Monckton Milnes, The Flight of Youth 1851-1885* (London: Constable Publishing, 1951), 165.

¹⁶ Letter from Florence Nightingale to Fanny Nightingale, Waverly, 6 November 1846, MS 8993/48, WL.

these “trance-like” states into which she might easily fall while making conversation with one of her mother’s socially imposing friends? Clearly there was something unusual about the trances; even more disturbing was the violent language with which Florence would condemn them. They were “shameful visions,” a “shameful” secret that she shared with no one, a threat to her mental balance, “my enemy.”¹⁷ Florence was again convalescing in the early months of 1845 when Shore came to visit. She warned him against lying long in bed, of the temptations of the world such as liking to be praised and admired or being the general favorite more than anything; all ideas that conflict her described state of mind. Indeed, she especially feared that she could not control her habit of daydreaming and repeatedly vowed she would stop.¹⁸ In reality, her times of convalescence were debilitating bouts of depression, from which she could not rise from bed, eat, or participate in any activities. It seemed as if Florence was collapsing, for she could not reconcile a life of housewifery, as well as not being able to follow her dreams of service.

Spiritual pride is taken to be the sin against the Holy Ghost, and Florence’s visions or dreams were fantasies about self-exaltation in which she saw herself in the center of glorious deeds and sublime reputation.¹⁹ This is a definite point of interest. No other biographer has attempted to directly assert what the content of Nightingale’s dreams may be as Longford has here. Many have speculated, ranging from sexual fantasies to envisioning worlds of freedom. One significant point is that when she abandoned her apathy and engaged in deeds of some social value, such as nursing her nephew Shore, the dreaming stopped.²⁰

¹⁷ A series of references to her ‘dreaming’ in private notes written to herself and some to God, December 1845, ADD MS 43402, ff 35, 36, 37 and 38, BL.

¹⁸ Woodham-Smith, *Florence Nightingale*, 51.

¹⁹ Longford, *Eminent Victorian Women*, 145.

²⁰ Florence Nightingale, Private notes, Undated circa 1844, ADD MS 45794, ff 30-36, BL.

In 1845 that plan came into cohesion for Nightingale. She decided that she would become a nurse. During these formative years since her return from Europe, she had been reading much political writing such as Harriet Martineau's *Life in the Sickroom*, George Sand's *Gabriel*, and Thomas Carlyle's *Sartor Resartus*.²¹ The misery of Britain's "Hungry Forties" made her realize at least that her vocation lay somewhere among the poor and oppressed. Nightingale read the descriptions in Charles Dickens' *Oliver Twist*.²² Between the upper and the nether millstone of free labor's starvation wages and artificially expensive food, the poor had no resource but the workhouses, as they had been fashioned by the new deterrent poor law of 1834. She mentions many other readings, but these four stand out as they all come prominently into play with real-life with which Florence struggled. Harriet Martineau was a close friend of her Aunt Ju (Aunt Julia Smith, one of the deplorable liberal spinster sisters of her mother). Martineau suffered various maladies. She believed herself to be suffering from an incurable condition and wrote *Life in the Sick-Room* in 1844. In this work, which is both memoir and treatise, Martineau seeks to educate the healthy and ill alike on the spiritual and psychological dimensions of chronic suffering.²³ Martineau's work parallels Florence's life especially as her depression grew and her physical afflictions became more apparent. As time marched, her anxieties culminated in a near death experience in 1846.

She finds solace in reading George Sand's play, *Gabriel*, where the hero is a woman named Gabriel, raised as a boy and educated as such by a tutor, Father Chiavari, in seventeenth

²¹ Harriet Martineau, *Life in the Sickroom* (Boston: Leonard C. Bowles, 1844); George Sand, *Gabriel* (Paris: Michael Levy Frères, 1839).

²² Charles Dickens, *Oliver Twist* (London: Chapman and Hall, 1858). The bound version was not published until 1858 but had been published as a monthly serial in the magazine *Bentley's Miscellany*.

²³ Deborah Logan, "Life in the Sickroom," *Victorian Periodicals Review* 38, no. 4 (Winter 2005): 424-6.

century Italy. At the beginning of the story, Gabriel has a dream in which she sees the archangel of her same name lose his wings and becomes a woman.²⁴ Nightingale struggled with the restrictions of being a woman. She once wrote her father about her lack of something to do and her desire to work that without it “cuts her wings, it palsies her muscles, and shortens her breath for higher things and for a clearer, but sharper, atmosphere, in which she has no lungs to live. She has fed on sugarplums, her appetite is palled for bread.”²⁵

She finds another example of comfort in Thomas Carlyle’s *Sartor Resartus*. It may have resonated deeply with Nightingale due to its theme focusing on spiritual pride, an issue that she battled for most of her life. As mentioned earlier by Elizabeth Long, one theory on the content of Florence’s dreams is that they centered around her achieving glory in the eyes of God for answering her call to service. Reading the concepts within the book, such as *The Everlasting No* had to have struck a chord. *The Everlasting No* is Carlyle’s name for the spirit of unbelief in God, especially as it manifested itself in his own; the spirit, which, as embodied in the Mephistopheles of Goethe, is forever denying the reality of the divine in the thoughts, the character, and the life of humanity, and has a malicious pleasure in scoffing at everything high and noble as hollow and void.²⁶ He follows this chapter with *The Everlasting Yea*, an affirmation of the ability that hard, socially relevant work has to refuse the depression caused by spiritual malaise: reduce your expectations, Carlyle says, and work in in well doing. He challenged Florence and everything she knew to be true.

²⁴ Pratina Prasad, “Deceiving Disclosures: Androgyny and George Sand’s *Gabriel*,” *French Forum* 24, no. 3 (September 1999): 331-51.

²⁵ Letter from Florence Nightingale to WE Nightingale, Embley, 21 January 1846, MS 8992/122, Wellcome/Claydon.

²⁶ G.B. Tennyson, “The Pythias Drunken Song: Thomas Carlyle’s *Sartor Resartus* and the Style Problem with German Idealist Philosophy,” *International Archives of History and Ideas* 15, no. 1 (Winter 1981): 37-9.

These nineteenth century books and others heavily weighed on her mind as she searched for meaning in life. Her validation in life came in the form of service; to care for people in town, often visiting schools and friends who were unwell. The status of the sick-poor loomed in her mind. That much was obvious from her visiting in the rural slums around her father's estates of Embley in Hampshire and Lea Hurst in Derbyshire. She wrote later in her curriculum vitae:

God has always led me of Himself. I remember no particular sermon or circumstances which ever made any great impression upon me. But the first idea I can recollect when I was a child was a desire to nurse the sick. My daydreams were all of hospitals and I visited them whenever I could. I never communicated it to anyone – it would have been laughed at – but I thought God had called me to serve Him in that way.²⁷

During this time, Florence made a most important friendship with the Chevalier Charles Josias von Bunsen (he would later become a Baron), the new Prussian ambassador and his wife, guests of her father's study. The couple united good grace, intellect, and wealth. A Biblical scholar as well as the world's leading Egyptologist, Bunsen greatly impressed young Nightingale. From 1842 onward the beginnings of many friendly connections, which grew and strengthened over time wore on. When Bunsen and his family met Nightingale, they valued her from the beginning. Said Bunsen, "On a few occasions, when nothing occurred peculiarly to rouse and reveal the soul which subsisted in her, in the fullness of its energy, or the powers which only waited for an opportunity to be developed."²⁸

²⁷ Florence Nightingale, "Lebenslauf," 7.

²⁸ Baroness Frances von Bunsen, *Memoirs of Baron Bunsen*, 2nd edition, abridged and corrected, vol. II (London: Longmans, Green and Co., 1869), 12.

Service to God became an obsession. Flo longingly wrote to her cousin Hilary Bonham Carter in an undated note of her wish to transcend the expectations of her family and friends, and to pursue her aspirations:

Dearest, I am looking forward to next Saturday, if I can go any how tacked on to somebody's apron string – how often I wish for grey hairs – they are the greatest possible convenience - & if they could be had before other infirmities, would be of as much advantage as Brevet Rank. If anybody wishes to read about the May of life in the little ink marks of poets, it's all very well, if they wish to read of it in real life, it is a series of scrapes, of dull bothers and sharp remorse, of useless giving of pain, and hopeless perplexity – we reckon our young years by their failures and not by their months and fifty times I have remembered, ever since, what an elderly woman once said to me, about privileges, the joys, and the exemptions from youth, which her age enjoyed.²⁹

After her twenty-fourth birthday she was certain of her vocation. In June of 1844, a philanthropic American couple, Dr. Samuel Gridley Howe and his wife Julia, came to stay at Embley for a month. Florence put a significant question to the doctor: did he think it would be “unsuitable and unbecoming” for her to adopt a career like the Catholic Sisters of Charity, namely nursing in hospitals? Did he think it would be a dreadful thing? Dr. Ward Howe replied, “My dear Miss Florence, it would be unusual, and in England whatever is unusual is apt to be thought unsuitable; but I say to you, go forward if you have a vocation for that way of life; act upon your inspiration.”³⁰ It appears that

²⁹ Letter to Hilary Bonham-Carter, Embley, 17 April 1844, ADD MS 45794, ff 86-7, BL.

³⁰ O'Malley, *Florence Nightingale*, 93.

Nightingale asked such pointed questions of her father's friends in an attempt to gain approval for her plans to become a nurse.

She began her secret plans to study at Salisbury Hospital under a family friend in 1845. It was the passing of her childhood nurse, Mrs. Francis Gale, that strengthened her resolve, and Florence entered a new period in her life – into the constant struggle to overcome this obstacle that prevented her from following her call. She strove to purify herself for the service of God and to learn more of His nature. As her vision of perfect goodness grew, so did her sense of her imperfection and remorse for past failures and present weakness. This mentality would feed her depression and by the end of 1845, it drove her almost to madness. One can see in this excerpt from a letter to her father she was working up the courage to tell them of her plans:

Out of the effervescence, not the “abundance,” of the heart the mouth speaketh, now. In this too highly educated, too little active age, the balance between theory and practice seems destroyed, the just connexion between knowledge and action lost sight of, the inspiration of unacknowledged which is to be sought in effort, even more than in thought, the actual addition to our store of knowledge, which is supplied by every deed, and the positive subtraction from thought, which a life of thinking suffers, not considered.³¹

Her mother could not fathom the idea of her most beautiful daughter working in a hospital, the epitome of filth and degradation. At the time, this was not surprising, for hospitals and the sick

³¹ Letter from Florence Nightingale to WE Nightingale, Waverly, 27 January 1846, MS 8992/122, Wellcome/Claydon.

they contained were filthy, and the majority of nurses a lewd, lecherous, and drunken lot.

Florence was heartbroken but not ill. She wrote to her cousin Hilary:

Well, my dearest, I am not yet come to say the great thing I had to say. I have always found that there was so much truth in the suggestion that you must dig for hidden treasures *in silence* or you will not find it; and I dug after my poor little plan in silence, even from you. I was to go to be a nurse at Salisbury Hospital for these few months to learn the “prax”; and then to come home and make wonderful intricacies at West Wellow, under the shelter of a rhubarb powder. I saw a poor woman die this summer because there was no one to sit up with her, who poisoned her as much as if they had given her arsenic. Well, I do not much like talking about it, but I thought something of a Protestant sisterhood, without vows, for women of educated feelings might be established.³²

Florence withdrew from her family as she began to study secretly. Blue books (government publications of a factual nature, including reports of Commissions), hospital reports and information from abroad on hospitals, health and mortality were read and carefully abstracted before breakfast and the daily social round.³³

Eventually, Florence, applying the training and principles Howe had given her, announced that she wished to have something worthwhile do; she would become a nurse.

Florence felt that she needed hospital training and in 1845 she decided to spend three months at

³² Letter from Florence Nightingale to Hilary Bonham-Carter, Embley, 11 December 1845, ADD MS 43402, ff 46, BL.

³³ Sir George Pickering, *Creative Malady: Illness in the Lives and Minds of Charles Darwin, Mary Baker Eddy, Sigmund Freud, Florence Nightingale, Marcel Proust and Elizabeth Barrett Browning* (London: Ruskin House, 1974), 137.

the Salisbury Infirmary where a family friend, Dr. Fowler, was the head physician.³⁴ He encouraged her dreams of becoming a nurse. Before telling her family of her plans, she wrote to her father about Dr. Fowler saying, “Dr. Fowler asked me to come to Salisbury to read with him. He made me feel quite a sensible and agreeable woman while I was with him. Don’t you sometimes meet with a person, who seems to finish all your half-formed thoughts for you, to be not so much a sympathizing friend, as the real companion of your pre-existence.”³⁵ When she suggested this plan during a visit from the Fowlers in December 1845, the conflict between Florence’s dream and her parents’ aspirations for her broke into the open sending Florence into a deep and dark despair. Naturally, Fanny was horrified. Parthenope had hysterics. “But there have been difficulties in my very first step, which terrified Mama. I do not mean the physically revolting parts of a hospital, but the thing about the surgeons and the nurses which you may guess. Eve Mrs. Fowler threw cold water upon it,” Florence wrote to her cousin Hilary.³⁶ The reasons behind the Nightingales’ rejection are indicated in this letter are dangerous and well known – the danger and degradation of work that dealt with the most dangerous, unpleasant physical diseases and the lascivious desires of fellow workers of a low class. Fanny Nightingale’s objections are understandable, yet there was a pathological element to it. Fanny seemed determined to break her daughter’s will and almost succeeded.

The only one who might have secured Florence her right to choose her life, her father refused to take her side. Frightened by family outburst and conflicts, he simply withdrew.

³⁴ In my research, I have not been able to determine the first name of Dr. Fowler, only that he was a neighbor and friend of her father.

³⁵ Letter from Florence Nightingale to WE Nightingale, January 1845, MS 8992/116, Wellcome/Claydon.

³⁶ Letter from Florence Nightingale to Hilary Bonham-Carter, Embley, 11 December 1845, ADD MS 43402, ff 46, BL.

Through his silence, he conspired to her defeat.³⁷ This action dealt a crushing blow to her sense of self from which she never fully recovered. Nightingale's parents had a good reason for this opposition. Florence would recount later in life that her mother had accused her of having an affair with a surgeon.³⁸ The upper and middle classes were nursed by relatives and servants at home; even the poor tried to avoid the hospitals, whose mortality rates were frighteningly high.³⁹ As long as the connection between cleanliness and infection was poorly understood, a patient was safer at home than a hospital, yet it would be Florence Nightingale who made this connection during her time at Scutari. The upper class believed that hospital nursing was the choice only of the poor and religious. While Florence was not poor, she was ardently religious.

As evidenced in her private notes and letters, Nightingale appeared hopelessly locked into a love/hate relationship with her sister and mother. Convinced they did not understand her, she began to succumb to despair. Falling into a brutal depression, Florence welcomed death. In December 1845, she wrote a series of journal entries, each one entreating God to come and end her life for her. She writes:

Lord thou knowest the creature that knoweth that I cannot live. Forgive me Lord, let me die – this day, let me die. It is not for myself that I pray this. Thou knowest that I am more afraid to die than live for I shall carry myself with [indecipherable] but I know that by living I shall only heap convictions on others' hearts, which will be but to [indecipherable two words] time.

³⁷ Nancy Boyd, *Three Victorian Women who changed their World: Josephine Butler, Octavia Hill and Florence Nightingale* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1982), 170.

³⁸ Woodham-Smith, *Florence Nightingale*, 56.

³⁹ Vicinus and Nergaard, *Ever Yours*, 29.

Lord I do not wish for another life. I believe in a future state and I thank thee. Many of my friends will find reconciliation to their fates in it and embrace the idea as a support which cannot be taken away from me, but the Lord knows all things. I do not think thou will insist on upon my taking up life again. Thou knowst I can make nothing of it. If as Papa says, “This is family and [indecipherable]” then Lord all is wrong, there will be nothing of my life. My imminent self is hollow.⁴⁰

Her family was at a loss of how to console her, all the while her sister and mother continued to negate her desires of a life of service. Florence began to waste away, not eating, not sleeping, not hearing the voice of God any longer and she laments, “I am dust, I am nothing. A curse to myself and others. This morning I felt as if my soul would wash away in tears. I feel in utter despair, this bitter papion of tears and agony that I live in. Oh grant that I may live to do this. Oh if our father walked the earth how should I go walk with him?”⁴¹ As the enforced idleness bore down upon her, her mind withered away. During this time, irreparable psychological damage was done to Nightingale’s psyche, so destructive she never fully recover from the rest of her life.

She longed to work in a hospital but whenever the word was even mentioned her mother and sister fainted and had to be revived with smelling salts.⁴² Her Unitarian tradition would have made it quite easy for her to convert opportunistically to Catholicism. While there were Anglican sisterhoods, they did not have the same provisions for training women in good works as it did men in relation to the care of the sick poor. Many themes surface in her writings at this time, including the superficiality of worldly activities and the unreality of one’s existence:

⁴⁰ Private note, Embley, 1 December 1845, ADD MS 43402, ff 34, BL.

⁴¹ Private note, Embley, 5 December 1845, ADD MS 43402, ff 35, BL.

⁴² O’Malley, *Nightingale*, 114.

All is like a dream, you say, yes, the world & the pink satin ghost in it & ourselves most of all – if we could always be true to ourselves, have a sacred trust in our intentions, we should need no other truth – but we lie to ourselves first, the lying to others follow of itself. That the sufferings of Xt's life were intense, who doubts? But the happiness must have been intenser – only think of the happiness of working and working successfully, too, and with no doubt as to his path and with no alloy of vanity or love of display or glory – but with the ecstasy of single heartedness – all that I do is always poisoned by the fear that I am not doing it in simplicity and singleness of heart – everything I do always seems to me false without being a lie.⁴³

She railed against the poor quality of a woman's life as compared to a man's in *Cassandra* in which she describes the middle-class unmarried woman as being a slave to her relatives. A woman was always expected to be available to entertain parents or their guests, and could not even retire to her room to study as a man had the right to do.⁴⁴ In *Cassandra*, Nightingale laments:

Passion, intellect, moral activity – these three have never been satisfied in a woman. In this cold and oppressive conventional atmosphere, they cannot be satisfied. To say more on this subject would be to enter into the whole history of society and of the present state of civilization. Women long to enter into some man's profession where they would find direction, competition (or rather opportunity of measuring the intellect of others) and, above all, time."⁴⁵

⁴³ Private Note, 25 April 1846, ADD MS 45794, ff 100-101, BL.

⁴⁴ Small, *Florence Nightingale*, 88.

⁴⁵ Nightingale, *Cassandra*, 78.

Her depression became deep and all encompassing. Florence began to lose weight; she was not sleeping and walked the house as if a ghost. In December 1845, she reached a critical level of despondency, almost dying. In her personal diary, her entries are so desperate; she writes, “No wonder we cannot figure to [indecipherable] idolatry in the spirit for it would wither the body and the prominence of the mind a bit. Oh if one has but a lost role what carriage of service can there be?”⁴⁶ In another she writes, “I am dust, I am nothing. A curse to myself and others. This morning I felt as if my soul would pass away in tears – in utter loneliness – in a bitter passion of tears and agony of solitude but I live – and God grant me that I may live to do this. Oh if our Father walked the earth how should I go walk with him?”⁴⁷

In response to her devastation at her thwarted plans for a medical career, her father agreed to let her travel the world with Charles and Selina Bracebridge, family friends, hoping to achieve two goals: the first being to save her from her overwhelming depression but the second to appease his wife and other daughter in the hopes this would help Florence abandon her ideas of a career in service. Florence’s reaction to her father’s withdrawal is significant. With Parthe and her mother, there were violent scenes – bitter denunciations and recriminations, even physical battles. Later in life, she had the dubious satisfaction of denying them access to her company. With her father, the person she loved the most, she remained mute.⁴⁸ The tension within the family soured Florence’s view of the country house and its upper-class inhabitants. While sorting the china, she asked, “Can reasonable people want all this? Is all that china, linen

⁴⁶ Private Note, Embley, 1 December 1845, ADD MS 43402, ff 34, BL.

⁴⁷ Private Note, Embley, 5 December 1845, ADD MS 43402, ff 35, BL.

⁴⁸ Cook, *The Life of Florence Nightingale*, vol. 1, 42.

and glass make a man a Progressive animal?”⁴⁹ She had become bored by the routine of walks in the garden, embroidery, reading aloud and succession of heavy meals.

In 1847, her saviors arrived in the forms of Charles and Selina Bracebridge. During 1846, Florence met a couple who were to become the most influential and supportive in her life – the Bracebridges. She had found her replacement for Marianne. Sigma, as Florence came to call Selina, appears to have been unusually warm, accepting, and understanding.⁵⁰ She became a primary support, and Florence enthusiastically wrote to Hilary, “Never do I see her, without feeling eyes to the blind and feet to the lame – many a plan, with disappointment has thinned into a phantom in my mind, takes form and shape and fair reality when touched by her.”⁵¹ While the two families had been friends for many years, it was that year the Bracebridges planned to take a lengthy expedition to Rome, Alexandria, and Athens. Selina and Charles, had extended plans to leave for the winter months. The couple was far from elderly but their health was poor and, as Selina explained to Fanny, Florence would be of great help to them on their travels. At first, she could not fathom a winter in Rome but as the days progressed she realized she needed any escape she could get from the brutal situation raging on at home. To her Aunt Hannah, she writes, “You will not be more surprised than I am, my dear Aunt Hannah, that I am going to Rome for three months with the Bracebridges on Tuesday. I am told that a winter in Rome will set me up for life, certainly there is no one who could have convinced me more than Mrs. Bracebridge. There be as much found in Rome as there anywhere else.”⁵² She goes on to say, “To you, dearest

⁴⁹ Private Note, Embley, undated 1844, ADD MS 45790, ff 177, BL.

⁵⁰ Private Note, Embley, undated 1844, ADD MS 45790, ff 181, BL.

⁵¹ Letter from Florence Nightingale to Hilary Bonham-Carter, Lea Hurst, 25 April 1846, ADD MS 45794, ff 103, BL.

⁵² Letter from Florence Nightingale to Aunt Hannah Nicholson, Embley, 27 October 1847, ADD MS 45794, ff 63-66, BL.

Aunt Hannah, I can say what I can say to no one else, you will believe me, that more of my desires are far from home and this wish had not been farther from my thoughts but it was father who told me to go which makes me believe that it is right to go.”⁵³

Albeit Florence seemed hesitant to leave for Rome, the experiences she would have on this three-year journey would be deep and profound. Nightingale had suffered greatly for the last eight years since their return from Europe. At every turn, she found her dreams dashed. To find so many allies in friends and family yet be so destroyed by her nuclear family proved devastating. Her sister, Parthenope, may have been the greatest offender of them all, feigning illness, using all manner of deception and manipulation, and outright verbal and physical abuse to control her younger sister. To Parthenope and Fanny, the traditional Victorian family represented everything. How dare Florence choose to disgrace them and their good name by working in squalid conditions with those they could give charity too but not care and consideration. In 1847, shortly before her departure, she and her father had visited the British Association at Oxford to attend a discussion hosted by Urbain le Verrier and John Couch Adams on the discovery of Neptune. She wrote of the trip, “I sauntered about the churchyards and gardens before breakfast and wished I were a college man.”⁵⁴ This was the first time she openly admitted to another her desire for constant learning and acquisition, to which there could be no satiating in Rome. Thankfully, WEN and the Bracebridges had a solution for the once vibrant young woman who was withering away due to enforced idleness. Rome would indeed be the

⁵³ Letter from Florence Nightingale to Aunt Hannah Nicholson, Embley, 27 October 1847, ADD MS 45794, ff 63-66, BL.

⁵⁴ Letter from Florence Nightingale to Mary Clarke, Embley, 10 July 1847, Florence Nightingale Papers, Correspondence ADD MS 43397, ff 292-95, BL.

savior that lifted Florence from her deathbed of depression and raised her into a confident, shining example of charity, self-sacrifice, and determination that we all know today.

CHAPTER 5 – A SAVIOR IN ROME AND A NILE CROCODILE

Live your life while you have it. Life is a splendid gift. There is nothing small in it. Far the greatest things grow by God's law out of the smallest. But to live your life, you must experience it.¹

In August 1847, the unusual trio, the Bracebridges and their assistant, Florence, departed London, headed for destinations never before seen. Once the journey began, the younger woman could hardly contain her excitement. Her father, also overjoyed for her trip, wrote out an extensive list of his favorite things to see and visit while in Rome, Alexandria, and Athens. Florence had no way of knowing that this trip, these experiences, and her encounters would finally solve the quiet revolution that had been waging inside of her for the last eight years. Despite the fact she was less than enthusiastic at the thought of wintering in Rome, a few days before departure she made up her mind to go.² It is worth mentioning that many of her biographers, such as Gill, Woodham-Smith, and Cook, spent relatively little analytical attention investigating her time in Rome or the transformative nature of this trip on the development of her personality.

As they traveled down the south to reach their destination, they made a few stops along the way – Paris, Marseilles, Chalon, Lyons, Avignon, and past her beloved Genoa. Each destination fanned the flame of excitement. At first in her letters, she can only describe how sea sick she was, writing, “I adhered like a pancake to my back, screwed my eyes tight close, and refused to hear, see or speak with the Devil.”³ She also admonished herself for not having a

¹ Florence Nightingale, “Live Your Life,” *The Industrial School Journal* 3, no. 3 (January 1916): 15.

² Mary Keele, ed. *Florence Nightingale in Rome: Letters Written by Florence Nightingale in Rome in the Winter of 1847-1848* (Philadelphia: American Philosophical Society, 1981), xviii.

³ Letter from Florence Nightingale to W.E. Nightingale, Le Havre, 28 October 1847, MS 9016/2, Wellcome/Claydon.

great ability to describe the sights she saw, a complete fallacy upon reading her letters. Upon arriving in Lyons, she wrote:

Well, my dear people, here we are at Lyons, after a most prosperous journey. The city sits by her river shore under her crowned heights and stretches out her hand, spanning her stream with her white fingers, like a Queen whose broad brow is adorned, not weighted down, with her diadem – she puts forth her hand and over the bridges of her fingers crawl the “hannetons,” as in the Presbytere.⁴

The group traveled through France in 1847 en route to a winter in Rome. From this adventure, a wealth of Nightingale literature abounds with humorous and exciting observations of the places, churches, people, museums, and art. During their brief stay in Paris, Florence experienced more of the salon life she had encountered on her previous trip, meeting more intellectuals and contributing her thoughts to grand discussions and spending time with her beloved Clarkey, now Mrs. Mary Mohl. Nightingale was in both Paris and Rome in 1848, the year of revolution, and a time of political upheaval in both countries.⁵ Her letters are full of observations on the government of the day and the insurgents. In the case of Rome and Italy the most material is available on the hated Austrian occupier and now the people the region.

The trio continued down the Rhone into the Ligurian Sea, making a stop at Pisa to catch a carriage to their next ship and stayed there long enough for Florence to stop and see one of her

⁴ Letter from Florence Nightingale to W.E. Nightingale, Lyons, 1 November 1847, MS 9016/4, Wellcome Claydon.

⁵ The 1848 revolutions in the Italian states were organized revolts in the states of the Italian peninsula and Sicily, led by intellectuals and agitators who desired a liberal government. As Italian nationalists, they sought to eliminate reactionary Austrian control. The 1848 Revolution in France, sometimes known as the February Revolution, was one of a wave of revolutions in 1848 in Europe. In France, the revolutionary events ended the Orleans monarchy (1830–48) and led to the creation of the French Second Republic.

greatest influences, Madame Ferucci. The pair had made a strong friendship when the Nightingale family had traveled to Europe in her youth. She writes:

I left Mrs. B washing at the Ussero [their hotel], and ran, all dirty as I was to Ferucci's. I had had no letter from her and was so disheartened by my luck at Genoa I half expected not to find her. I met Madame Ferucci and Antonio on the stairs and stopped to ask them the way without realizing. She recognized me, kissed my hand as Madame Ferucci came screaming down the stairs. In her hand my letter and she overwhelmed me with joy.⁶

After a month of travel, the group arrived at Rome. The night seemed endless upon entering the *caput mundi*, the capital of the world, and Florence described the last hour of her journey, "I felt as if we were passing through the valley of the shadow of death (it was so dark) on our way to the celestial city. I looked out the window every five minutes to see the lights of the city on the hill, but in vain."⁷ Her excitement could not be contained and is apparent in her descriptions of her entrance into Rome. She wrote:

I could not sleep for knowing myself in the Eternal City and towards dawn I got up and scoured myself. As soon as it was daylight I went out. I ran till I came to St. Peter's. I would not to the left or right (I know I passed through the Piazza Navona), till I came to the Colonnades; there was the first ray of the rising sun just touching the top of the fountain. No event in my life except my death can ever be greater than that first entrance into St. Peter's, the concentrated spirit of

⁶ Letter from Florence Nightingale to Fanny Nightingale, Rome, 12 November 1847, MS 9016/10, Wellcome/Claydon.

⁷ Unaddressed letter from Florence Nightingale, Rome, 11 November 1847, MS 9016/7, Wellcome/Claydon.

Christianity of so many years, the great image of our faith which is the worship of grief. I went in; I could not have gone there for the first time, except alone, not in the presence of St. Peter himself, and walked up to the dome. There was no one there but I and I. There I knelt down.⁸

St. Peter's would become one of Florence's favorite places to spend her time, reading and meditating, but not the only place she visited. She had a thirst for knowledge and delighted in the wealth of art and architecture. The Bracebridges had many friends who were leading classical scholars and archaeologist throughout the city, so Florence not only had access to the best books, the trio was escorted around by experts.

Many of her letters are about the impressive works of art in Rome: paintings, architecture, and sculpture. Upon entering St. Peter's the only object she allowed herself to look at besides the dome was Michelangelo's *Pieta*. Nightingale and the Bracebridges tirelessly visited museums and churches, some several times. She reported back to her family her observations of everything. Nightingale demonstrated scholarly interest in antiquity. She studied the many ruins, explored the catacombs, copied inscriptions, and visited the churches and galleries. The Coliseum displeased her immensely, stating she could not bear to think of the Christians who had died there.⁹ This did not stop her from exploring the recently opened catacombs and picking up bone fragments. She writes of luxurious afternoons spent with the Bracebridges strolling through the beauty of Rome. "In the afternoon we three had a long saunter

⁸ Unaddressed letter from Florence Nightingale, Piazza di Spagna, 14 November 1847, MS 9016/11, Wellcome/Claydon.

⁹ Letter from Florence Nightingale to her family, Rome, 13 November 1847, MS 9016/8, Wellcome/Claydon.

and meditation under the aisles of St. Peter's, took our fill at the Mosaics, Canova's lions, the beautiful Genii of the Stuart tomb, and did nothing else that day."¹⁰

Quite an extraordinary experience, the Vatican Museums left a permanent impression on Nightingale. Florence found herself completely encompassed by an unknown amount of art, architecture, and sculpture. For an art enthusiast, such as herself, the situation must have been overwhelming. In Rome, she had the opportunity to view her first works of Michelangelo. She wrote to her sister:

Yesterday, dear Pop, was my first day at the Vatican, my introduction. I hardly knew what I was to see. It is only open on Thursdays and Mondays, and as there is but one entrance, you have to be pra [...] through the whole. At last we sat down to worship in the little Tribune before the Apollo. I had not the least expectation of him, the sublime repose, after he was shot off his arrow, without excitement, without anxiety, as to whether it will hit its mark, the supernatural lightness, and here too, the almost feminine delicacy and softness of the mouth – the same as the Christian idea of superhuman strength – and yet how different.¹¹

Michelangelo is by far the most discussed of all the artists whose work Nightingale saw. Throughout her entire excursion in Rome, she admires his work and his artistic vision most and wrote lengthy letters on his works. Nightingale tried to understand him and spent many days of her visit searching out his works for admiration and study.

¹⁰ Letter from Florence Nightingale to her family, Rome, 14 November 1847, MS 9016/9, Wellcome/Claydon.

¹¹ Letter from Florence Nightingale to Parthenope Nightingale, Rome, 20 November 1847, MS 9016/16, Wellcome/Claydon.

In a letter to Parthenope she recounts how at the Vatican Museum, she and Selina Bracebridge talked the guard into letting them in after hours for a private viewing. They were alone yet not alone, for an entire brevity of angels, seraphs, and cherubs watched them from above.¹² The two decided to toss decorum aside and lay flat on their backs to stare straight up at Michelangelo's crowning achievement, the ceiling in the Sistine Chapel.¹³ She says, "Of all my days in Rome, this has been the most happy and glorious. Think of a day alone in the Sistine Chapel with Σ, quite alone, looking up into that heaven of angels and prophets...I did not think I was looking at pictures but rather into Heaven itself."¹⁴ In a letter home, she went through a thorough description of every character, every scene, panel, and describing the artistry and philosophical meanings for her family. She writes of Michelangelo saying, "How M. Angelo must instantly have recognized them all when he met them spirit to spirit."¹⁵ She must have felt a connection to this fellow Florentine who shared her Savonarolian republican in spirit.¹⁶ He too was an advocate of church reform, who forced to glorify the Medicis, was commissioned to paint the frescoes at the Sistine Chapel. Florence could sense it, for she noted in many of her letters that the imagery was disturbing and not on par with other works of his.

After her visit, she bought engravings of the Sistine Chapel and would keep them in her room for the rest of her life. She would visit the Sistine many times while she was there, each

¹² Letter from Florence Nightingale to Parthenope Nightingale, Rome, 20 November 1847, ADD MS 45791, ff 258-60, BL.

¹³ O'Malley, *Florence Nightingale*, 136-7.

¹⁴ Letter from Florence Nightingale to Parthenope Nightingale, Rome, 17 December 1847, MS 9016/24, WL; ADD MS 45791, ff 268-9, BL; "Σ" or Sigma, is the nickname that Florence gave to her companion, Selina Bracebridge. Throughout every letter, she uses this symbol to identify her.

¹⁵ Letter from Florence Nightingale to Parthenope Nightingale, Rome, 17 December 1847, MS 9016/24, WL; ADD MS 45791, ff 258-69, BL.

¹⁶ William E. Wallace, *Michelangelo: The Artist, the Man and his Times* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2009).

time describing the overwhelming imagery within. She wrote in February 1848, “In the morning Σ and I walked to the Sistine, where was a splendid light and I looked for the first time at the Last Judgment. But I am afraid of it, and cannot look for more than five minutes before my eyes wander back to the prophets.”¹⁷ She goes on to say, “How any *mortal* mind could have such a conception as the last judgment is like a miracle. It is so real, so living – you do not admire it or criticize it – you believe in it.”¹⁸ This great work had an enormous effect on Florence, one she carried with her the rest of her life. “My first sight of the Sistine Chapel will be one of the moments I shall carry with me, and it will be a constant light to the reading of the prophets from this time,” she wrote home.¹⁹ Whereas in her youth, her obsession had been with keeping accounts of every opera she saw, as an adult, her fascination now turned to representations of holy figures in art, and Rome was anything but in short supply. She spent an extensive deal of time analyzing the Sistine Chapel and finally concludes that, “No one can have seen the Sistine without feeling that he has been very near to God, that he will understand some of his words better forever after and that Michelangelo – one of the greatest sons of men – has done as much to communicate it to men.”²⁰

On another day, the group spent a morning in Gibson’s studio and another in Overbeck’s, collected plants in the Colosseum, rode in the Campagna and bought brooches, mosaics, and Roman pearls.²¹ She read her inner thoughts and aspirations into many of the works of art, as

¹⁷ Unaddressed letter from Florence Nightingale, Rome, 17 February 1848, MS 9016/56, Wellcome/Claydon.

¹⁸ Unaddressed letter from Florence Nightingale, Rome, 17 February 1848, MS 9016/56, Wellcome/Claydon.

¹⁹ Letter from Florence Nightingale to Parthenope Nightingale, Palazzo dello Sdrucchiolo, 17 December 1847, MS 9016/24, WL; ADD MS 45791, ff 258-69, BL.

²⁰ Letter from Florence Nightingale to Parthenope Nightingale, Palazzo dello Sdrucchiolo, 17 December 1847, MS 9016/24, WL; ADD MS 45791, ff 258-69, BL.

²¹ Cook, *The Life of Florence Nightingale*, 70.

evidenced in her journal entries.²² The trio had a sculptor take them through the Capitoline Museum and spends a great length of her letter dissecting the many different noses she saw on all the busts. She writes, “My friend the sculptor, an adept Scotchman more practical than imaginative, agreed that the nose of Caesar was quite unremarkable.”²³ Whereas opera had been her passion during her first trip to Italy, art in the form of painting and sculpture was her new obsession. She advised a study of the prophets at the Sistine Chapel to future travelers to Rome, so important was that material in the great works.²⁴ She followed the route plotted out by her father to the letter.

The colossal head of Juno at the Ludovisi gallery, at the Villa Ludovisi, left an equal impression on the young woman. The Juno now resides at the Museo Nazionale Romano in Rome. She and Selina were struck down by the unknown sculpture of Juno. “All other goddesses have been to me but beautiful women – nothing the least divine, like the Apollo or Jupiter, so I always thought *we* should be *men* in the next stage – as there could not be made an ideal of a woman – but now I have seen a Goddess.”²⁵ It could be surmised that Florence is paralleling what Plato says in *Timaeus*, in relation that a man who lived a disgraceful life would next be reborn as a woman, and so on down the stages of being. A righteous woman would be reborn a man. How the notion must have made Florence seethe and desire the notion of good behavior

²² Johann Friedrich Overbeck, a German painter who lived in Rome and friend to Charles Bracebridge.; John Gibson, a Welsh neo-classical sculptor in Rome, who frequently entertained English guests.

²³ Letter from Florence Nightingale to Dr. Richard Fowler, Rome, 25 December 1847, MS 9016/27, Wellcome/Claydon.

²⁴ Letter from Florence Nightingale addressed to her family, Rome, 19 November and 29 November 1847, MS 9016/16 & 17, WL.

²⁵ Letter from Florence Nightingale to Parthenope Nightingale, Via S Bastianello 8, 1 February 1848, MS 9016/50, Wellcome/Claydon.

being awarded the status as man – at least she could choose her vocation if she were. These insights did not stifle her love of art.

Sculptures at the Capitoline entranced her. Upon entering the room housing “The Dying Gaul,” Florence could not leave for hours. “No cast, no previous imagination had given me the slightest idea,” she writes her sister, “Oh the wonder of that divine art, it seems almost a miracle, and I lingered in that room for that brute (he really is ugly) has succeed in enchaining all our sympathies.”²⁶ In the next statement within this letter, an important parallel can be made of Nightingale’s personal journals. Referring to her understanding of grief, she observes how the Gaul is a dying man, his body dying in every sense and power but that the spirit remains. Before leaving for Rome, she wrote similarly in her journals of her body dying but her spirit refusing to leave.²⁷ These reflective notes show us a young, empathetic woman who identifies with the message.

Throughout her journey in Rome, Nightingale made comparisons with herself and the artwork around her. It was as if every piece spoke to her directly and magnified her desire to find her one true calling. This is a particularly interesting comparison made by Florence Nightingale, who seemed to always see herself as the dancing water within fountains. In many of her letters home, she is either referencing the way the light shines upon the waters, dancing gaily and free or how the moon reflects in the fountains. She makes a comparison between the Emperor’s Fountain at Chatsworth in Derbyshire, not far from her home to that of St. Peter’s fountain. Of the Emperor’s Fountain, she writes:

²⁶ Letter from Florence Nightingale to Parthenope Nightingale, Palazzo 5 Cammini, 9 December 1847, MS 9016/21, Wellcome/Claydon.

²⁷ Private Note, Embley, 1, 2, 5 & 7 December 1845, BL ADD MS 43402, ff 34, 35, 36, and 37.

See, how it strives and strives and strives to heaven. It cannot reach it. It is shedding tears of grief and disappointment, and now it makes another and another spring. Alas! it has chains about its wings and about its feet – and it falls, falls, falls heavily to the ground, and is lost upon the earth. And that which escapes is scattered among the clouds and before the wind, and never find its way again.²⁸

Again, grief enters her language, it is as if she is describing her life at home, constantly under watch and restraint, never free to express herself or follow her dreams and calling.

Of the St. Peter's Fountains, she writes:

See how the infant founts spring and gambol and dance in the sunbeams. See, there is one – he is shooting with his tiny arrow at the sun; he stands, the mimic Apollo, erect and fearless. His sister fount welcomes him back with her glad eyes. In loving triumph, she holds up her watery mirror. Now they all unite in a merry ring to gather the sunny drops which fall from on high.²⁹

There can be no doubt this is a poorly hidden message to her sister and mother, of Florence's desires of the two of them supporting her and her endeavors. Florence goes from this description within the letter to a jarring segue into the local politics of Rome. How Florence must have suffered under the crushing thumb of conformity her family put on her.

Visiting such extraordinary expressions of art encouraged her spiritual journey. On every wall, every rooftop, or scone, she would have been surrounded by angels, cherubs, pagan gods

²⁸ Letter from Florence Nightingale to Parthenope Nightingale, Via S Bastianello 8, 26 November 1847, MS 9016/7, Wellcome/Claydon.

²⁹ Letter from Florence Nightingale to Parthenope Nightingale, Via S Bastianello 8, 26 November 1847, MS 9016/7, Wellcome/Claydon.

and goddesses, and holy Christian saints. To be in the home of God, as she referenced Rome many times, for her was a successful connection to her “call.” It seems that the painting of the Delphic Sibyl truly was her favorite work by Michelangelo. It was as if she heard the voice he heard, but was afraid that her earthly ears were too gross to reach the meaning of the heavenly message.³⁰ In many letters, she references the Delphic Sibyl, always as if she is surprised that the angel remains. Michelangelo's Delphic Sibyl is the most beautiful and youthful of the five sibyls depicted on the Sistine ceiling. The sibyls, female seers from antiquity, were thought to have predicted the coming of Christ, and this Delphic Sibyl appears startled as she turns her head away from her prophetic scroll and gazes into the future. For her, “Rome is to me the Rome of St. Peter’s; I shall take the Rome of the Caesars quietly.”³¹

The Delphic Sibyl was the voice of Apollo, the Greek god of music, poetry, prophecy, and medicine. Some art enthusiasts say that the four colors in her garments represent Earth, Water, Fire, and Air -- the core elements of life. Apollo, a favorite of Florence’s, appeared in numerous references to him and his symbolism in many of her letters and later writing. One may surmise that the “wistful uncertainty,” that Nightingale described in the face of the Delphic Sibyl, may have resonated with her as a reflection of her and her experiences. She was still conscious of her call to God, of her desire for power and inability to achieve it, and if it would be her death that freed her enough to define it.³²

³⁰ O’Malley, *Nightingale*, 136. It appears that not only that travel journals were lost from her earlier trip to Europe, but a few key letters and journals from her winter in Rome were also lost by Ida B. O’Malley. Biographers Gill, Bostridge, McDonald and Woodham-Smith all make mention of this in their respective works.

³¹ Unaddressed letter from Florence Nightingale, Rome, 11 November 1847, MS 9016/7, Wellcome/Claydon.

³² Cook, *The Life of Florence Nightingale*, 72.

Descriptions of her daily activities is filled with art and spiritual reflection. As a young woman who had a thirst for acquisition, she drunk in everything. After they left the Sistine Chapel, she describes her journey back to their apartment. The sunlight dazzled as they walked past the Monte Mario where the fountains reminded her of dancing silver beams. She and Σ raced to St. Peter's Basilica before it closed and spent the rest of the afternoon there, again in total solace, until finally, the sacristan shoed them out through a tomb, into the moonlight.³³ Her obsession with Rome is documented in this letter from Florence. Almost every morning, Florence would rise before dawn so that she might have breakfast at her little spot she describes, "I have a little corner of my own, behind the left-hand support looking from the high altar, where I always go."³⁴

Florence's letters home to her father were more matter-of-fact than what she wrote to her female relatives. They consisted mostly of accounts of the current state of politics in Rome. Nightingale writes in great detail of her appreciation for the freedom of speech guaranteed to Romans by Pope Pius IX, not as familiar back in England. The Italian states, cities, and papal states continued to struggle under Austrian rule. Many of her father's friends, exiled during the Risorgimento, died never having returned to their homeland. Italian unity and removal of the Austrians must have been of great interest to WEN. She writes to her father of a procession of all the Italian provinces to showcase their love for Pius and desire for freedom from the Austrians. She says, "In the evening of the Day of Processions, the banners did not choose to be cut entirely and they made a

³³ Letter from Florence Nightingale to Parthenope Nightingale, Palazzo dello Sdrucchiolo, 17 December 1847, MS 9016/24, WL; ADD MS 45791, ff 258-69, BL.

³⁴ Letter from Florence Nightingale to Fanny Nightingale, Rome, 18 January 1848, MS 9016/39, Wellcome/Claydon.

little promenade. As they stopped under Lord Minto's windows he appeared and shouted, Viva l'Indipendenza dell'Italia!"³⁵ As her trip wore on, her letters changed from beautiful descriptions of art, architecture, and countryside to a more serious tone, discussing the state of politics in Italy, perhaps reminding her of her exiled friends in Geneva from her youth.

On this trip, she made the single most influential friendship on her career path, that of Mr. Sidney Herbert and his wife, Elizabeth. The Bracebridges were surrogate parents to Elizabeth, who was the same age as Florence, and the trio quickly fell in with one another. Of the couple she wrote, "The Sidney Herberts are here – he is a charming companion and really, if I were not afraid of being laughed at, I should say so artless, so full of fun, and so little like a man of the world. His keen enjoyment of the present [...] is his great charm."³⁶ With Elizabeth, Florence found a companion who had a long history of charitable work with foundling hospitals. Of Elizabeth, Florence showcases her constant adoration for females when she describes her as:

As for her, she is like the sunshine of Italy – it feels as if, when she is gone, out of the world and time a light had taken its departure – she is not like the ancient Helen, walking in the contemplation of her own beauty, nor like the Saint Bertha, with a palm in her hand, but like the Spirit of Joy and Peace – the first thing one says of her is not "how beautiful she is," for it is not an obtrusive, tyrannical charm which cannot help doing homage to and continually noticing, but one feels

³⁵ Gilbert Elliot Murray Kynymond, second earl of Minto, a member of the Whig Party and at this time Lord Privy Seal, was sent out to Italy by Lord Palmerston (a friend of WEN) in a semi-official capacity in the autumn of 1847. Letter from Florence Nightingale to WE Nightingale, Palazzo dei Cinque Cammini, 16 November 1847, MS 9016/11, Wellcome/Claydon.

³⁶ Letter from Florence Nightingale to Fanny Nightingale, Palazzo dei Cinque Cammini, 29 November 1847, MS 9016/18, Wellcome/Claydon.

the warmth and light of her presence, as one does that of the Sun, without scarcely applying an adjective to it one way or other. If I must use epithets, I should say that I never saw but [...] so unspotted from the world, so perfectly free from the vulgarity of being a walking dictionary of factitious differences. She is pure in understanding as well as heart.³⁷

Now the Nightingales were Whigs and the Herberts Tories, and they were high church and the Nightingales broad church. In Rome, the Herberts had a small circle of friends they met with almost daily. One was Dr. Henry Edward Manning, Archdeacon of Chichester, and a man who loved to irk Nightingale any chance he got. The other, a woman who would also become important in the future to Florence, Mary Stanley.³⁸ Nightingale formed a friendship with Stanley, albeit in the Crimea she would not be able to stand the sight of her, because she was interested in nursing as well.³⁹

One of the main reasons the Herberts came to Rome was so that Elizabeth could have an audience with the pope. During this time, the Oxford Movement was rattling the Church of England. This movement eventually developed into Anglo-Catholicism. In this period, the clergy consisted largely of Evangelicals, while universities became the grounds for the restoration of liturgical and devotional customs which borrowed heavily from traditions before the English Reformation as well as contemporary Roman Catholic traditions. This a point worthy of mentioning as the Nightingale's worried Florence might convert to Catholicism due to her adoration of Pius. Little did they know that she wrestled with the idea of converting, largely in

³⁷ Letter from Florence Nightingale to Fanny Nightingale, Palazzo dei Cinque Cammini, 29 November 1847, MS 9016/18, Wellcome/Claydon.

³⁸ Woodham-Smith, *Nightingale*, 48.

³⁹ Woodham-Smith, *Florence Nightingale*, 48.

part to join a sisterhood, but also some of the more traditional aspects of Catholicism appealed to her pious nature. Nightingale found herself drawn to Catholicism, not because of its religious dogma, but because it provided women with greater opportunity for religious service than the Anglican Church during this period. Florence must have sensed this distress in her family and wrote home:

Are you afraid that I am becoming a Roman Catholic? I might perhaps, if there had been anything in me for a Roman Catholic to lay hold of, but I was not a Protestant before...Can either of these two [churches] be true? Can the “word” be pinned down to either one period or one church? All churches are, of course, only more or less unsuccessful attempts to represent the unseen to the mind.⁴⁰

Finally, there was someone who would traverse the many sisterhoods and hospitals within Rome so that Florence may further her education on the nature of these institutions. Charities abounded in Rome and Florence carefully recorded all of them and visited many. She visited Saint Michele Hospital, and was accompanied by the Herberts. The Cardinal in charge appeared not to understand why anyone would want to visit and accused the Herberts of being Russian.⁴¹ The group finally reached an understanding, and upon doing so, he happily showed them the chapel, distributed papers and prints that were produced by the pupils of the asylum and then sauntered off to have them prepare some music for the group.⁴²

Florence writes, “Charities certainly swarm in Rome as flies in the sun, but such a blue bottlefly as this I had not idea of. There is an asylum for old men, and an asylum for young

⁴⁰ **Find this citation – keele 155**

⁴¹ Letter from Florence Nightingale to Parthenope Nightingale, Rome, 20 December 1847, MS 9016/26, Wellcome/Claydon.

⁴² Letter from Florence Nightingale to Parthenope Nightingale, Rome, 20 December 1847, MS 9016/26, Wellcome/Claydon.

women, where 180 are taught trades, their only qualification being fatherlessness.”⁴³ A month later Florence would visit the sisters at the St-Vincent-de-Paul and a week after that, she and Mrs. Bracebridge took a tour of the Hospital of Saint Spirito, situated just outside the walls of the Vatican. Throughout the month of January 1848, Florence made a point to visit as many other hospitals operated by charitable sisterhoods as she could, such as Saint Giacomo, Saint Gallicano, and Saint John in Lateran. These included the orders of women living and working as members of religious communities. After their trip to Giacomo, Florence laments, “I have never come out of any places with a heavier heart that I did out of S. Giacomo. It is the hospital for incurable diseases, wounds, and surgical cases. The nuns were perfectly overworked and the mother superior, whom I liked a great deal, seemed worn out and hopeless.”⁴⁴ The rest of the letter is a lengthy description of the conditions of the hospital and things Florence felt could change to make it a better quality of existence. It is worth mentioning that this letter is to Fanny Nightingale, considering her mother’s past reactions to Florence’s attempts to become a nurse, Fanny must have been livid at the thought of her spending so many of her days in and out of the hospital slums of Rome. That said, this experience transformed the personality of Florence Nightingale. For two months, she had been allowed almost unfettered freedom, to come and go as she pleased, with little to no supervision by the Bracebridges. They often let her stroll alone through town. She describes in a letter to her family of a morning she spent looking for Guido at La Vittoria. She notes how “it is so easy to find one’s way in Rome by the obelisks.”⁴⁵ In another

⁴³ Letter from Florence Nightingale to Parthenope Nightingale, Rome, 20 December 1847, MS 9016/26, Wellcome/Claydon.

⁴⁴ Letter from Florence Nightingale to Fanny Nightingale, Rome, 23 January 1848, MS 9016/43, Wellcome/Claydon.

⁴⁵ The Church of Santa Maria del Vittoria. The picture Nightingale was searching for was a small painting of the Crucifixion, that she would later find at a different church, the Santa Lorenzo in

letter, she tells her mother, “I went by myself to the vespers at the Trinità.”⁴⁶ How liberating it must have been to walk free and to take in the splendor of her surroundings, uninterrupted by her petulant and needy sister, critical mother, or nonchalant father?

During her stay in Rome, she began to embrace the many elements of the charitable work done there encompassed her. A most influential friendship developed with Florence and the Mother Superior, Maria Santa Colomba, of the Trinità de’ Monti, located just up the Spanish Steps from where she and the Bracebridges were lodging. Their meeting was what some may call serendipitous. At a Benediction on February 6, she noticed a little girl, lively and pert but clearly living in squalor. Florence could not forget her and made a point of learning her name. The child, Felicitta Sensi, lived with a so-called aunt whom Florence disliked.⁴⁷ She felt compelled to do what she could to get this little girl off the streets and ensure her an education. After making several inquiries she was summoned to a meeting with the Madre Santa Colomba. The nun who met with her and advised her was the maîtresse des externs, Laure de Ste Colombe, often referred to as “the madre” or Maria.⁴⁸ The convent was a house of French order, Sacré-Couer, at the top of the Spanish Steps, very close to where Nightingale and the Bracebridges were staying. The Trinità de’ Monti is celebrated for its beauty and for the flower-girls and women in peasant costume who frequented it.

The longer she was there, the more she felt in true communion with the Catholic faith. In fact, she was feeling the pull stronger than she ever mentioned to her family as she makes no

Lucina. Letter from Florence Nightingale to her family, Rome, 11 November 1847, MS 9016/7, Wellcome/Claydon.

⁴⁶ Letter from Florence Nightingale to Fanny Nightingale, Rome, 18 January 1848, MS 9016/39, Wellcome/Claydon.

⁴⁷ Gill, *Nightingales*, 219.

⁴⁸ O’Malley, *Florence Nightingale*, 141.

mention of her blossoming friendship with Maria. Nightingale understandably said little of her retreat in letters home. There is only a joking reference to her time as “an inmate” in an unnamed convent.⁴⁹ Reserved for notes in her private diary, that unfortunately no longer exist, the story with Madre Santa Colomba provides unusual insight into the metamorphosing Florence.⁵⁰ Madre Colomba was not only profoundly mystical but practically efficient. Florence spent much of her time in Rome at the convent, where she records the sayings of this woman and observed she was “always listening for the voice of God, looking for his will.”⁵¹ The Madre became her spiritual guide. Florence had sympathetic eyes and ears for all these things. In the end, what attracted her most to it was the orphanage and school for girls attached to the church. Her profound sense of self-responsibility of every human soul kept her free from any inclination to Roman doctrine, albeit she made many efforts to convince her family that the Catholic doctrine was mostly a righteous state of being.⁵² Nevertheless, she was more impressed by the practical benevolence of the Catholic sisterhoods.

For ten days, she studied the organization, rules, and methods of the large school at the short retreat.⁵³ As in all her studies, she appeared to be seeking motive more than method. She

⁴⁹ Unaddressed letter from Florence Nightingale, Rome, 17 February 1848, MS 9016/56, Wellcome/Claydon.

⁵⁰ Gill, *Nightingales*, 219.

⁵¹ Private note, Embley, 17 August 1950, MS ADD 45790, ff 30, BL.

⁵² Each letter listed here contains sympathetic references and writings on the beauty of the Catholic faith: Letter from Florence Nightingale to WE Nightingale, Rome, 20 December 1847, MS 9016/26, Wellcome/Claydon; Letter from Florence Nightingale to Parthenope Nightingale, Rome, 17 January 1848, MS 9016/37, Wellcome/Claydon; Letter from Florence Nightingale to Parthenope Nightingale, Rome, 23 January 1848, MS 9016/43, Wellcome/Claydon; Letter from Florence Nightingale to Fanny Nightingale, Rome, 16 February 1848, MS 9016/54, Wellcome/Claydon.

⁵³ The Convent was giving hospitality at this time to the Abbess of Minsk (in Lithuania). According to Sir Cook Nightingale wrote a long letter on the extraordinary adventures which the Abbess related to her during her stay. She was advised in 1853 to print it but I can find no evidence that she did.

was still struggling to find the vocation within her call while in Rome. Many years later a friend wrote to her, “It seems to me that the greatest want among nurses is *devotion*. I use the word in a very wide sense, meaning that state of mind in which the current of desire is flowing towards one high end. This does not presuppose knowledge, but it very soon attains it.”⁵⁴ What Florence was truly seeking with this study was extract the secret of devotion. This entire endeavor was kept secret from her family, thus again, reaffirming Selina’s devotion to helping Florence find her voice. She took the foreign tour as a tonic to enable her the better to fulfill her vocation; to her parents and her sister, the tour was the as a tonic which might divert her from it. They hoped that foreign travel would distract her thoughts, and dispel what they perhaps considered morbid fancies. They could not have been more wrong. Through her friends, they enabled her to educate herself on all manners relating to the care of the sick.

The experience at the convent could not have been a regular event. The entire time was spent observing in the convent school, and the mention thereof as a means of hiding the true nature of her adventure. For a number of years, Florence maintained a very close relationship with Colomba – she makes numerous references to the madre in her Nile trip in 1850, which have survived. Unable to have previously discussed her mystic experiences with any other, the madre took her calling very seriously. Madre Colomba encouraged Florence to answer that calling, which must have been comforting to hear after all that time. The one surviving letter from their correspondence, from the madre in 1856, shows why the relationship went no further.

Nightingale gained while in Rome a deep appreciation of Catholic liturgy. Nightingale continued to consider conversion to the Roman Catholic Church, not for reasons of doctrine, but

⁵⁴ Letter from R. Angus Smith to Florence Nightingale, 7 July 1859, “Navy Nurse Corps,” *American Journal of Nursing* XXI, no.1 (October 1920): 413.

because of its provision of a role for woman, like nuns. Fundamentally she understood her call to be one of work within the world, not separation from it. Florence talked in her letters of attending many Catholic services. She also climbed the steps of the Scala Santa at St. John in Lateran on her knees, a traditional act of Catholic piety. She writes, “Not that I believe in the Scala, but I believe in the knees, the devout knees, which have gone up it. I have faith in the Communion of knees, as much as in many another Communion.”⁵⁵ As stated by Thomas Pynchon in the introduction, the world of the guidebook suppressed the identities of the native inhabitants and that a process of “othering” began but for Florence, her goal was to live and emulate the locals as authentically as possible.⁵⁶

After only her first day in Rome, Florence met Pope Pius IX. She writes, “My dears, I have seen him, Pius, you know. I have seen him and he is more beautiful, more charming than even most fervent pietists could desire.”⁵⁷ This would be the first of many times she met with Pope Pius, for whom she had a deep appreciation. The letters to follow shortly show Nightingale’s enthusiasm for Pius IX, who became pope in 1846. She and the Bracebridges went to see him numerous times, as he was celebrating Mass, giving blessings, and driving about Rome before their audience with him. She was sympathetic when he was ill and wished he had

⁵⁵ Letter from Florence Nightingale to Parthenope Nightingale, Palazzo dello Sdrucchiolo, 27 December 1847, MS 9016/30, Wellcome/Claydon; These are known as the “Holy Stairs.” Tradition says that these are the marble steps of Pilate’s house up which Christ was walked at the time of his trial. They are said to have been brought to Rome by Helena, the mother of Constantine the Great, and purveyor of Christian relics. Worshippers may only ascend the steps on their knees.

⁵⁶ Catherine Matthias, *English Travel Writing from Pilgrimages to Postcolonial Explorations* (Basingstroke: Macmillan, 2000), 84.

⁵⁷ Unaddressed letter from Florence Nightingale, Rome, 11 November 1847, MS 9016/8, Wellcome/Claydon.

somebody to take care of him. “I wish he had someone to care for him. Have popes mothers? I never thought of that.”⁵⁸

Nightingale reported on the unfavorable opinions of English politics on the new pope. Her defense of him knew no boundaries and began many a quarrel at home with her incessant letters on the state of politics in Rome and defense of Pius. She wrote home saying, “To judge the pope you must not measure him by the standard of political intelligence even among babes and females in England, nor by the actual state of British political economy; you must estimate him by the state of Rome, or rather what it was when he was truly elected by God.”⁵⁹ Upon their actual meeting, she remarks that she and Mrs. Bracebridge were the only women in this group waiting for an audience with Pope Pius. She writes, “His voice is one of the most charming I have ever heard, and his manner easy, courteous, benevolent – is quite that of a man of the world – with the grace besides of his own good heart.”⁶⁰

Her admiration of Pius continues, even as the tension in Italy increased. She described entering Italy as, “You will now what the first sight is, of the land of St. Peter’s, the land of Pius the father of liberty.”⁶¹ Her letters begin to turn away from the chipper descriptions of art and architecture and instead begin to focus more on the current political situation between the Italians and Austrians and more on her ardent sympathy for the unfolding political crisis that upended

⁵⁸ Letter from Florence Nightingale to Fanny Nightingale, Rome, 11 January 1848, MS 9016/36, Wellcome/Claydon.

⁵⁹ Letter from Florence Nightingale to Parthenope Nightingale, Via S Bastianello 8, 26 November 1847, MS 9016/17, Wellcome/Claydon.

⁶⁰ Letter from Florence Nightingale to Fanny Nightingale, Rome, 11 January 1848, MS 9016/36, Wellcome/Claydon.

⁶¹ Letter from Florence Nightingale to Fanny Nightingale, Palazzo dei Cinque Cammini, 12 November 1847, MS 9016/9, Wellcome/Claydon.

1500 years of papal dominance on the Italian peninsula.⁶² She admires him for appointing a council to rule with law alongside him and in addition gave the press freedom of expression. To her father she explains, “As to the liberty of speech, it is absolute. You may say in the Caffè Nuovo, that the Pope is an imbecile and that you would throw the Cardinals out the window, or words to that effect. The liberty of the press is almost as absolute.”⁶³

Florence had an interesting attachment to Italy. During her youth, when the family was in Geneva, she took part in the celebration of amnesty (albeit short-lived) from the Austrians with many great Italian scholars and artists. Now, again, upon her arrival in Rome, there was another celebration under way. Nightingale, who had been moved by the Italian Risorgimento on her first trip, and had met the exiles in Geneva, was in Rome when the great events of 1848 occurred. Pope Pius had announced he would allow for a secular government in Rome and a few other freedoms, such as that of the press. She wrote to her father of the excitement in the streets, “The great day is over and what a day it has been. Do you know I would rather have been present at this than at the trebly hundred triumphs; it is a day taken out of Heaven and put down upon earth, a day apart from the rest of one’s life.”⁶⁴ The Romans were in a joyous state and at eight o’clock that night, Florence and the Bracebridges joined the crowd at the Quirinal. She describes all the different representatives arriving in processions, each with their flags and colors flying. The group followed ahead of the parade as they made their way to St. Peter’s Square. She reflected

⁶² See William Petre’s correspondence with Sir George Hamiltron, Inclosure in No. 204 relating to the “Austro-Ferrarese” question in “Correspondence Respecting the Affairs of Italy, 1846-1847, Presented to Both Houses of Parliament,” (London: Harrison and Son, 1849), 219.

⁶³ Letter from Florence Nightingale to WE Nightingale, Palazzo dei Cinque Cammini, 16 November 1847, MS 9016/13, Wellcome/Claydon

⁶⁴ Letter from Florence Nightingale to WE Nightingale, Rome, 18 November 1847, MS 9016/12, Wellcome/Claydon.

on historical irony of these exciting scenarios in writing to her father.⁶⁵ “Imagine those streets and palaces hung with tapestry (representing the battles of the Dorias and Colonnas), and with triple rows of scarlet and yellow hangings, wreaths of laurel mixed with yellow flowers, hung from palace to palace and every fifty yards a banner with a different motto,” Florence described to her father.⁶⁶ She continues, “If I say this, what impression do I give you of the one idea animating in unison so many organizations, of the golden shower which fell upon them from the windows, everyone scattering gold petals from their nosegays and of all Rome sending forth one rapturous cry, and yet hardly that, for the people were too moved to shout.”⁶⁷ A grand occasion and celebration, one that lasted well into the late hours of the evening. Can there be a comparison to Sismondi dancing on a table and shouting history at the top of his lungs?

In February 1848, the revolutionary spirit came raging again through not only Rome, but Florence as well. A revolution was happening in Naples and the Austrian king, Ferdinand, had been forced to grant a constitution. On February 4, Florence wrote a captivating letter to her Hilary and worth quoting in entirety:

Last night we illuminated for our brother of Naples. I heard that there was to be a procession ‘alle uno’ when it was just six, and ran down directly to Mondaldini’s to catch Mr. Bracebridge (I certainly was born to be a ragtag and bobtail, for when I hear of a popular demonstration I am nothing better than a ragamuffin.)

Mr. B and I caught a carriage and drove to the Capitol. It was still and quiet and

⁶⁵ Letter from Florence Nightingale to WE Nightingale, Rome, 18 November 1847, MS 9016/12, Wellcome/Claydon.

⁶⁶ Letter from Florence Nightingale to WE Nightingale, Rome, 18 November 1847, MS 9016/12, Wellcome/Claydon.

⁶⁷ Letter from Florence Nightingale to WE Nightingale, Rome, 18 November 1847, MS 9016/12, Wellcome/Claydon.

dark and as we walked up to the Clivus Capitolium from the Forum, the silent
 Three stood up in the starlight like ghosts of the (past) Fates, and looked as if the
 Fates themselves were no more, the world was dead. The night was frost and very
 cold, there no voices and I felt as if we were revisiting a world... where Past,
 Present, and Future alike were over and Change itself was dead.”⁶⁸

This quote can be seen as an excellent example of the revolutionary spirit that so attracted
 Florence.

As they left to head to the Corso, upon arriving it was as if they met Life. The whole
 population of Rome seemed to be pouring down the roads up to the Capitol. The Romans walked
 up the road with purpose, side by side with their torches, resembling a Roman phalanx. They
 carried banners of red, white, and green – the colors of faith, hope, and charity. Occasionally a
 long cry arose at the Campidoglio but otherwise they were silent.⁶⁹ They watched the birthing of
 Italy, ultimately these political events drove the English travelers out of Rome. The uprising, not
 far from the walls of Rome, in Milan, the potential for a military siege had become real. Florence
 referred to the week as “The Glorious Five Days.”⁷⁰ Successful resistance against the Austrian
 occupiers and the beginnings of civil, quasi-democratic governments, the granting of civil rights,
 liberty of the press, a constitution transpired with the fall of Rome appeared on the horizon. The
 papacy was well aware of the impending changes and needed to salvage its power; discussions

⁶⁸ Letter from Florence Nightingale to Hilary Bonham-Carter, 4 February 1848, Piazza de
 Spagna. Also quoted in O’Malley and McDonald without collection citation.

⁶⁹ O’Malley, *Nightingale*, 139.

⁷⁰ Letter from Florence Nightingale to her family, 25 March 1848, Hôtel d’Angleterre Rome, MS
 9016/65, WL.

with English diplomats clearly indicate this.⁷¹ At the same time, being part of the English community in Rome was not without its contacts with these same diplomats. Florence gleefully reported as the remnants of the Austrian regime in the north were torn down and burned.⁷²

As the fighting began in Lombardy in March 1848, Florence could scarcely contain herself. “Do you hear the sound of the cannon in Lombardy? Every shot seemed to me a cry of triumph from Confalonieri in cielo [in heaven].”⁷³ She had been traveling through Rome that day with Charles Bracebridge and came across a great gathering near the Coliseum. “When we came back we passed through a great crowd in front of the Coliseum – it was a priest, surrounded by the tricolors of Italy leading a crusade against the Austrians.”⁷⁴ Clearly, Rome had become ungovernable forcing Pius IX to leave Rome on 24 November 1848. He headed south at the invitation of the King of Naples, in route, he visited Neapolitan sanctuaries.⁷⁵

Nightingale laments that her friends, the Herberts, did not share her same sense of triumph. They did not have the fire of the Risorgimento flowing through their veins as Florence did. In a letter home titled “The Day of the Fall of Rome 1848,” written sometime in March 1848 after their departure, Florence fumes, “I must exhale my rage and indignation before I have lost all notion of an absolute right and wrong. On all sides I hear moderate men and women: ‘Those

⁷¹ See Lord Minto’s account of his meetings with Pius IX in Geroge Fitz-Hardings Berkley and Joan Berkley, *Italy in the Making: June 1846 to 1 January 1848* (1936; Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1968), 347-9.

⁷² McDonald, *CWFN* vol. 7, 84.

⁷³ Unaddressed letter from Florence Nightingale, Hôtel d’Angleterre Rome, Lady Day 25 March 1848, MS 9016/65, WL.

⁷⁴ Unaddressed letter from Florence Nightingale, Hôtel d’Angleterre Rome, Lady Day 25 March 1848, MS 9016/65, WL.

⁷⁵ Roberto De Mattei, *Pius IX*, trans. John Laughland (Leominster, Herefordshire: Gracewing, 2004), 32-4.

abominable Romans, they have destroyed their own works of art!”⁷⁶ She goes on to say, “I should like to see them fight the streets inch by inch, till the last man dies at his barricade, till the Vatican is blown into the air, till my own St Michael has winged his way back to whence he came.”⁷⁷ The fire of revolution burning deep inside her, only to be carried with her into the Crimea four years later is concluded in a letter with the following, “If I were in Rome I would be the first to fire the Sistine, turning my head aside, and Michelangelo would cry, ‘Well done,’ as he saw his work destroyed.”⁷⁸

The revolutions in Italy also carried over into France as they passed through on their return from Rome. How disappointing and exciting for Florence to be driven from her new home by revolution? A letter to her Boston friends, the Howes, confided her love of revolution:

When 1848 began with its revolutions I thought the kingdom of heaven was come, a kingdom which never presents itself to my mind under any other form than that of a republic. I have never been so disappointed as in this French revolution – it began so beautifully. Radetzky has conducted the affair with almost superhuman sagacity. Where does he get his supplies from? From his Infernal Majesty? Those stupid Austrians seem to get on as well without a government as with one.⁷⁹

Her penchant for entertaining writing was a talent that she never lost.

⁷⁶ Extract from missing notebook, excerpted from Ida B. O’Malley, *Florence Nightingale: A Study of Her Life Down to the End of the Crimean War*, 151-2.

⁷⁷ Extract from missing notebook, excerpted from Ida B. O’Malley, *Florence Nightingale: A Study of Her Life Down to the End of the Crimean War*, 151-2.

⁷⁸ Extract from missing notebook, excerpted from Ida B. O’Malley, *Florence Nightingale: A Study of Her Life Down to the End of the Crimean War*, 151-2.

⁷⁹ Letter from Florence Nightingale to Julia Howe, from a letter in Laura E. Richards, ed., “Letters of Florence Nightingale,” *Yale Review* 24 (December 1934): 336-41.

Her time in Rome was but four short months but its effects on her nature, intellect, and courage were profound. She arrived in Rome a meek, miserable woman, whose voice was but a faint cry across the wind. Upon leaving Rome, she had become the Delphic Sibyl, to which she so greatly admired, cloaked in fire and passion, her sense of self and purpose renewed, a flame that would not be put out. As she claimed earlier that “Rome is to me the Rome of St. Peter’s; I shall take the Rome of the Caesars quietly” and that she did.⁸⁰ In a private note to herself she said that 1847-1848 was her “happiest New Year” and that this was “the most entire and unbroken freedom from dreaming I ever had, oh how happy I was.”⁸¹ Twenty years later she wrote, “I have never enjoyed anytime in my life as much as my time in Rome.”⁸²

Upon returning from Rome, Nightingale returned to a home unchanged. Writing to Mary Mohl she quips, “In London there have been the usual amount of Charity Balls, Charity concerts, Charity Bazaars, whereby people bamboozle their consciences and shut their eyes.”⁸³ The longer she was home, the greater her depression mounted. In addition, while she was home, Robert Monckton Milnes resumed his attempt to marry Florence but her mind was made up – she must remain pure to achieve her ultimate goals of service to God. Her love for him cannot be doubted, for even a year after refusing him she wrote in her journal:

⁸⁰ Unaddressed letter from Florence Nightingale, Rome, 11 November 1847, MS 9016/7, Wellcome/Claydon.

⁸¹ Letter from Florence Nightingale to Mary Mohl, London, 21 November 1869, ADD MS 43397, ff 227, BL.

⁸² Letter from Florence Nightingale to Mary Mohl, London, 21 November 1869, ADD MS 43397, ff 227, BL.

⁸³ Letter from Florence Nightingale to Mary Mohl, London, 21 November 1869, ADD MS 43397, ff 227, BL.

I know that if I were to see him again, the very thought of doing so quite overcomes me. I know that since I refused him not day has passed without my thinking of him, that life is desolate to me to the last degree with his sympathy and yet with him I could not bear his life. The potential of life without another would be intolerable to me – that voluntarily to put it and of my power to ever be able to seize my chance of forming for myself a tone and niche life would seem to me like suicide. Yet my present life is suicide.⁸⁴

Florence had committed to a spiritual marriage to God. Nevertheless, that did not take away the bitterness that came with a life of solitude. Fortunately, Milnes remained a great friend and supporter of Nightingale his entire life. The family plunged into deeper division after this refusal with two factions emerging: the pro-Florence side, with Aunts Mai, Ju, Patty and Hilary and the anti-Flo faction, with her mother, sister, and the Nicholsons. Her father, once again caught in the middle, thought this a wondrous opportunity for Florence to once again travel with the Bracebridges, this time to Greece, Alexandria, and Cairo. Her mother reluctantly agreed, thinking if Florence would not marry, the next best thing for her was to lead a life of refined scholarship and literary ease which the enlightened nineteenth century had made possible for women.⁸⁵

The Bracebridges fancied travel by boat through Italy to Cairo in 1849, spend the spring in Athens and made their way leisurely back through Germany (an important travel choice indeed). This caused greater turmoil in the family with Parthenope going into hysterics over Florence's special treatment and Fanny thinking her husband too generous with his youngest

⁸⁴ Journal Entry, Alexandria, 25 December 1850, ADD MS 43402, ff 53-4, BL.

⁸⁵ O'Malley, *The Life of Florence Nightingale*, 154.

daughter. In fact, allowing for her to go to such disease-ridden countries was a calculated risk on his part. Only since the invasion of Napoleon and Admiral Lord Nelson's victory at Aboukir Bay, that Europeans had even been to Egypt. In Alexandria and Cairo, Florence would not have the freedom of movement she had in Rome. Social customs required her to cover from head to toe and still find an angry mob at an unescorted woman. Well aware that this trip was again another last attempt to get here interested in anything but hospitals, she could not refuse the Bracebridges.

Thanks to the extraordinary education she received from her father she was fluent in ancient Greek at the time the trio arrived in Athens, Florence and become their chief navigator. Her letters from Greece reveal her disappointment with Athens as a place, which due to a prolonged Turkish occupation, was in total disarray. While travelling to Egypt, Florence met two sisters of St. Vincent de Paul who gave her introductions to the sisters at Alexandria. In Athens, she met the American missionary couple Mr. and Mrs. Hill, who showed her their Protestant school and orphanage.⁸⁶

This trip maybe intrigued her more than Rome had, as not only a Christian but a great scholar of the classical works of Homer, Plato, and Aristotle. In the Balkans and Egypt, western women were not permitted to conduct business, so the role she had taken in Rome would not be reprised on this journey. Instead, she acted as companion, nurse, interpreter, and scribe. This third role proved the most important, as noted before, she was fluent in Greek. Most interestingly, with help from Julius Mohl and Christian von Bunsen, she dedicated herself to learning hieroglyphics. The trio took a huge trunk, full of books, including their friend Harriet

⁸⁶ Vicinus, *Suffer and Be Still*, 42.

Martineau's *Eastern Life Past and Present*.⁸⁷ Another must have for the described to her was Charlotte Brontë's second novel, *Shirley*. This novella tells the tale of an independent Yorkshire heiress and her struggling friend, Caroline. In this refreshing tale were many of the sentiments that Selina and Florence wanted said aloud about English women's lives.⁸⁸

For both Martineau and Nightingale, the journey to Egypt proved to be more about mystic experience than physical endurance. The tone of Nightingale's journal entries and letters home had completely changed from when she was in Rome. Her obsessive references to God and his will border on the psychotic.⁸⁹ Martineau wrote that "a Nile voyage is as serious a labour as the mind and spirit can be involved in."⁹⁰ Similar to Martineau, Nightingale both frequently took long walks alone to ponder their spirituality. Nightingale also extensively read and quoted from Henry Martyn during her travels.⁹¹ She transcribes many passages from his memoirs in her journals, all excising the importance of committing fully to God's will. Between him and the words she wrote down from the Madre Colomba, she often goes into a fanatic discourse on meditating on their words.

On November 18, 1849, Florence and the Bracebridges landed in Alexandria. In a journal entry on the way, one can see that she struggled with emotional torments, desperately trying to reconcile her special treatment for travel abroad to her incessant desire for a life of service. It is upon this trip we truly see Florence Nightingale transform into a mystic. In October, in transit to Egypt, she writes:

⁸⁷ Harriet Martineau, *Eastern Life Past and Present*, vol.1 (London: Edward Moxon, 1848).

⁸⁸ Calabria, *Florence Nightingale in Egypt*, 75.

⁸⁹ Pickering, *Creative Malady*, 137.

⁹⁰ Martineau, *Eastern Life Past and Present*, 86.

⁹¹ Henry Martyn, *The Memoirs of Reverend Henry Martyn, B.D.* (New York: Robert and Carter Brothers, 1850).

[Begins abruptly] zealous to do good I would say, ‘Don’t I advise you not, the higher your notion of what teaching is, the more you will be disgusted by what you do, unless you take pains to qualify yourself before hand.’ When, on the one hand, I see the numbers of my kind who have gone mad for the want of something to do, people who might have been so happy, Miss Edmunds, Aunt Evans, Aunt Patty and, on the other hand, I see the tribes of unmarried woman whose... [page runs off, second page not available]⁹²

Apparently, travel has begun to greatly affect Florence’s mind, that it permitted the time for deep self-reflection and a space for interiority. The group did all the usual sightseeing in Egypt, but the Bracebridges sensing Florence was in great distress, made a point of spending a great amount of time with the Sacre-Couer (Sisters of Charity) at St. Vincents de Paul. Not for religious reasons but because of their nursing practice: “they bleed, they dress wounds, and dispense medicines.”⁹³

During this trip, Florence committed to writing an excellent account of their excursion as possible, often noting in her diary writing letters till very late at night.⁹⁴

Between her departure and arrival across the Mediterranean in March, Florence wrote

⁹² Private Note, en route to Egypt, 10 October 1849, ADD MS 45790, ff 107, BL.

⁹³ Private Note, Alexandria, 27 November 1849, ADD MS 45790, ff 137, BL; Florence Nightingale, *Letters From Egypt: A Journey on the Nile, 1849-1850* (London: Barrie & Jenkins, Ltd., 1987), 29.

⁹⁴ In Michael Calabria’s *Florence Nightingale in Egypt and Greece*, he reproduces the diary in an unusual way. Every excerpt has been included, but only with dates and no page numbers. As the journal is given but the one collection number, ADD MS 45846, citing with specific file folder numbers is impossible. In addition to his publication, he cites Florence Nightingale’s *Letters from Egypt*, which was published by her in 1853. Of course, there are no reference numbers and can only be cited by page number, with no dates included in his reproduction. An astute researcher must take into their account the location with the corresponding letters and location to achieve an idea of what day or month the events taken place. Having viewed the journal myself, I must agree with the citation used by Calabria in his reproduction.

thirty-nine letters to her family home. These letters may be the finest representative of the finest English travel writing available. Her narratives of terrifying rides through the cataracts are some of the greatest moments in her book, *Letters from the Nile*. On one occasion down the Nile, she witnessed another boat become stranded on the rocks in the river but by the time another boat came to their rescue it had been shattered on the rocks, all its passengers killed.⁹⁵ At that juncture, Selina decided she would walk the rest of the way, but Florence sat on top of the cabin, drenched to the skin from the huge waves that passed all over the boat but determined not to miss a moment.⁹⁶

This journey up the Nile to Nubia proved an inspirational visit for Nightingale. On some days she found herself at the temple of Abu Simbel with not another tourist in sight. Watching the rising sun light up each turn of the great stone faces, placing her own crucifix in the tomb of Osiris in Philae, and sitting for hours in the Ramesseum at Thebes a few high points of her journey. On their way back, according to her diary, it was at Thebes that her slow descent into her depression and panic began.⁹⁷ The enforced dependency was starting to eat away at her spirits. Unlike her time in Rome, she could not endure the freedom of movement due to cultural restrictions. However, at the Great Pyramids, Florence was allowed to traverse the tunnels alone, as Selina and Charles had no taste for climbing stairs. They made no objection to her going in alone, however Florence made mention in her diary how different this trip would have been if her mother had been in charge.⁹⁸ Several pages in her journal were devoted to the description of the

⁹⁵ Private Note, Alexandria, 30 November 1849, ADD MS 45790, ff 139, BL.

⁹⁶ Gill, *Nightingales*, 240.

⁹⁷ Private Note, Alexandria, 20 February 1850, ADD MS 45790, ff 137, BL; Nightingale, *Letters from Egypt*, 133-7.

⁹⁸ Florence Nightingale, *Letters from Egypt*, 178.

climb in the Great Pyramid: Here, clad in flannel and brown Holland and having taken off your shoes, you are dragged by two Arab down one granite drain, up another limestone one, hoisted up a place and a last find yourself in a lofty groove and you look up to what seems an immeasurable height, for your light does not approach the roof.⁹⁹

Her letters and diary entries once again showcase the two Florences. To her family, her letters are the usual chipper and descriptive narratives, recounting all their adventures and people they meet but her journals revealed a much darker sense of self, one confused with her life and frustrated that her dreaming appears to have returned with a vengeance. One of her most prolific journal entries into her psyche happened not long after they landed in Alexandria. It reads:

I opened the casement. The fresh stormy night wind blew upon my face. It brought purity on its wings, it flowed onwards, it rushed past, it carried away corruption and impure things, it brushed infection and decay before it. It cleared the dead leaves from the earth, the breath of sickness from the chamber. It stopped as it passed by and at the cold fountain of strength I drew the precious draft.

Blessed be thou, O wind. Though all was dark, though the sky was stark, though there was no light in earth or heaven, blessed be thou. There came another strong wind with rain. The torrent fell. I could not open the casement. The trees rocked to and fro as with an earthquake. All was confusion – the line between earth and heaven was obscured I scarcely could discern between truth and error. I wait and there fell heavy tears. I could not discern between right and wrong.

⁹⁹ Florence Nightingale, *Letters from Egypt*, 179.

Then I went forth. I loved to feel the strong winds on my face with the fain falling on my hair and I cried to the blast, come, blow upon me, wash e from the stain of day.¹⁰⁰

The entire trip was not made up of sorrow and introspection. She also had many happy times where she meditated in the moonlight at the Temple of Osiris, or walked in the jeweled glow of the Egyptian sunset. Yet the dreaming remained. She scolded herself in her diaries, referencing her dreaming as “the murderer of my thoughts” or “Oh heavenly fire, purify me – free me from this slavery.”¹⁰¹ She agonized over the dreaming constantly, taking much prayer and meditation as a way of dealing with that but even then, she would find herself “dreaming in the very face of God.”¹⁰² During her stay in Rome, especially with the Madre, she found herself in comfort, free from dreaming. Interestingly in Rome, the voice of God never spoke to her, but in Egypt, two of the four times she heard the voice calling to her occurred. Surprisingly, she does not go into detail in her journal on the nature of these calls only to say that once God called to her in the voice of Madre Colomba.¹⁰³

Alone in Egypt, surrounded by such ancient relics and spaces she began to confront these dreams, much like the monks of old. With the dreaming, the mysticism within grew. The prospect of Egypt appealed to her for many reasons. Her favorite scholars, such as Homer, Plato, and Aristotle had all drunk deep from Egyptian culture and history. Hermetic religions such as Gnosticism, to which Nightingale had been introduced by her friends Bunsen and Mohl, had

¹⁰⁰ Private note, Alexandria, November 1849, ADD MS 43402, ff 61, BL.

¹⁰¹ Calabria, *Florence Nightingale in Egypt*, 45; Journal entries for 20 January 1850 and 15 March 1850, ADD MS 45846, BL.

¹⁰² Calabria, *Florence Nightingale in Egypt*, 45; Journal entries for 17 January 1850, ADD MS 45846, BL.

¹⁰³ Calabria, *Florence Nightingale in Egypt*, Journal entries for 22 & 28 February 1850, ADD MS 45846, BL.

grown up in the Middle East.¹⁰⁴ Christian monasticism, of which Florence was a devoted student, had begun with Pachobius in the deserts of Egypt. She hoped this would be a spiritual as well as cultural feast.

The nineteenth century is routinely thought about as the era of secularization, a period when the disciplines and institutions of modern science were founded and cultural authority shifted from traditional authority of religion to explanation through the scientific exposition of natural laws. The sociologist Max Weber spoke about this process as the disenchantment of the world.¹⁰⁵ While some might still accept the broad-brush strokes of this story, the Victorian period is also a period of deep and sustained religious revival. There was an evangelical revival in the Christian church but also a host of dissenting, heterodox and millenarian cults. It was a golden age of belief in supernatural forces and energies, ghost stories, weird transmissions and spooky phenomena. For many years historians saw these beliefs as embarrassing errors or eccentricities, signs of the perturbations produced by the speed of cultural change.¹⁰⁶ Evelyn Underhill, an authority on Western mysticism in the twentieth century, describes Nightingale as “One of the greatest and most balanced contemplatives of the nineteenth century.”¹⁰⁷ Her opinion was based on Nightingale’s life work of social action. The source of her strength, vision, and guidance was founded in a deep sense of unity with God. This is a hallmark of mystic tradition in many of the world’s religions. This aspect of Nightingale’s life has not been the focus of enough study, yet

¹⁰⁴ Gill, *Nightingales*, 234.

¹⁰⁵ Max Weber, *The Protestant Ethic and the Spirit of Capitalism* (New York: Charles Scribner’s Sons, 1938).

¹⁰⁶ Roger Lockhurst, “The Victorian Supernatural,” www.bl.uk/romantics-and-victorians/articles/the-victorian-supernatural.

¹⁰⁷ Evelyn Underhill, *Practical Mysticism: A Little Book for Normal People* (New York: Cosimo Classics, 2006), 106.

we cannot understand her significance without taking this into account. It is important to acknowledge that throughout this journey, Nightingale constantly evolved her belief in God but saw herself in art and paralleled her life with that of Grecian and Roman myths. This is most apparent in her semi-autobiography title “Cassandra,” her musings of the Delphic Sybil, or her fascination with Isis when in Egypt.

Upon arriving at Philae, Nightingale discovered the temple dedicated to the goddess Isis where she spent every day there meditating in the chamber, as evidenced in her sequential diary entries from this period. “I never *loved* a place so much – never felt a place so homey: thank God for all we have felt and thought. Every moment of that precious week, from before sunrise to long after moonlight had begun, I spent upon the Sacred Island, most of it in Osiris’ chamber.”¹⁰⁸ Nightingale spent a great deal of time meditating in such places, incorporating aspects of these ancient religions into her own unusual and eclectic theology. In an act of homage, she left her crucifix behind at Osiris as an offering to the ancient Gods.¹⁰⁹

After February, her mental state appears to disintegrate. Some professionals could refer to her as a religious zealot, others could call her a fanatic, and psychiatrists identify these experiences as hallucinatory. Determining the reality of another’s fervor in their faith is a difficult task, bringing some to an intense level of skepticism. The two Florences have been set, the early Florence, fragile and unwilling to break the hearts of her family to follow her passion and the one who emerges in Egypt is the same who will later write “Cassandra” and *Suggestions for Thought*.

¹⁰⁸ Calabria, *Florence Nightingale in Egypt*, 47; Journal entries for 22 January 1850, ADD MS 45846, BL. Ellipsis part of Nightingale’s own writing.

¹⁰⁹ Calabria, *Florence Nightingale in Egypt*, 47; Journal entries for 27 January 1850, ADD MS 45846, BL.

In April 1850, on their return journey to Athens, Florence met her “ideal” woman, Mrs. Frances Hill, wife of a local Protestant missionary. She and her husband established the first schools there after the expulsion of the Turks. Mrs. Hill would be yet another highly influential woman in Florence’s life, as evidenced by Nightingale’s constant references to her in her journals and letters home. Florence writes her sister that she has not spent much time in Athens because she has spent every moment with Mrs. Hill at their school. Florence writes of her, “As for Mrs. Hill, I never any body the least like her. She is the ideal woman. I am at the home of a real missionary, not one according to the use of the United Church of England.”¹¹⁰

Throughout her journey, she writes exciting descriptions home to her family of what she saw but privately wrote things such as, “Saw the Great Pyramids today. They gave me no impression.”¹¹¹ Upon their stop in Trieste, it broke Florence to see her beloved Italy so destroyed by the Austrians because of the revolutionary fighting they had fled just the year prior. “We went ashore at Ancona and found the city shaken, the palaces burnt and broken, and a bomb through the Duomo...the city looked as if it had been shaken by an earthquake.”¹¹² Her heart heavy, she retreated inside for the remainder of their stop.

A month later was Florence’s thirtieth birthday. This day proved profound, for on that day she made a vow to God that her life would be nothing of service; there would be no marriage to a man only to God, her only children being ones she cared for, and that every waking moment

¹¹⁰ Letter from Florence Nightingale to Parthenope Nightingale, 17 May 1850, ADD MS 45790, ff 236, BL.

¹¹¹ Calabria, *Florence Nightingale in Egypt*, Journal entries for 19 March 1850, ADD MS 45846, BL.

¹¹² Unaddressed letter from Florence Nightingale, at sea Trieste, Ancona, 20 April 1850, ADD MS 45790, ff 1-8, BL.

would be spent serving him.¹¹³ She believed her youth was gone with the passing of her twenties. To her mother she writes, “I must write to you on that, thirty years ago, you put me in here. I have no regrets for the departure of a youth which I have misspent, a life which I have disliked. But I am full of hope for the life which is set before me and for the occupations of which I hope I shall find myself better prepared for.”¹¹⁴ On this same day in her journal, she writes, “Today I am 30 – the age Christ began his mission. Now no more childish things, no more vain things, no more love, no more marriage. Now, Lord, let me only think of Thy will, what Thou wilt me to do.”¹¹⁵

The remainder of her journal ending in August 1850 offers constant meditations on Mrs. Hill, Madre Colomba, and her readings of Martyn and Cowper. The Bracebridge party traveled home slowly, up through Corfu, Trieste, Prague, Dresden, and then Berlin. Nightingale’s Greek letters reveal her disappointment with Athens as a place. She wrote that the Greek religion was about the deification of man and compared it to the Egyptian belief that worship was about the attributes of God.¹¹⁶ It is possible due to her declining mental state that she was having a difficult time enjoying the rest of their journey. Another cause could be they were trapped on their vessel for weeks due to the British blockade of Grecian seaports and she was still angry. The sights of war instilled a fierce response in Nightingale. Many of her letters home during this period are reports of the ongoing political strife happening with her homeland and Greece, in addition to the

¹¹³ Calabria, *Florence Nightingale in Egypt*, Journal entries for 12 May 1850, ADD MS 45846, BL.

¹¹⁴ Letter from Florence Nightingale to Fanny Nightingale, Athens, 12 May 1850, Claydon House Bundle 121; McDonald, *CWFN* vol. 7, 397.

¹¹⁵ Calabria, *Florence Nightingale in Egypt*, Journal entries for 12 May 1850, ADD MS 45846, BL.

¹¹⁶ Letter from Florence Nightingale to Parthenope Nightingale, 29 April 1850, Athens, ADD MS 45790, ff 15-29, BL.

remnants of the war with the Turks. She still retained her freedom of movement, visiting monuments, temples, and other historic sites in the moonlight. When she visited the Parthenon under cover of darkness she felt all her expectations of Greece had been realized. She walked over to the Acropolis and where she describes it as, “The Acropolis by moonlight is like entering a sacred portal. The principal place occupied by Athena? How beautiful is the myth which shows her springing from the head of Jupiter?”¹¹⁷ She had once seen St. Peter’s Basilica by moonlight; noticing the imperfections but simultaneously striving past unseen perfection, beyond the compass of its own thought. As she looked at the Parthenon, sitting alone with the stars, and reflected that God did not keep all his inspirations for the Jews, she felt her own spiritual kinship was elsewhere.¹¹⁸ It takes an inquisitive mind to find spiritual connection with temples of many different religions and still find solace and unity in their core teachings.

Her time in Athens is not described in the same manner as Rome or even Egypt. It is tinged with sadness at her return home and anger at the current state of political affairs that surrounded her on her journey homeward. Her dreaming had returned and it is apparent in her journals that is very distressed by this, for now they invaded her sleep, and kept her from feeling at rest. At Ptah’s temple Cave at Jerf Hoysayn, she wrote, “Oh what is Crucifixion – would I not joyfully submit to Crucifixio, Father, to be rid of this? But this long moral death, this failure at all attempts at cure. I am just the same state I was last June 7. I think I have never been so bad as this week.”¹¹⁹ What is this sin she committed that requires the dramatic penance of Crucifixion?

¹¹⁷ Letter from Florence Nightingale to Parthenope Nightingale, 31 May 1850, Athens, ADD MS 45790, ff 56-70, BL.

¹¹⁸ O’Malley, *Nightingale*, 162.

¹¹⁹ Private Note, 9 June 1850, Athens, ADD MS 45790, ff 74, BL. Calabria, *Florence Nightingale in Egypt*, 66. The letter Nightingale wrote about this visit to the cave of Eumenides gives a totally different impression. She describes a beautiful horseback ride with Selina on a gorgeous evening. She records her meditation at the famous site, hallowed by the Oresteian

One thing is certain: the excruciating cycle of sin, repentance, and renewed sin has something to do with Nightingale calls “dreaming.” Where can she find healing for this affliction, as she calls it? Her hope now lay in a much-anticipated foray into Germany. As she prepared to leave Athens she wrote, “After a sleepless night, physically and morally broken down, a slave. Glad to leave Athens. I had no wish on earth but to sleep, an unbroken sleep in my little bed at Lea Hurst.”¹²⁰

She decided that upon their return trip she will study at Kaiserswerth-am-Rhein. The letters Nightingale wrote in Austria and Germany en route to Kaiserswerth should be considered some of the most important in her works and travels abroad. She turned from her high church affections for Rome to her Protestant roots, traveling to the birthplace of Protestantism. Sightseeing and museums dominated, but in her mind, she was set on pursuing her vocation. Her mother, Fanny, must have been horrified at these letters home, full of hope and passion in her choice and she too far away to stop anything. Selina could see that Florence was in some kind of crisis and that Egypt and Greece had not had the same effect that Rome had on her previously. Clearly, this proved to be a different kind of calculated risk than what her father had taken by allowing her to go. Certainly, her mother would see this as an ultimate betrayal of her trust. Nevertheless, Selina took it upon herself to be the support for Florence that she did not have at home.

This is evidenced by the beginnings of many of Florence’s letters home towards the end of July 1850. Many of them start with phrases such as, “I wish you would write,” or “Since you won’t write to me I will write to you.”¹²¹ The fury upon her return would be great. Nevertheless,

trilogy, which seemed to be one of her favorite works of literature. Both the diaries and letters reveal the dichotomy of her mind.

¹²⁰ Private Note, 23 June 1850, Athens, ADD MS 45790, ff 90, BL.

¹²¹ Letter from Florence Nightingale to Fanny Nightingale and family, Pyrmont, 21 July 1850 & 26 July 1850, Claydon House Bundle 122; McDonald, *CWFN* vol. 7, 474-5.

Florence was no longer a shrinking violet. Albeit the violence was intense, Parthenope had thrown the bracelets Florence got her into her face and Florence herself fainted.¹²² Everyone in the family sunk into a rage upon her return but Florence's new resolve was a steely one. Her transformation now complete, she was ready to embark on her own, to make her own mark, and no longer cave to the wills and whims of her sister and mother.

Albeit her journey through Egypt and Greece were tumultuous, constantly at war with herself and her surroundings, trying in vain to make sense of the call of God, she emerged a mystic and unflappable woman. She had written Parthenope in 1851, "I am very glad to hear that you like people opt be happy in their own way and hope that that means that you mean to let me be happy in my own way," but that, "I am not surprised by your letter. You look upon my life here as a passing fancy which it is not impossible I shall give up when gratified."¹²³ Florence would no longer be pushed around. She had become the "Lady with the Lamp," albeit she did not know this yet. The foundation was set for to become the greatest contributor to nursing and medicine in England, maybe even the world. The transformative nature of travel could not be more apparent in the vision that returned to Lea Hurst, with a little owl named Athena in her pocket, in 1851 ready to take on the course of her life.

Upon arrival in Germany, Florence still suffered greatly but things seemed to approve once they arrived in Berlin. At the time, she was reading Currer Bell's *Shirley*, which gave a fine, clear picture of the weary uselessness of many women's lives.¹²⁴ The Bracebridges again let her travel alone, this time in carriage; however, alone in the sense that her their servant Trout.

¹²² Private note, undated, ADD MS 43402, ff 180, BL.

¹²³ Letter from Florence Nightingale to Parthenope Nightingale, Kaiserwerth-am-Rhein 9 September 1851, MS 8993/45, Wellcome/Claydon.

¹²⁴ O'Malley, *Nightingale*, 167.

There she visited a Bethanien hospital, a deaconess hospital, and the institute for the deaf and dumb.

Braver than before, Florence openly wrote about her hospital visits, the nursing practices, and her hands-on experiences. In July, she wrote about the Bethanien Hospital, which she had visited while in Berlin. She explicitly recounts the time she spent with the matron Mademoiselle Amalie de Rantzau and the advanced features of the new model hospital she founded. She especially made note that the deaconesses there were from the nobility, the middle class, and farm girls. She wrote to her mother that, “The hospital is like a palace, the deaconesses’ rooms are just like ours at Embley.”¹²⁵ Most notably in this same letter, she expressed her respect for German culture, especially because it lacked the appearance of class consciousness. She wrote, “In London a clergymen’s daughter is more punctilious than an earl’s. But to see a young lady in Berlin answering the bell herself, walking about alone, is very agreeable.”¹²⁶

While in Germany, Nightingale made a side trip to see Amale Sieveking, a woman who had founded a school for girls and whose father, Dr. Edward Sieveking later helped Florence with her nursing school. Nightingale spent two weeks at Kaiserswerth, as an honored guest. She visited all the wards and was introduced to the matrons and deacons. Finally at the end of July, Nightingale found herself on the road to where she had been trying to go for almost a decade: driving up the road to the Kaiserwerth Anstalt. She wrote:

My hope was answered. I was admitted within the Diakonissen Anstalt. Went to the inn to dismiss Trout and get my things. My first night in my own little room

¹²⁵ Unaddressed letter from Florence Nightingale, Berlin, 10-17 July 1851, MS 8993/22, Wellcome/Claydon.

¹²⁶ Unaddressed letter from Florence Nightingale, Berlin, 10-17 July 1851, MS 8993/22, Wellcome/Claydon.

within the Anstalt. I felt queer, but the courage which falls into my shoes in a London drawing room rises on an occasion like this. I felt so sure it was God's work.¹²⁷

The founders of Kaiserswerth, the Fliedners, saw the arrival of Florence, of the well-connected Nightingales, as an actual gift from God. Theodor Fliedner served as a German Lutheran minister and founder of Lutheran deaconess training. In 1836, he opened Kaiserswerth Diakonie, a hospital and deaconess training center. He and his second wife convinced her to write a pamphlet to expose the work being done at their establishment and promote its good works. It was titled *The Institution of Kaiserswerth on the Rhine, for the Practical Training of Deaconesses*. Charles Bracebridge saw it to be published, anonymously, but that would still not quell the fury at home at its mere existence.¹²⁸ Nightingale only stayed here for two weeks but this could be considered the most important time of her travels that spanned so many years. The following year she would return for three months of training and during this journey she made stops to visit with the Sisters of Charity in Paris. Her transformation now almost complete, Florence Nightingale, "The Lady with the Lamp," had now been born.

¹²⁷ Gill, *Nightingales*, 252.

¹²⁸ Gill, *Nightingales*, 253.

CONCLUSION

The human heart has hidden treasures, in secret kept, in silence sealed; The thoughts, the hopes, the dreams, the pleasures, Whose arms were broken if revealed.¹

For Florence Nightingale, nothing could have been more profound than time abroad. It allowed her that first taste of freedom that she had yearned for her entire life. The usual constraints of Victorian life melted away as she traversed the streets of Rome, Egypt, and Greece. What was once nothing more than a wilting violet bloomed forth into a powerhouse of history, science, and charity? Without these experiences, Nightingale would have been doomed to a life of enforced idleness, a true hell on earth, to which there is a strong chance she would have taken her own life. The cult of domesticity no longer held her in a vice grip of boredom, monotonous, and repetitive actions. Establishing women in their rightful place in the changing scope of history is inherent and necessary. The re-emergence of the women's movement in the mid-twentieth century sparked interest in Nightingale, among many other significant women. Anthologies of women of the Victorian period accord her a substantial place.

With travel, Florence broke the chains of traditional Victorian womanhood. She is just one among the many trailblazing women emerging from this period with their thoughts on freedom and desire for financial and cultural independence. Whereas many saw a woman's place as the head of the house, ensuring the moral fiber of the next generation, others saw it as a cage. Rather than attracting a husband through their domestic abilities, middle-class girls were coached in what were known as "accomplishments."² These would be learned either at boarding school or

¹ Charlotte Brontë, "Evening Solace," Anne Brontë, Emily Brontë and Charlotte Brontë, *Poems by Currer, Ellis and Acton Bell* (Philadelphia: Lea and Blanchard, 1848), 188.

² Kathryn Hughes, "Gender Studies in the 19th Century," *Discovering Literature: Romantics and Victorians*, British Library.

from a resident governess. In *Pride and Prejudice*, the snobbish Caroline Bingley lists the skills required by any young lady who considers herself accomplished, “A woman must have a thorough knowledge of music, singing, drawing, dancing, and the modern languages, to deserve the word; and besides all this, she must possess a certain something in her air and manner of walking, the tone of her voice, her address, and expressions, or the word will be but half-deserved.”³ Florence Nightingale may have well shown Caroline Bingley how a woman can truly achieve both.

Her father’s interest in providing her an exemplary education rooted her desire for learning and accumulating any knowledge she could. Globes were a standard part of Victorian education, but WEN took it upon himself to make geography entrancing, thus building the foundation for Florence’s wanderlust. In pursuit of knowledge, Florence was relentless. She was brilliant, she was focused, she was competitive, and she identified learning, correctly, as an avenue to power.⁴ Constantly stifled by her mother and sister, she never could truly express herself. More confident in her intellectual abilities than most women of her day, this explains the achievements, admiration, and hostility she aroused. Anomaly and glorious, this academic excellence was a gift bestowed by her father.

Her first journey abroad, the family Grand Tour took in Europe, planted the seeds of adventure in her spirit. Seeing firsthand many of the places, people, and things she had been studying. Making friends with great thinkers such as Sismondi, Caterina Ferucci, and the most influential friendship of her life, Mary Mohl néé Clarke, showcased a world of intellectual freedom of thought and expression she had never experienced at home. While in Geneva she

³ Jane Austen, *Pride and Prejudice* (London: Spottiswoodes and Shaw, 1853), 33.

⁴ Gill, *Nightingales*, 129.

writes of reading about a French woman who hiked to the top of Mont Blanc, the first woman to ever do so.⁵ Madame Ferucci and Mary Clarke represented cultured, intellectual women, with the freedom to do what they wish without the social expectations of maintaining a husband, albeit both would be married, but of their choice rather than being forced by family.

Shortly before their return, Queen Victoria ascended the throne. As a woman in a position of great power, the Nightingale sisters followed her ascendency to the throne closely. For them and many Victorian women and girls across England, this began to set a new precedent of women in the workplace across the country. Nightingale's desire to become a nurse continued to grow. Nightingale had not reckoned on the strength of her mother's disapproval. Frances still refused to allow her daughter to take up what was widely considered a sordid, morally suspect occupation. Plummeted into depression, Nightingale despaired of ever escaping the monotonous round of aimless leisure.⁶ That did not stop her from attempting a secret education in medicine. She writes to her Aunt Hannah of her studies, "I have been reading lately a report upon Lunacy, which insists above all upon exercise. In the open air for the patients, upon working in the garden, for instance as having an almost extraordinary effect in soothing the irritation of madness."⁷ Maybe part of her reason for reiterating this to her aunt is that she was a mild attempt trying to find a way to deal with her own deteriorating mental situation.

As her mental health deteriorated from being denied a higher purpose, Florence's father grew more desperate to help her while her mother and sister seemed content to continue their torment. Florence wrote to Parthenope, "In answer to what I know you are saying and thinking,

⁵ Letter from Florence Nightingale to Madame Benedicks, Letter 3 in Henning Wieslander, "Florence Nightingale och Hennes Svenska Ungdomsväninna," 27-30.

⁶ Poovey, *Cassandra*, x.

⁷ Letter from Florence Nightingale to Aunt Hannah Nicholson, Embley, Winter 1844, ADD MS 45794, ff 16, BL.

first I want to say that fears concerning the future prevent my gaining all good and strength that is possible from the present. I look again and again if there be any light to rescue those who so dearly prize each other from the sad sorrow of grieving or injuring each other.”⁸

Out of desperation, the family allowed her to travel across the globe with the family friends, the Bracebridges. These saviors in Rome truly allowed Florence the freedom to transform into the powerhouse that the world knows today. Apart from cultural requirements when they were in Egypt, Florence enjoyed an unfettered freedom to walk, talk, write, and dream by herself. Forced from Rome due to the rising tensions of the Italian revolution of 1848 she wrote, “When 1848 began with its revolutions I thought the kingdom of Heaven was come, a kingdom which never presents islet to my mind under any other form than that of a republic, never under that of an aristocracy.”⁹ How fitting she writes of revolution to the woman who wrote ‘The Battle Hymn of the Republic.’

Her time in Egypt and Greece also greatly influenced her life, but not in the way that Rome did. Her friendship with the Madre Saint Colomba and the Sisters of Charity sealed her fate of becoming a nurse. The Madre Saint Colomba had found it a heaven-sent blessing to pour out her own feelings to Florence, also, taking on Florence’s heartbreak and desires for becoming a nurse and living a life of service and charity. Leaving Rome behind sent her back into despair, but the travels in Greece and Egypt pulled her up by her bootstraps for a short time. She began training at the prestigious Kaiserswerth-am-Rhein for her nursing career and spent over a year learning from the Protestant sisters there all she could about caring for the sick.

⁸ Letter from Florence Nightingale to Parthenope Nightingale, Kaiserwerth-am-Rhein, 9 September 1851, MS 8993/45, Wellcome/Claydon.

⁹ Letter from Florence Nightingale to Julia Ward Howe, Derbyshire, 28 July 1848, from a letter in Laura E. Richards, ed., “Letters of Florence Nightingale,” *Yale Review* 24 (December 1934): 336-41.

Upon her return from the final leg of her journey, Florence showcased a steely resolve. She demanded to be free of her family obligations to take on her own path. The now famous home on Harley Street became her own salon of great minds of the day, with friends like Charles Dickens, Elizabeth Barrett Browning, Elizabeth Blackwell, Anne and Charlotte Brontë to name a few, frequenting her household. From here, her important Rome connection and friend, Sir Sidney Herbert, would at last grant her the enormous opportunity to showcase all the knowledge she had been gathering over the years. This is how history remembers her, as the prestigious “Lady with the Lamp,” becoming a symbol of nationalism and glory during England’s time in the Crimean War. Under Florence’s leadership, the nurses brought cleanliness, sanitation, nutritious food, and comfort to the patients. Nightingale was known for providing the kind of personal care, like writing letters home for soldiers, that comforted them and improved their psychological health. Her group of nurses transformed the hospital into a healthy environment within six months, and thus, the death rate of patients fell from forty to two percent.

She changed the face of nursing at home and abroad, helping change the way the government dealt with the sick-poor, sanitation practices, and still influencing that today who have a dream of nursing. One wonders if those who seek out the profession of nursing understand the turmoil and hardships one woman had to endure to change the entire course of history. Nightingale’s unwillingness to accept a predetermined future of housewifery would put all women on a path to achieve greatness for themselves. Throughout her life, Nightingale struggled against the constraints against placed upon women, but she also extolled the virtues of hard work, female modesty, and anonymous service. Although she recognized her exceptional privileges, she had no sympathy for women who were less dedicated. She once wrote to her father:

In the last century, it does not appear, at least among women, to have been so. The education of the faculties, and their sphere of action, were in harmony & we hear consequently little, in poetry or fiction, of uneasiness or melancholy. In this century we have advanced the standard of the one (Theory) – without that of the other (Action) – for man cannot move both feet at once, except he jump and he now seems to stand askew. May we not hope that, in the next century, without the one retrograding, the other may be brought up to stand alongside, and the balance again restored. But for this, trials must be made, efforts ventured – some bodies must fall in the breach for others to step upon, failure is one of the important elements of success – the failure of one to form a guide-post to others – till at last, a dog comes who, having smelt all the other roads, and finding them scentless & unfeasible, follows the one which his Master has gone before.¹⁰

Florence Nightingale may be one of the greatest women of our time and the least understood. Her never-ending battle with depression would last her entire life. She developed a disability and reclused the rest of her days, as consequence of her contracting foodborne illness in Crimea, her efforts to improve the standing of healthcare and women who desired to work never wavered. She may have referred to Selina Bracebridge as her Ithuriel, ultimately, in the end, Italy would be the constant presence in her life that opened her eyes and heart to the spiritual and intellectual strength necessary to change. The transformative nature of her travels must not be overlooked when studying her, for to read her letters and journals is to transport yourself to a place and time lost long ago. As

¹⁰ Letter from Florence Nightingale to WE Nightingale, Embley, 27 January 1846, MS 8992/116, Wellcome/Claydon.

Florence desperately wrote in *Cassandra*, “Women dream till they no longer have the strength to dream; those dreams against which they so struggle, so honestly, vigorously, and conscientiously, and so in vain, yet which are their life, without which they could have lived; those dreams go at last.”¹¹ Like a fiery comet, Florence Nightingale streaked across the skies of the nineteenth-century England and transformed it with her passage.

¹¹ Nightingale, *Cassandra*, 48.

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