

Nightingale Discourse and “Author-ity”

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*I study Flo as if she were a language and as she is a deep one I have
not mastered it by any means.*

Mary Mohl to Parthenope Nightingale, 16 February [1853]¹

While I write I am under the empire myself of words.

Nightingale, undated private note [1856-57?]²

Abstract: This essay considers current discourses circulated by what I call the Spiritual School of Nightingale production that enlarge her authority through religious authorship. Since the 1990s, this School’s distinctive populist and academic wings have been bringing out editions of her (mostly) unpublished manuscripts on religion along with their own commentaries, which construct Nightingale as a deeply spiritual author and inspirational role model by reading her writings as proofs of the “faith [. . .] central to her life, work, and thought,” rather than as textual evidences that require nonpartisan sifting. This School, which is positioned to take over Nightingale studies, can be credited with reviving interest in her work; and religious ideas could hardly have been more important for her sense of vocation. Despite the value of these efforts, especially the recently-arrived *Collected Works*, taking her equivocal writing about “faith” on faith of their own is problematic because it generally forecloses probing more deeply into what else these expressions might have meant or been intended to signify. What this School’s under- and over-readings miss, I argue, is the tangled “more is less” problem with the exalted terms of Nightingale’s self-authoring and the high discourses of “author-ity” that she adopted in writing on religious subjects.

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At the height of Victoria’s century, Florence Nightingale’s name bore a radiant aura after her army nursing brigade in 1854-56 gave the nation its much-needed “Heroine of the Crimea”—and more, a living English saint.³ Among many exalted tributes, Henry Wadsworth Longfellow’s 1857 poem awarding her “The palm, the lily, and the spear, / The symbols that of yore / Saint Filomena bore,” registered the coincidence of “Nightingale mania” with Italian popular enthusiasm for this supposed “virgin and

¹ Epigraph, Bostridge.

² Epigraph, *Ever Yours*, 177.

³ After visiting Scutari, one MP marvelled, “Nightingale in the Hospital makes intelligible [. . .] the Saints of the Middle Ages” (qtd. in Cook 1.238). On soldiers’ veneration see *Ever Yours* (158).

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martyr of early Rome,” canonized in 1855, whose name was believed to mean “daughter of light” (*Oxford* 354). As *The Oxford Dictionary of Saints* tells the story, scholarly scepticism belonging to a “scientific age” already began to mount as reports of Philomena’s spectacular cures were spreading throughout Italy, accompanied by “fictitious Lives.” The Holy See finally suppressed her cult (in 1960), much to the “indignation” of her “devout patrons” and those with “vested interests” in her shrine.

The vicissitudes of Florence Nightingale’s reputation hold their own cautionary tales about belief and scepticism, special interests, and exaggerated claims invited by her association with divine light in popular iconography, gliding with her Turkish lantern through a grim barrack ward. This essay offers such cautions about current discourses being circulated by what I call the Spiritual School of Nightingale production, which is positioned to take over Nightingale studies with the arrival of the 16-volume *Collected Works* (2001-2012). Since the mid-1990s, the populist and scholarly wings of this School, while disavowing the idealized image of the Lady with the Lamp, have been bringing out editions of her manuscripts on religion, elevating her authority through spiritual authorship. Their own commentaries construct Florence Nightingale as a deeply inspiring writer and role model by reading her writings as proofs of the “faith [. . .] central to her life, work, and thought” (Larsen, “St. Flo” 2), rather than as textual evidences that require nonpartisan sifting. Members of this School have revived interest in a remarkable Victorian; and religious thought could hardly have been more important for inspiring her sense of vocation. Yet taking her equivocal writings about “faith” on faith of their own is problematic because it generally forecloses probing more deeply into what else they might have meant or been intended to signify. What the Spiritual School’s under- and over-readings miss, I will argue, is the tangled ‘more is less’ problem with the terms of Nightingale’s self-authoring and the high discourses of “author-ity” that she adopted in writing on religious subjects.

1. Self-Authorizing Discourse

Despite her gift for creative writing, in the early 1850s Nightingale made a conscious choice to reject a literary career for an active public vocation, which would afford its own professional writerly scope for the reclusive invalid reformer after the Crimea. Before and after this decision, she wrestled with her deepest personal questions in masses of private manuscript. This corpus includes journals; lengthy private notes; letters to God on pale blue paper; spiritual fantasies; imaginary dialogues; travel diaries; copious annotations in her Bible and other religious books; abandoned writing on “devotional authors”; and “memoranda” on every birthday, New Year’s Day, and the anniversaries of her four divine “calls” assessing her spiritual progress or lack of it.⁴

⁴ Nightingale’s unfinished manuscripts titled “Notes from Devotional Authors” (discussed below) are listed here because although intended for publication, the writing characteristically served private

Although these writings bear witness to keen spiritual discernments, it is also evident that Nightingale suffered from recording and practicing her faith with the pen. Besides external causes others have discussed, her psycho-spiritual anguish, which began well before the Crimea, was sustained long after partly by the habit of writing her core religious ideas over and over in a recurrent lexicon of theological absolutes that led her into the same impasses for decades, despite their support for her high “sense of mission” (Poovey, *ST* xx-xxi).⁵

An enduring problem was Nightingale’s practice of writing about herself in terms of what she called God’s “character.” While this form of self-authoring discourse could be seen simply as an aspirational expression of her intimacy with the Divine, Benjamin Jowett, long her dialogue partner, was more sceptical, objecting on theological grounds to her insistence on this phrase and questioning its authority:

I want you to tell me some day what is the ‘Character of God’ of which you often speak but, as appears to me, without coming to the point. Where do we get our knowledge of him? 1st answer: from nature & this leads to the recognition of fixed laws & tends to sanitary improvement. 2nd answer: from the human reason & conscience. But what do we definitely learn of him from these & on what grounds do we believe their anticipations? *And how is the God revealed in nature to be reconciled with the God in reason & conscience?* (letter to Nightingale, 14 Aug [1871], *DMN* 214; italics added)

This was a good question with the introduction of germ theory, which seemed to contradict Nightingale’s God of perfect love. In later letter Jowett wrote:

I am right in not allowing you to be constantly using the expression, ‘Character of God’ (although I did not reclaim until I heard it about 1000 times) because it is anthropomorphic, and unless we change our words frequently in theology we shall be insensibly putting them in the place of ideas. [. . .] We must

purposes as well. Space does not allow me to present more textual and biographical evidence for the uncomfortable paradoxes that comprise the “Nightingale problem,” or analyze the different issues of religious expression in her correspondence and writing on many public subjects.

⁵ Poovey’s Introduction to Nightingale’s *Suggestions for Thought* makes lucid the religious and social ideas empowering her sense of vocation and social vision that, in the text, are challenging to follow. While appreciating the difficulties of and need for this kind of explication, and without attempting to compass the ‘whole’ Florence Nightingale, I have chosen to focus on critical questions in order to indicate why some balance to the Spiritual School’s understanding and use of her religious writings is needed. I am not doing much here with Larsen’s useful distinction between her “apologetic” theological writing meant to persuade others that reiterates her core theodicy (discussed below), and her richer “devotional” writings (*People* 119), abundant in speculations, insights, and personal expressions, because in so many of her texts public and private purposes and discourses (uneasily) coexist.

describe [the 'nature,' 'being,' 'substance,' 'character' of God] under many figures of speech, as well as we can. (16 Jan. 1873; *DMN* 235)

But Nightingale could not accept these objections. With his “we” situated in the bosom of England’s male clerical-academic establishment, the Oxford Regius Professor of Greek was unaware of or unable to grasp the personal importance of this peculiar “anthropomorphic” locution for his famous female correspondent’s self-legitimation—its “point.” Nor, despite their shared interest in Platonism, could he see how the “Character of God” related to Nightingale’s concept of the “type,” the personified model one must ever have “before [one]” (*ST* 210). The highest of her personal types was “the Perfect.”

Nightingale’s identification of God’s “plan” with her reform plans also caused anguish when she saw them ‘broken up’ as God “thwart[ing her] work” (letter to Jowett, [16 July 1862], *DMN* 18). Other difficulties arose from the fact that her heterodoxy harboured remnants of Christian doctrine she thought she had jettisoned or recast, especially “the cross,” the other “type” in whose terms she wrote herself. As a “practical” concept, voided of Christ’s divinity and “vulgar” Atonement doctrine, it consecrated her ideal of service (*CW* 4.49), if sometimes in tension with the single-minded ambition that her projects succeed. For one who aspired to please God “always” by “be[ing] always pleased with God and his cross,” it also presented a crux of spiritual discernment between its potential to sacralise her own sense of “victim[age]” and its model of Christ-like “willing[ness]” to “incu[r] any and all sufferings” in “helping on men and carrying out God’s will and work.” Unacknowledged tensions between “the cross” and “the Perfect” then troubled what she called her “Theodike,” another target of Jowett’s objections.⁶ Here “the ‘cross of Christ’” had a “historical meaning” as “the proof of God’s goodness” in “educat[ing] the world by His laws, i.e., BY SIN,” using “EVIL” as “the *only* way” to “teac[h] man by his own mistakes, by his *sins*, the way to *perfection*” (49, 47). Nightingale understood this core religious belief as subsuming four “identical propositions,” in which “God’s providence, God’s laws, the cross” are conflated as “identical terms” (47). Their mutual reinforcement fit her logic that God’s “character” above all was “consistency” (qtd. in *CW* 1.19), as seen in His invariable “laws.” In a world so ordered, there can be no meaningless or random suffering.

If for Nightingale “experience seems to have taken on a reality only when it had been ordered and fixed in writing” (*Ever Yours* 6), she bound herself to the dilemmas of her theodicy by maintaining their absolute terms with her active pen. Although the idea of self-correction as obedience had liberated her in 1851 to take up nursing, in after years her recursive writing practices cut mental grooves, I would argue, that reinforced

⁶ Nightingale to Abbott, 8 Feb. 1895, and letter from Jowett [Jan. 1865] (*DMN* xxxiii, 40-41). See Poovey for a nuanced discussion of suffering in Nightingale’s theodicy (xxii-xxvi) and McDonald on “the cross” (*CW* 2.23-24). Nightingale’s “practical” and “historical” categories of meaning for this phrase are not perfectly complementary.

her imperious yet conflicted mode of thought, helped engrain her psychic attachment to suffering, and bound her to lofty spiritual ideals that mis-fit aspects of her personality and circumstances, making self-possession more elusive than it should have been for a woman of superior intelligence and insight. One needn't belittle Nightingale's accomplishments or absorption in spiritual things to see that the authoring of herself in these peculiar terms of "faith" made a sometimes wobbly "cent[er for] her life, work, and thought."

2. Populist 'Higher Nightingale' Discourse

In the 1990s, while revolt was simmering in Britain's largest nurses' trade union against "the founder of modern nursing" for holding their profession back (Bostridge 544-45; cf. *CW* 1.846, Grypma, "Saint" 8), new flame-bearers of Nightingale's legacy emerged from the holistic nursing movement based in the American Southwest. Blending the region's New Age spirituality—known for its religious universalism, vision of interconnectedness, natural healing rituals, and Native Americanistic mysticism—with their Jung-inflected feminism and philosophy of "wholeness," these champions authored a heady new populist discourse of Florence Nightingale as world healer, celebrity saint, and mystic.⁷

Its New-Age ritual form emerged at an "International Tribute" staged at the Scutari Barrack during a 1996 UN summit in Turkey, featuring a poetic prayer, addressed to no God, raising up Nightingale's "Beacon of Lamplight" to "kindle" the "Lanterns of Caring" in "Nurses and Healers."⁸ On the same day it was read at the Community of Healing Hands in Tucson, Arizona, and interpreted with a "Sacred Lamp Lighting Prayer Dance" by Zuleikha of Santa Fe, New Mexico, at Questhaven Retreat in California. Next came a super-synchronized "Millennium Moment" in Y2K on the 180th anniversary of Nightingale's birth, when caring "nurses around the world" were to pause "for a moment of silence to create a ritual of light" in her honour, "form[ing] a wave of energy that w[ould] encircle the globe as noon occurs successively in each of the 24 international time zones" (Collins and McGuire 103). Thus was launched a "worldwide movement" of "Nightingale Moment[s]" bearing her legacy into the second millennium.⁹

⁷ The populist Spiritual Party is important for helping to revive interest in Nightingale (McDonald, *CW* 1.1). My cautionary remarks pertain only to American holistic nursing leaders' Nightingale discourse and are not to be construed as diminishing the usefulness of holistic healing methods or the difficult, necessary work nurses do.

⁸ Beck (105). Deva-Marie Beck gave the keynote address for the "International Tribute to Florence Nightingale at Scutari" at the UN Human Settlements HABITAT II Summit, Istanbul, 1996, posted at www.nightingaledclaration.net/prayer, accessed 21 May 2010.

⁹ See "The World Wide Commemorative Moment for Florence Nightingale," 2009, posted at www.nightingaledclaration.net/moment, and "Nightingale Moment Events," posted at www.ahna.org/Home/EventsCalendar/NightingaleMoment, both accessed 31 May 2010. The Y2K

During this period, the American Holistic Nurses Association (AHNA) was waging two Nightingale-linked campaigns: efforts to win recognition of their field as a “nursing specialty” by the American Nurses Association (ANA), which looks for “evidence-based practice”;¹⁰ and petitions for the Episcopal Church USA to add Nightingale to the liturgical calendar as a “Christian heroine”—Episcopalese for “saint.” During that long struggle, holistic nursing leaders generated a flood of apologetic publications, Nightingale editions, and research, including a medical explanation of her 30-years’ invalidism (Dossey, “Crimean Fever”) to disprove charges that she suffered from neurotic instability, severe personal failings (Grypma, “Saint” 7-8), and “a sexually transmitted disease” (Karpf 107). Downplaying her rejection of Anglican orthodoxy and declaration (to Reverend Henry Manning) that she “despise[d] the Church of England” (qtd. in *CW* 2.10), in which she had been baptized, these partisans also placed Nightingale among “the greatest mystic saints of Christendom” (Calabria, *Egypt* 152), whose extraordinary intimacy with the divine foreclosed questions about their orthodoxy and gave them personal immunity. In 1997, Michael D. Calabria edited *Florence Nightingale in Egypt and Greece: Her Diary and “Visions”* (1997), where he pronounces her “essentially a mystic,” if unable to make the “final leap to the unitive life with God,” on the grounds that she believed everyone can “becom[e] an incarnation of the Divine,” “one with the consciousness of God” (153, 150, 8, 9, quoting *ST* 58, Calabria and Macrae ed.). After the Episcopalians voted at the 1997 convention to give the Nightingale “case” three more years of consideration, the *Journal of Holistic Nursing* published a guest-edited Nightingale issue (1998) serving both campaigns.¹¹ A lavishly-illustrated biography, *Florence Nightingale: Mystic, Visionary, Healer* (2000), by Barbara M. Dossey, Director of Holistic Nursing Consultants in Santa Fe, arrived on the market

“Moment,” which applied globally the concept of energy-based therapies acting on the body’s force-fields, exemplifies how AHNA’s public Nightingale rituals implicitly demonstrate holistic modalities.

¹⁰ “ANA Protects,” American Nurses Association news release, 2 May 2008, posted at www.ahna.org/AboutUs/ANASpecialtyRecognition/tabid, accessed 26 February 2012. ANA represents 2.9 million registered nurses in the US. AHNA’s web page “For Consumers” states that “‘holism’ in nursing is a philosophy that emanated directly from Florence Nightingale, who believed in care that focused on unity, wellness, and the interrelationship of human beings, events, and environment” (posted at www.ahna.org/Home/Forconsumers, accessed 25 Feb. 2012). The more prominent page “What Is Holistic Nursing?” links these beliefs with the measured claim that “Florence Nightingale [. . .] is considered to be one of the first holistic nurses” (posted at www.ahna.org/AboutUs/WhatisHolisticNursing/tabid/1165.Default.aspx, accessed 25 February 2012). AHNA has 5700 members.

¹¹ Karpf (108); see “General Convention Action,” Oct. 1997, National Episcopal AIDS Coalition, posted at www.neac.org/articles/000040.html, accessed 15 May 2010 (cf. McDonald, *CW* 2.87-88). Vol. 16.2 of *JHN* (1998; re-issued for the Nightingale Centennial in 2010), guest-edited by Barbara M. Dossey, Louise C. Selanders, a nursing professor at Michigan State University, and Reverend Ted Karpf, executive director of the National Episcopal AIDS Coalition, featured five of the “supporting documents” presented for Church consideration (Collins and McGuire 102) and included such titles as “Rediscover the Essence of the Nursing Profession” (Collins and Maguire), “Balancing Our Feminine and Masculine Energies” (Luck), “She Must Be A Saint. It’s Clear She’s Not a Sinner” (Karpf), and “Florence Nightingale: A 19th-Century Mystic” (one of three by Dossey). In 2006 ANA granted professional specialty status to holistic nursing and to HIV/AIDS nursing (“ANA Protects”).

just months before the Church formally added Nightingale to the Calendar of Lesser Feasts and Fasts as a “healer and social reformer,” although not as a “mystic.”

The populist wing’s creative uses of what might be called the Nightingale brand make sense if one ignores certain gaps.¹² Holistic nurses are instructed to “share [. . .] their spirituality [with patients] without using traditional religious language” (Dossey, “Questions”); Nightingale insisted on non-sectarian nurse training (with Bible study) and framed it in non-doctrinal terms as “God’s work” (*Notes on Nursing* [1859] 136). She anticipated the theory of “healing” the “whole person” by enabling the body’s natural reparative processes (Shaner-McRae *et al.*), saw health, social, and environmental problems as systemically interconnected, and understood herself as a ‘world healer’ in terms of her theological first principles and British imperial standpoint. Her quasi-millennialist scheme for humankind’s perfection, rather than “megalomaniac” (Strachey, qtd. in Bostridge 530), is vibrantly “visionary”¹³ to the populist party, anticipating the UN Millennium Development Goals as well as modern holistic nursing. “Visionary” also implicitly claims Nightingale as a “mystic.”

The productive logic of analogy that overleaps counter-evidence to generate points of identification between their “founder” and themselves makes the publications of the populist Spiritual School less than reliable as well when they juxtapose passages from classical mystics with Nightingale’s writings as though they agree, even if differences jump off the page (see *Egypt* 55). This kind of logic also helps blur distinctions between her religious texts and their own inspiring writing about her relations with holistic nursing, which read into her thought their own modern improvements. The production of unities through analogic thinking then transfers to their subject, contributing to the image of Nightingale as an “icon of wholeness, an emblem of a united, integrated life,” as Dossey maintains in *Mystic, Visionary, Healer* (vii), the bible of the American holistic nursing movement.¹⁴

¹² I am thinking of historical and cultural gaps between Nightingale and her twentieth- and twenty-first-century admirers as well as differences between ideal image and actuality. Nightingale, who nourished her heterodox imagination on ‘world religions’ and ‘Pagan’ traditions, could be seen as a New Age Victorian and was deeply interested in many forms of mysticism but did not call herself a “mystic.” Sonya Grypma, representing yet another spiritual party in the *Journal of Christian Nursing*, observes that Nightingale’s mythic image invites admirers to “project onto [her]” their “own values related to religion, culture, class, and gender” and questions the reshaping of “‘Nightingale the Christian’ into “‘Nightingale the Mystic,’” “the ideal post-modern [post-Christian?] spiritualist” (“Saint” 9, 6 ; “Feminist” 22).

¹³ “The Bidding,” “Florence Nightingale Centennial Commemorative Global Service Celebrating Nursing” (4), service booklet posted at www.nationalcathedral.org/pdfs/NIGHTINGALE20100425.pdf, accessed 3 June 2010. Nightingale and Jowett used non-sectarian “millennium” discourse in discussing the progress of civilization (*DMN* xvii; Jowett [Jan. 1865], 41).

¹⁴ Despite its informational value, Dossey’s exaggerated language borders on hagiography: “[Nightingale’s] spiritual vision and her professional identity were seamlessly combined”; and “it is difficult to find her equal on the entire canvas of 19th-century Western civilization” (see Preface, vi-vii), whereas it is more accurate to say, as Mark Bostridge, Nightingale’s latest major biographer, puts it, that she possessed “one of the greatest analytical minds of her time” (xxii). Dossey fits her biographical narrative into “the five phases in the mystical life,” with the last chapter titled “Union with the Divine.” Advertised as a “book for all ages, a book transcending time,” and named 2009 Book of the Year by *The*

Despite her “dislike” of rituals and “buz-fuz” over her name (qtd. in Bostridge xxii), her holistic nurse patrons have continued to author Nightingale-themed productions, like the recently-formed Nightingale Initiative for Global Health (NIGH), which helped persuade the United Nations to declare 2010, the centenary of her death, the International Year of the Nurse.¹⁵ Countless celebrations of her “legacy” followed in many forms of discourse, from Scutari tours “in her footsteps” and holistic nursing fairs to ‘non-denominational’ worship services.¹⁶

The “Florence Nightingale Centennial Commemorative Global Service Celebrating Nursing” at the National Cathedral in Washington, DC, was the populist Spiritual School’s highest ceremonial act of authorship in 2010.¹⁷ Holistic nursing discourse infuses the published service, which “embrace[s]” its view of Nightingale’s “holy life” (4) and resounds with a lexicon of wholeness, inclusiveness, “wisdom,” “compassion,” “light” and “presence,”¹⁸ the essential divine quality, which Nightingale embodied at Scutari, and “what holistic nursing is all about”: caring, incarnate “presence,” the particular therapeutic modality being “just a vehicle for the nurse to connect with the

American Journal of Nursing, this volume is available in a “Deluxe” “Commemorative Edition” with “gold-gilded edges, richly colored endpapers, and a satin bookmark finely bound in a deluxe cover,” like a Bible (see www.nightingaledeclaration.net/commemorative-nightingale-biography-by-dossey and www.dosseydossey.com/barbara/book.html, both accessed 10 March 2012).

¹⁵ The “Commemorative Global Service” program lists NIGH as one of three IYNurse “Founders,” a Nightingale title (2). Established in 2003 to foster “a catalytic grassroots-to-global movement” “among nurses, health care workers, educators and concerned citizens,” NIGH seeks to bring world health issues to public attention and inspire “21st-century Nightingales” “to shar[e] health with the world” (“Why Nigh? Why Now?” posted at www.nightingaledeclaration.net/about-nigh, accessed 26 Feb. 2012). Formed from the first four letters of her name, NIGH’s acronym is suggestively supernaturalistic, perhaps to invoke her saintly presence and affirm the holistic nurse’s caring present-ness, like God’s, to the world.
¹⁶ A Google search in May 2010 for Nightingale commemorations yielded 25 pages of links and counting. On Westminster Abbey’s service see www.nightingaledeclaration.net/global/tutu and www.florence-nightingale-foundation.org.uk/press_news.htm, accessed 15 May 2010. On the Lamp Ceremony annually performed there on Nightingale’s birthday see Bostridge (545). Nightingale refused a national funeral and burial in the Abbey (xx).

¹⁷ Like IYNurse, this service signalled holistic nursing’s elevation to a world platform. Although other sponsors and participants are listed, the published program bears NIGH’s influence and authorial fingerprints (italicized below; cf. n. 15). Selanders and two of NIGH’s International Co-directors, Dossey and Beck, had speaking roles, Beck read her “Flame” poem, Zuleikha danced. The “Welcome” page describes the IYNurse as “a *collaborative, grassroots, global* initiative honouring [beyond their practical work] nurses’ voices, values, and wisdom” (a holistic nursing touch) “to act as *catalysts* for *achieving a healthy world*” (2). It proclaims that “we *follow*” in Nightingale’s and others’ “*footsteps*” “by dedicating ourselves” to “the *United Nations’ Millennium Development Goals*” (all 8 listed) and “join with others in *embracing* [the] *way of being in the world*” expressed in “The Charter for Compassion” (see n. 19). “The Bidding” (to worship) is a mixed discourse, reading like a worship-service version of AHNA’s earlier petition for professional recognition, claiming Nightingale as “the founder of modern nursing and as a visionary,” then listing her scientific qualifications ANA-style, such as “evidence-based practice” (4). The program’s advertising page also announces a Dossey “Conversation in Healing” event.

¹⁸ Holistic nursing discourse in this “global,” putatively non-denominational service circumvents Christian references, which nonetheless turn up in the music, lessons from the Christian Bible, and the setting, a neo-gothic cathedral with a six-panel stained-glass window representing Florence Nightingale in stylized medieval saint poses (one of many tributes to her in this artistic medium).

patient” (Trossman). “The Charter for Compassion” on the back of the program¹⁹ implicitly enlists caring nurses in “the creation of a just economy and a peaceful global community,” a NIGH theme, and “acknowledge[s . . .] that some have even increased the sum of human misery in the name of religion” (12). In context this clause recalls Nightingale’s hatred of Victorian dogmatism and sounds like holistic nursing code for the superiority of “spirituality” over dogmatic religion (Dossey “Questions”). Yet Nightingale does not quite fit this binary model: she called her approach to belief “the mystical or spiritual religion, as laid down by John’s gospel” (to Jowett, 1889, qtd. *CW* 3.330), phrasing that also affirms the notion of absolute truth preserved in her own dogmas.

Now that centennial excitement has subsided, I would offer a moment of re-assessment. Apart from monetary returns from “Nightingalia” like the doctor and nurse teddies in the London Museum Shop, trade in “Florence Nightingale” discourse has long served systems of exchange in which parties with “vested interests in [her] cult” (*Oxford* 354) have used her authoritative image to raise their profile with the public and authenticate their work. In forwarding their own deeply-held beliefs along with their professional concerns, the Spiritual School’s populist wing has been circulating a Nightingale currency that unconsciously replicates the masked self-referentiality in her own religious texts. The more serious caution for Nightingale students who rely on this party’s interpretations is that a lexicon designed to serve as a regimen of truth for holistic healing, however effective in the sickroom, is inadequate for grappling with the knotty textual productions of this Victorian ‘searcher’ (cf. *ST* title), who was driven by doubt, anxiety, ambition, and the “multitudinousness”²⁰ of her wide-ranging intellect as well as by “faith.”

3. Authorship

In 1837, at age 16, Florence noted privately that God spoke to her and “called her to His Service” (Cook I.15). Despite her pleas that He tell her what to do, the ‘voice’ did not return for 15 years—long years of balked ambition and unfulfilled religious longing, ‘false calls’ she suspected as temptations or projections of her own desires, chronic insomnia, depression bordering on madness, suicidal despair, and violent family rows. Her talk of taking up nursing horrified the upper-class Nightingales. Evangelical female mentors urged her to ‘wait on circumstances.’ Her Catholic spiritual director in Rome in

¹⁹ “The Charter for Compassion” is not a NIGH creation but expresses its outlook (see <http://charterforcompassion.org/the-charter/#charter-for-compassion>, accessed 18 June 2012).

²⁰ I am adapting this term from Matthew Arnold’s usage: Percy Shelley, John Keats, and Robert Browning “do not understand that ‘they must begin with an Idea of the World in order not to be prevailed over by the world’s multitudinousness’” (*Letters to Clough*, 97; qtd. in Trilling 32-33). A line of speculation I cannot pursue here concerns how the **Fout! Alleen hoofddocument**. multifarious reading, incompatible influences, and heterodox interests that make Nightingale such a fascinating study also posed difficulties for her self-authoring and coherent theologizing.

1848-49 demanded she choose “between the God of the whole Earth & [her] little reputation” (qtd. in Dossey, *Mystic* 65). Florence, introspective and strong-willed, was taught to distrust self-preoccupation as a flaw in female character and her habit of “day-dreaming” heroic situations as the devil’s work (cf. “Cassandra,” *ST* 207). But stamp it out she could not.

In an exploratory private note dated Whitsunday 1851 analysing the family’s injustice to her gifts and finally owning her rage, Nightingale recorded a breakthrough. Declaring that “my Holy Ghost tells me” to be independent, she vowed to obey God’s “laws”—in this case, laws governing the influence of “circumstances” upon personality that required leaving home for her own well-being (*Ever Yours* 48-50). Once she had recast liberation as higher obedience than duty to family and owned “my Holy Ghost” (*Ever Yours* 49) in writing, the ‘voice’ returned, just before her 32nd birthday, calling her “to be a saviour” (qtd. in Boyd 228). The next year she was superintending a small London hospital; then her nation called her to the Crimea.

Nightingale, who did not claim to experience external auditions, explained: “the Holy Spirit, the Divine in me, tells me what I am to do [. . .] But you have to invent what it says” (*ST* 61). Although she did not think of herself as an “author,” creating her better self drove her earnest private scribbling, which served as a spiritual discipline for marshalling unruly thoughts and feelings into communion with the will of “the Perfect,” and, rather differently, as a heuristic tool for “finding out” things about self, God, and His world. With limited exceptions, until the 1990s virtually all this personal writing was available only in archives. Her largest self-authoring project, two manuscripts she called “Novel” and “Religion” (qtd. in Cook 1.119), was begun in 1851; by the end of 1852 she noted, “I have remodelled my whole religious belief from beginning to end. I have learnt to know God. I have recast my social belief; have them both written for use, when my hour is come” (qtd. in Cook 1.469). After the Crimea, she revised, expanded, and combined these manuscripts into a three-volume opus, ultimately titled *Suggestions for Thought for Searchers After Religious Truth*, privately printed in 1860 for a small circle, including Jowett. It was never finished, its problems left unresolved, yet Nightingale drew on its core concepts the rest of her active life.²¹

Overtly addressed to her contemporaries, *Suggestions* is a work not of systematic theology but of theological speculation, philosophical disputation, preaching, and social criticism that harbours ongoing debates with herself under cover of the philosophic or collective “we” or “you,” third-person pronouns, and lofty discourse about God’s “character.” While the speaking persona is reasoning upon multifarious contemporary topics, this covert autobiographical project is both driving and troubling the attempt at constructing a system. To clear some ground Nightingale rejects Anglican doctrines of

²¹ Cf. Larsen (*People* 119), who also comments on Nightingale’s “theological monomania” (121). She once protested to Jowett that her wonted theological terms were her “staff.” In an 1894 private note the 74-year-old woman acknowledged that her scheme had been too invested in “logic” and “law,” for “Religion is not logic”—but was still maintaining that “evil [. . .] has created no end of good” (*CW* 2.537-38).

original sin, salvation in Christ, his divinity, the resurrection, the Atonement, and “eternal punishment” as well as other nineteenth-century Christianities and secular substitutes. Her alternative, the Whitsunday note expanded into her “Theodike,” turns on her conception of “the Perfect,” inflected by her commitments to empirical induction and civilizational progress. Working *forward* from the problem of suffering (cf. Jowett [Jan. 1865] *DMN* 40-41), Nightingale argues that evil gives impetus to self-correction by prompting one to discover and cooperate with God’s physical, moral, and social “laws” learned from experience and observation. God resists the temptation to speak in human words, just as He refuses to intervene in His natural order with miracles, lest we merely pray for rescue when we should be exercising our gifts and rescuing ourselves. The inability of individual self-improvement to address the world’s suffering necessitates her belief in human “saviours from social, from moral error” (qtd. in Poovey xxv), who “find out” God’s laws inductively and correct for others, helping forward the perfection of humankind.

For a woman who longed to exercise her gifts in doing God’s work but so rarely ‘heard from Him’ directly, this argument was bracing, authorizing her saviour persona with her own inspired words. It was also compelling because it reflected the terms of her breakthrough in 1851 and affirmed Nightingale’s tendency to project the personal onto the universal. Yet *Suggestions* is both inconsistent and, as my summary indicates, conceptually repetitious, the logic of its leading ideas circular like the writing itself, which continually side-steps religious problems it raises, wanders into mazy digressions, then doubles back to take up burning questions it has ‘settled,’ especially about evil. It had loomed large in Nightingale’s thinking on return from Scutari (“what a hell it was!” [letter draft to Jowett, n.d., *DMN* 67; cf. private note, 1856-57?, *Ever Yours* 186-90]) and surfaced in darker letters to Jowett, especially when her reform plans were thwarted. She wrote him *circa* 1865, “I think that the Evangelical view of utter corruption and the election of a few” (not a doctrine she intellectually accepted) “is more in accordance with the fact” than the view of many writers that “there is on the whole more happiness than misery in this world”: “must we not rather say that, if it is the wish of a good God, it is a dreadful mistake, and that it bears on the contrary the marks of being the work of a Devil?” (letter draft, n.d., *DMN* 67). Jowett cited progress “since the days of savagery” (20 August [1865]; *DMN* 68) but later challenged her conception of evil as part of God’s plan:

The great difficulty in the system of *theology* which you sometimes urge upon me, & in which I very much agree, is how to find vestiges of justice to the individual. That the human race are, or may be, in a progress towards finite perfection if they will attend to the laws of god is a true & consoling doctrine. The dark spot is the sacrifice of the individual, or rather of all but a very few, in this progress. (Sept 1868, *DMN* 152)

This had been precisely her obscured complaint: although one of those “elect[ed]” to advance the world, she too had been “sacrifice[d].” And was God’s pedagogy for “a very few” worth the suffering of so many—and the few—or “the world worth creating after all?” (letter draft to Jowett, n.d., *DMN* 67)?

With its autobiographical project unresolved, *Suggestions* is shaped by oscillations between “the Perfect” and the preoccupation with evil, misery, and “error.” Jowett urged Nightingale to condense and reorganize: it was “absolutely necessary that the book should have some regular plan [. . .] [or the] quest [. . .] will be lost [. . .]” (9 August 1860; *CW* 11.39).²² God had a plan, but this unruly work couldn’t be fixed.

4. Scholarship and Partisanship

In 1992, the American Victorianist Mary Poovey, determining “to provide entire sections of the text rather than edit out repetitiousness or digressions” (xxix), produced a 237-page edition of *Suggestions* (from the original’s 829 octavo pages) that allows one to inspect Nightingale’s thought processes, discontinuities, and attempts to impose structural divisions. Two years later, the University of Pennsylvania Press Studies in Health, Illness, and Caregiving series issued a drastically “abridged” 150-page version of *Suggestions* edited by two members of the Spiritual Party’s East Coast wing.²³ Candid about the work’s “unwieldiness,” this team set out “to make the essence of [Nightingale’s] spiritual philosophy accessible to the general public, [. . .] scholars and students” by removing redundancies and “unclear” sections, covering awkward leaps, and “reorganiz[ing]” (Calabria and Macrae xxxix, vii) *Suggestions’* more prominent ideas into seven thematic chapters, the shape of systematic theology. While the editors’ contextual material is informative, their tidy redaction provides a misleading textual basis for scholars inclined to use this edition because they are already attracted to the Spiritual School’s image of Nightingale and expect to find a systematic religious thinker.

Since 2001, the publications of this School’s populist party have been outpaced by the flagship project of its scholarly wing, *The Collected Works of Florence Nightingale*, edited by Lynn McDonald, professor emerita of sociology at the University of Guelph and Nightingale’s passionate defender. The availability of these materials representing Nightingale’s impressive range of expertise and interests beyond nursing is

²² Jowett to Nightingale, 9 August 1860 (*CW* 11.39). The words in the first pair of brackets are the editor’s, the second ellipses mine. The other ellipses probably indicate editorial omissions (see McDonald, “Key to Editing,” *CW* 11.56). Also see McDonald on “Why Nightingale Did Not Publish *Suggestions for Thought*” (51-53).

²³ The co-editors straddle both camps of the Spiritual School: Michael D. Calabria, at the time head reference librarian at Baruch College, New York City, and a lay member of a Franciscan order, and Janet A. Macrae, an adjunct faculty member in New York University’s holistic nursing program, specializing in Therapeutic Touch (book jacket), whose *Nursing as a Spiritual Practice: A Contemporary Application of Florence Nightingale’s Views* appeared in 2001 (New York: Springer).

indispensable for new scholarship. And more than any other work of the Spiritual School, these 16 hefty volumes (“a substantial selection” from her corpus [*CW* 1.2], filled out with copious scholarly commentary and editorial apparatus, and backed by a full-text electronic edition) establish Nightingale’s authority through authorship. The series is also constructed to elevate her even higher as a religious author, even though only “two rather abstruse [theological] essays” appeared in print in her lifetime (*CW* 1.8).²⁴

More than the issue of what a writer must do to be considered an “author,” this project raises questions about when and how editorship becomes authorship, constructing the subject author while editing her “works.”²⁵ While McDonald maintains that Nightingale can now ‘speak for herself,’ throughout she is also spoken for—in subtle ways re-authored—by the editor’s selection, arrangement, and smooth interweaving of her materials with well-written introductions, overviews, bridge passages, and paraphrases that pre- and post-interpret Nightingale’s texts, ensuring the while that “[t]he spirituality that underlay all her intellectual and practical work [is] apparent from beginning to end” (*CW* 1.4). The problem I see is not the emphasis on religion (the subject of four volumes and sections of others) but the way that “spirituality” and “faith” function in McDonald’s commentaries as ‘god-terms’ stamping higher authority on Nightingale’s character and work, rather than as descriptive terms naming her preoccupations. The operative assumptions are that she was consistently “faithful” because religious ideas and phraseology run through virtually all she wrote, while her character in turn authenticates her faith-language. Even though her texts are rich in spiritual insights, why make these assumptions instead of freely probing the various kinds and objects of ‘faithfulness’—and less lofty attitudes as well—that her religious writing manifests on different occasions and in double-voiced discourse?

²⁴ “Works,” though a conventional title one cannot quarrel with, may suggest to the unknowing that Nightingale authored full-length published works, like John Stuart Mill (whose 33 volumes are given as a parallel in advertising for *The Collected Works of Florence Nightingale*; see “Introduction to the Project,” University of Guelph, posted at www.uoguelph.ca/~cwfn/Introduction.index.html [accessed 23 June 2012]). She called the manuscripts on which she drew for *Suggestions* her “Works” or her “Stuff” (letter to Edward Nightingale, 12 May 1852; qtd. in Poovey vi). The fact that most of her writerly output was not published in her lifetime and other items “have been long out of print (*CW* 1.2) helps of course to justify this project.

²⁵ In any scholarly effort to collate a historical person’s writings, the problem is always how to read and what to ‘do’ with them. Nightingale needs editors and interpreters: some texts do not make much sense without context and explication; textual variants and manuscript fragments require them; letters need placing. Because McDonald’s sheer editorial competence inspires trust and her picture of Nightingale is complex yet coherent and inspiring, the reader is less inclined to question her interpretations or notice those occasions when she skilfully writes around or despatches a problem. On the other hand, the principle of letting the subject “speak for herself,” which also guides McDonald’s 216-page Centennial biography advertised as “based on [Nightingale’s] writings” and produced to correct “unreliable second-hand accounts” and “misreading[s] of the primary sources” (*Florence Nightingale at First Hand*, [2010], “Book Description,” posted at www.wlupress.wlu.ca/press/Catalog/mcdonald-continuum.shtml, accessed 23 June 2012) has its own liabilities if it is assumed that Nightingale presents herself truthfully and adequately and can be ‘known’ from her written representations. This is the taking-her-word-for-it problem I refer to as conflating her character with her discourse, a kind of category slippage.

Nightingale, who understood how deceptive fine phrases could be, did not make a blanket equation of religious terminology with the real presence of “faith.”

The populist Spiritual School celebrates what Nightingale called “Practical Mysticism” while restoring some features of “the mystical life” she had repudiated in “Notes from Devotional Authors of the Middle Ages,” manuscripts probably drafted in 1872-73 (Jowett, 18 April [1873], *DMN* 238-39) but left abandoned in pieces. Gérard Vallée, special editor of the volume on mysticism, who prefers to emphasize her “spiritual quest,” represents the “Notes” as an earnest searcher’s discursive journey and, in speculating why she did not follow through with publication, implies that in them Nightingale was the failed author of a flawed theology. He suggests that she “could see that she had not been able to outline a coherent and comprehensive view of what a spirituality of the active life should be”, that there were “too many remaining loose ends,” and that “on important points (the question of evil, atonement, even prayer), she had not (yet) got it right” (*CW* 4.12, 17).²⁶

Vallée sees Nightingale wrestling in the “Notes” with the problem of “linking the active life and union with God” (*CW* 4.12). McDonald, skirting the mystical and embracing the practical, stresses the intellectual link between Nightingale’s “faith and her social activism,” the scientific methodology of L.A.J. Quetelet, the pioneering Belgian statistician (*Physique sociale*, 1835,1869), which gave her “a positive, constructive alternative to the ‘desperate wickedness’ of the world, the means of turning ‘original sin’ into ‘original good’” (5.11). McDonald’s work on Nightingale and statistics is essential for understanding her contributions to social science, but its focus on external problems cannot address her difficulties in dealing with her experience of “evils” within or in “linking the active life and union with God.” McDonald also finds in Nightingale a “Christian feminism [. . .] radical for our time,” “even more singular in her own” (*CW* 2.68),²⁷ a claim linked to others, that her “heterodox” views in *Suggestions* were “experimental” (16) and “mellowed with age, so that she became doctrinally more conventional” “in her old age” (4.xiv; cf. 2.24). But some of these views persist in later writings, like the “Notes,” and whatever she believed late in life, by then her active career was over.

McDonald wants Nightingale “understood in all her complexity,” including “warts, errors of judgment and ill temper” (*CW* 1.4) but takes pains to warn against an array of

²⁶ Vallée describes the daunting challenges of wrestling manuscript fragments, revisions, deletions, and versions, including two of the Preface, with gaps, into (some) order and sense (*CW* 4.12-17). The writing is forceful and incoherent by turns and often lacks transitions. Her professional writings trained on public subjects are much better written.

²⁷ McDonald has presided over Canada’s National Action Committee on the Status of Women and championed women’s equality as a member of Parliament, 1982–88 (www.wlupress.wlu.ca/Catalog/mcdonald-fn2.shtm, accessed 26 August 2010). Her discussions of Nightingale’s independent-minded relations with contemporary woman’s rights causes usefully rebuff dismissive accounts. See Webb for a far more “radical” view from the Spiritual School’s feminist liberation theology fringe (and see McDonald, *CW* 11.6).

“hostile” scholars who have undermined her authority by dwelling on (or even briefly mentioning) Nightingale’s temperamental “faults” and neurotic symptoms (see 1.34-35; Appendix B, 843-47)—cautions warranted in egregious cases like F. B. Smith’s summation that “her faith was a sacralised egotism” (qtd. *CW* 2.87). Having reduced the “Nightingale problem” to alleged *character* flaws, McDonald then echoes the populist wing’s apologetics without the hagiography: for example, contemporaries’ charges of Nightingale’s hard-driving style and intolerance of opposition, even if true, merely reflect “failings of [the] ego,” and “What major or minor saint was without some failing, especially of ego?” (88). Is it enough to assure the reader that she “often [humbly] acknowledged” such “failings” (88)—even though in the next breath she could insist they were “not [her] own fault” (to Jowett, mid-1860s, qtd. in Bostridge 392)? Although the “Nightingale problem” is larger than issues of temperament, they raise questions of credibility for her writings: where and to what extent might “ego” have skewed her judgment or driven her tenacious convictions about “God’s thoughts”? When one reads that for this “workaholic perfectionist,” “the relentless quality of her life’s work [. . .] can only be understood by its basis in faith” (*CW* 1.46, 84), one sees the point but still wants to ask: why “only” one explanation?

The inferring of faith or God from *every* phenomenon, even “failings,” reflects the essential religious standpoint for many believers, including Nightingale. Sharing this stance would give the Scholarly party a loftier interested agenda than the advancing of one’s professional group: scholarship as partisanship not only *for* Florence Nightingale but *through* her religious image for their own view of God. Or, in light of McDonald’s qualified tolerance of Nightingale’s “singular” creed (*CW* 1.7), perhaps “faith” functions in these commentaries as “spirituality” does in holistic nursing discourse, as a honorific signifier with plastic interpretive scope. Whatever the case, the tendency to take Nightingale’s religious representations as self-evident signs of her “faithful” character produces less here on several counts. Rigidity and “repetiti[on]” for example are seen as evidences of “consistency” and “faithfulness” or mere errors of style (*CW* 2.15): but style signifies more. We get no serious questioning of her captivity to favoured theological abstractions (cf. Jowett, 17 Nov [1861]; *DMN* 12-13)²⁸ because they belong to religion. We aren’t invited to contemplate the *tangled* nature of her “complexity” or to factor in her aesthetic attraction to biblical eloquence.²⁹ Nor are we alerted to the feminine perils of abjection in her discourse of “the cross” and “desire for martyrdom” (see McDonald *CW* 2.82, 23; Kristeva 5).

²⁸ McDonald does discuss the evolution of Nightingale’s problematic “doctrine of ‘necessity’” in relation to her theology of “God’s law,” with its basis in scientific reasoning (see (*CW* 1.21, 55-56; 5.11-18, 36-39; and “Nightingale’s Revised Views of Determinism,” 11.49-51).

²⁹ See the “Epistle Dedicatory” inscribed at the front of Nightingale’s personal Bible on the “glorious poetry” of the King James translation (*CW* 2.101). Her self-conscious habit of “always fall[ing] into biblical language” (letter to W.E. Nightingale, 7 May 1870, qtd. in *CW* 2.35) and her conscious affinity for the authors of the Old Testament’s prophetic books helped leverage her voice ‘higher.’ On her modes of Scripture interpretation see Larsen (*People* 113-36).

The dilemmas Nightingale's writing sustained, her cruxes, became her crosses and seem to me too prominent to miss. Perhaps one shouldn't ask commentators trained in the social science, religion, and nursing fields to 'read' Nightingale so closely. Yet close reading without partisanship is what these texts first of all require. The idea, moreover, that interrogation reduces Nightingale is mistaken: following the mazy courses of her spiritual life and thought yields a richer portrait—more, not less.

5. "Author-ity"

Adapting some of Foucault's ideas about "authorship seen as a form of author-ity" (Richter 824), "the humanistic version" of power/knowledge that belonged to nineteenth-century Europe's dominant *epistémé*, may afford some broader insight into why "[e]xperience seems to have taken on a reality" for Florence Nightingale "only when it had been ordered and fixed in writing" (*Ever Yours* 6). Having declared the 'death' of Nightingale the literary author, she replaced this "romantic god-term" with her own species of *écriture*, while attempting to preserve the power of what Foucault calls the "author-function" (Richter 824), and strove through voluminous, if lexically constrained, text production to construct *herself* as a commanding order of discourse—God's agent, like the biblical prophets or Carlyle, speaking as His "voice" to humankind.³⁰ Yet having embarked upon the discursive high road of identifying her ideas with "God's thoughts," Nightingale founders in by-paths of uncertainty about whether she has "invent[ed]" (*ST* 61) or misread those thoughts. Although she strives to make her contending discourses "function as true" by force of writerly will, her regime of truth breaks down over questions of "author-ity," frustrating the desire to speak God's truth decisively in order to possess herself whole.

The woman who raged against an "age of cant" also confessed that "while I write I am under the empire myself of words." Because in a cultural situation of discursive excess and falsity Nightingale generated redundant words in efforts to find "Truth" and rein in her own excesses—the multiplying questions and doubts, the overweening spiritual and earthly ambitions—I think it can also be said, again to adapt Foucault, that her textually-embodied "author" is "the ideological figure" that "marks the manner in which [she] fears the proliferation of meaning" (899) beyond her control. Although the autobiographical "author" is 'declared dead' too by Nightingale's self-effacing self-references like the philosophic "we" in *Suggestions*, the "author-function" remains as the operational principle by which this writer "limits, excludes," and "impedes the free circulation" and reformulation (899) of thought as she strives to nail down her own founding discourse of "self" and "God."

³⁰ One could historicize Nightingale's peculiar religious lexicon in relation to the problematic of the post-Romantic "author" and broader discursive patterns in her time including Victorian sage discourse, which drew on the biblical prophets (see Holloway) and redefined the "author." Landow has discussed Nightingale writing as a "female sage."

Yet more is surely here than is dreamt of in Foucault's philosophy. All Nightingale's spiritual mentors taught her to turn to God with questions of self. But fixing her spiritual eye on "the Perfect" as her ultimate model put her out of touch with the faulty woman, who suffered from not being 'known.' Thus even in yearning to identify "His will" with hers, she was forging covert links between her ultimate Authorizing discourse and the female suffering servant it also bid her be who she knew was not "the Perfect," any more than Jesus was God. Circulating in such discursive convolutions, Nightingale's author-ity could not be fixed.

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