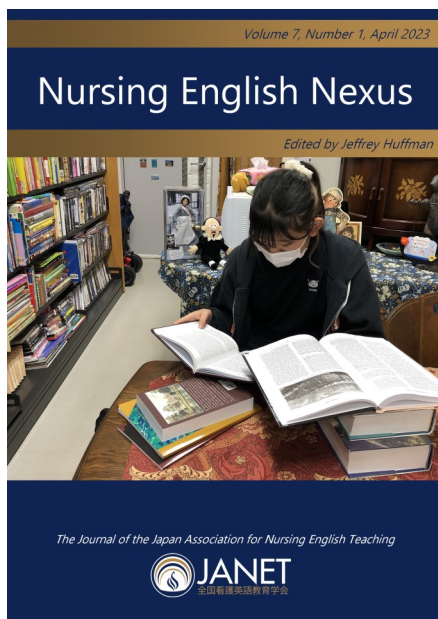


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## Shakespeare as a Guiding Influence on Florence Nightingale's Life and Work

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**Abstract:** *The liberal arts tend to be underrepresented in the tight curricula of nursing education. The objective of this article is to argue for the value of introducing nursing students to English literary writers who influenced Florence Nightingale—an enduring figure in the history of nursing—and shaped her ideas on nursing theory and practice. Nightingale frequently refers to the plays and characters of William Shakespeare in her extensive correspondence and personal diaries. This article examines the influence of Shakespeare's works, notably Hamlet, on Nightingale's views of life and death in relation to nursing. The article provides a rationale for studying literary and historical perspectives on Nightingale and offers some practical suggestions for presenting literature, particularly Shakespeare, in a liberal arts course at a nursing college.*

**Keywords:** liberal arts education for nursing students, Florence Nightingale, literature, William Shakespeare, Hamlet, Ophelia

The history of nursing is a large and crowded field, and usually lost among the details is the modest but nonetheless significant influence of literary authors on modern nursing theory and practice. In an ideal "Literature and Medicine" course at a nursing college, one way to fill this gap in knowledge of the liberal arts would be to study the lives and works of particular literary figures who influenced Florence Nightingale (1820–1910), the renowned nurse, social reformer, and founder of modern nursing.

Nightingale was a highly literate woman, for her time and ours. While growing up, she had free run of her independently wealthy father's extensive home library, where she became a lover of learning through her deep and wide reading across many disciplines. Her preferences in English literature included the Christian Bible and John Bunyan's *Pilgrim's Progress*, the English Romantic poets John Keats and William Wordsworth, and, significantly for the purposes of this paper, William Shakespeare. Later, Nightingale also delved into the philosophical works of Immanuel Kant and Thomas Carlyle, as well as studies of politics, economics, public health, and statistics. But in her own mature writing about nursing, Nightingale often meditates on literary sources, with Shakespeare mentioned frequently

among them.

During her working life, Nightingale maintained an extensive personal library and wrote copious notes and reflections on the books she read. She valued books not only for the knowledge they contained, but also for their potential to expand the minds of readers and inspire positive change in the world. Such views are as valid today as they were in Nightingale's time.

### Nightingale's Appreciation of Shakespeare

Florence Nightingale is certainly known for having revolutionized the ways in which nursing is practiced and taught through her innovative theories and tireless dedication to improving the lives of patients. What is much less known is that from an early age Nightingale was captivated by the imaginative power of the plays of William Shakespeare. Throughout her life, Nightingale drew upon her literary knowledge to inform her ideas about caregiving, compassion, and the meaning of life and death.

Nightingale appreciated the range and depth of Shakespeare's characters and the timeless themes explored in his dramas. In her own writing, public and private, Nightingale often cited Shakespeare as a source of guiding inspiration and wisdom, and she encouraged others to read,

study, and attend his plays for similar guidance. She saw parallels between the events and characters depicted in Shakespearean drama and the issues she encountered in her work as a nurse and reformer during the Victorian age.

William Shakespeare (1564–1616) was a successful English playwright and poet in his own lifetime and is regarded by many authorities today as the greatest writer in English and, arguably, in world literature. In addition to 154 sonnets and two long narrative poems, Shakespeare wrote 38 known plays, many of which are still widely performed, read, and studied—among them such familiar titles as *Romeo and Juliet*, *Hamlet*, *Macbeth*, *Othello*, and *A Midsummer Night's Dream*.

Shakespearean drama retains a hold on our collective imagination for its wide range of memorable three-dimensional characters, timeless themes, sublime poetic language, and profound explorations of such universal human experiences as love, jealousy, betrayal, and power. Accordingly, Shakespeare provides a fitting starting point of investigation into figures in the liberal arts who influenced Florence Nightingale's evolving views of nursing.

Understandably, Nightingale took a professional interest in all literary depictions of sickness and death, and she eventually made use of them in formulating her theories and practices for the proper conduct of medical caregivers. She criticized the literary authors of her own day, observing, "Sick-beds and death-beds are painted with colours and descriptions which not only the novelist never could have seen, but which no one ever did see. There is perhaps but one novelist who is an exception to this" (Nightingale, 1860/2010b, p. 278). Nightingale then asserts Shakespeare's superiority over Victorian authors, particularly in regard to scenes depicting the sick and the dying:

In England, of all human experience, sickness and death have met with the

least faithful observation. The materials of course are there, but the careful study is altogether wanting. The "death-bed" of almost every one of our novels is as mere a piece of stage-effect as is the singing-death of a PRIMA DONNA [caps in original] in an opera. One would think death did not exist in reality. Shakespeare is the only author who has ever touched the subject with truth, and his truth is only on the side of art. (p. 278)

In her unflattering comparison with stylized death scenes in grand opera, Nightingale criticizes the typically sentimental presentations of death in literary works by her Victorian contemporaries. The most egregious example may have been written by the great English novelist Charles Dickens, who was Nightingale's friend and fellow supporter of social reform. In the sentimental style of the times, Dickens dramatized the death of Little Nell in *The Old Curiosity Shop* (1841) with such high melodrama that, as critics have noted, the scene descends into unintended humor.

By contrast, Nightingale contends that Shakespeare gives his audiences unsparingly honest depictions of disease and death—though, as works of art, his dramas are ennobled by such theatrical features as the hero's moment of tragic recognition and soaring flights of poetry. Nightingale believed that of the many various English literary representations of men and women facing grave illness and death, Shakespeare's treatments of such scenes were the most truthful and consequently the most useful models for members of the nursing profession who must confront the realities of sickness and dying in the course of their working lives.

#### **Life and Death—and Madness—in *Hamlet***

In her correspondence and diaries, Nightingale frequently returned to Shakespeare's *Hamlet*—fully titled *Hamlet, Prince of Denmark* (1604–5/1969)—as this drama appears to have had a

profound impact on Nightingale's views on life and death. The play is a running meditation on the two basic polarities of human existence, summed up in Hamlet's most familiar line, "To be or not to be." Indeed, that *is* the question, which might be paraphrased, "To live or not to live." For Hamlet the question has as its corollary, "To act or not to act." Hamlet reflects at length on these existential questions as he contemplates (and delays) making an agonizing decision, whether to avenge his father's murder, in a process that consumes the play's full four hours.

The setting of the play, the royal court of Denmark, is very much a man's world, much like the Victorian world in which Nightingale struggled against so many obstacles typically imposed by men, a world which she labored so hard to reform. In the play, the royal court's outward decorum is a façade of normalcy which just barely conceals a viperous nest of palace intrigue and royal murder lying directly behind it: Specifically, the new ruler, King Claudius, appears to be capably in charge, but the truth emerges that he gained the throne by secretly poisoning the old king—his own brother—and then marrying his victim's widow, Queen Gertrude.

Inhabiting this dysfunctional masculine world are the play's only two female characters—Gertrude, the Queen who is Hamlet's mother, and Ophelia, the young noblewoman who was once romantically involved with Hamlet. While Hamlet is the tragic hero of the play, Ophelia proves to be the tragic victim. Not surprisingly, Nightingale was drawn to Ophelia and saw in her a figure of innocent, undeserved suffering, a natural object of pity for the audience and for Nightingale herself.

Indeed, Ophelia is a tragic victim, even a sacrificial one, cynically used by the men in her life who exploit her for their own ends. Her father Polonius, a high official at the royal court, conspires with King Claudius to use Ophelia to spy on Hamlet in their efforts to determine the cause of Hamlet's apparent madness. In return, Hamlet

verbally lashes Ophelia (crying, "Get thee to a nunnery!" i.e., a slang term for a brothel) when he finds that she is spying on him for her father and the King (Shakespeare, 1604-5/1969, p. 951, 3.1.121). In other scenes Hamlet toys unkindly with Ophelia's emotions. Later, in a horrible tragedy of mistaken identity, Hamlet inadvertently kills Ophelia's father, sending Ophelia spiraling into genuine madness which contrasts ironically with Hamlet's feigned madness.

Ophelia roams the palace, madly reciting bitter verses and singing songs that alternate between bawdiness and lamentation. Despite her madness (or possibly because of it), Ophelia hands certain members of the court flowers which, according to Chatfield (2014), carried clear symbolic meanings that Shakespeare's audiences would have understood. Offering flowers to her brother Laertes, Ophelia says: "There's rosemary; that's for remembrance; pray you, love, remember: and there is pansies, that's for thoughts." Both rosemary and pansies (a pun on French *pensées*, i.e., thoughts), were probably meant to honor the memory of their slain father Polonius. To King Claudius, Ophelia gives fennel (for flattery and possibly for casting away evil spirits) and columbines (for thanklessness). To Queen Gertrude, she gives rue (for repentance: "rue" in English means "regret" or "sorrow"; the herb supposedly had abortive properties, too) and daisies (for dissembling), but not violets (for faithfulness) as they had "withered all when my father died" (Chatfield, 2014; Shakespeare, 1604-5/1969, p. 963, 4.5.174-183). The three flowers Ophelia gives to Gertrude are caustic suggestions of Gertrude's betrayal of her first husband, Hamlet's dead father. Then Ophelia exits the scene, wanders outside unattended, and falls into a brook where—insensible of her condition—she slowly sinks and drowns. Interrupting King Claudius and Ophelia's brother Laertes as they plot Hamlet's death, Queen Gertrude reports Ophelia's final moments of abject madness:

Her clothes spread wide,  
 And mermaid-like, awhile they bore her up,  
 Which time she chanted snatches of old lauds,  
 As one incapable of her own distress,  
 Or like a creature native and indued  
 Unto that element. But long it could not be  
 Till that her garments, heavy with their drink,  
 Pulled the poor wretch from her melodious lay  
 To muddy death. (p. 966, 4.7.174-182)

This haunting description of Ophelia's drowning evokes the sorrow and pity of a helpless patient, dying neglected amid the distractions of those who should have cared for her.

Florence Nightingale was understandably moved by Ophelia's plight, even beyond what most audience members might feel, as she saw in Ophelia's innocent suffering a symbol of the tangled agony that highly traumatized medical patients (and their caregivers) often struggle with. The spectacle of Ophelia's unjust victimhood may have influenced Nightingale's views on the importance of compassion in caregiving and shaped her belief that nurses must work to alleviate all aspects of their patients' suffering, not only the physical symptoms and sources, but also the possible emotional trauma behind them.

Evidence of Nightingale's preoccupation with Ophelia's suffering persists throughout the writings and letters in which Nightingale frequently alludes to Ophelia's words. When wreathes of rosemary blossoms were offered to honor the memories of her own mother and father, Nightingale wrote in letters to medical colleagues in 1880 and 1889, "That's for remembrance" (MacDonald, 2001, p. 214, p. 392), a phrase she also quoted in an 1880 letter thanking Queen Victoria for her message of consolation on the death of Nightingale's mother (MacDonald, 2003, p. 421). Decades after her own service as a nurse in the Crimean War, Nightingale recalled the stoical deaths there of the chief British general, Lord Raglan, and many of his

men:

Like the drowning Ophelia: devoted, unselfish and single-minded to the highest degree, he let himself and his troops float down to death, unconsciously to himself, with scarcely a struggle against the weeds and the waters which were pulling him down to destruction. (MacDonald, 2003, p. 743)

This habit of alluding to Ophelia's madness and drowning not only shows that Nightingale had fully absorbed memorable lines from scenes in Hamlet but also hints at underlying and persisting emotional trauma in Nightingale's mind and spirit. As noted by Lynn MacDonald, the editor of seven volumes of the literally "voluminous" sixteen-volume series containing Nightingale's extensive correspondence and published essays:

Ophelia's mad speech is cited in various, troubled places, notably when Nightingale had gone to be with her mother after her father's death, when for her Embley [i.e., Embley Park, the name of the family estate] was "all withered when my father died." (MacDonald, 2003, p. 743)

Nightingale's quoted words here, "all withered when my father died," repeat nearly exactly Ophelia's words on the death of her own father Polonius. Indeed, such frequent allusions to Ophelia's mournful songs and mad speeches that precede her pitiful death and its anguished aftermath may be taken as signs of Nightingale's view of the tragic fate of all women, herself included.

### **The Legacy and Portrayal of Nightingale: A Rationale for Considering Literary and Historical Influences**

From the example of Ophelia's tragic end, it may be possible to broaden the context of Shakespeare's place in the life of Florence Nightingale by situating her efforts within the power politics, even the sexual politics, of her day—conditions sufficiently dramatic to seem "Shakespearean" in

nature and scale. Among her many interests in social reform, Nightingale strove to gain agency for women as effective caregivers in homes and communities and as professional nurses in the male-dominated world of medicine. As Holliday and Parker (1997) speculate:

It may be that Nightingale was not in fact a caring, nurturing woman, but an early feminist who exploited her gender in an attempt to demonstrate that women could work in the world as effectively as men. . . . Alternatively she may only have been fighting for her own rights as a talented individual wishing to show the world what she could achieve. (p. 483)

Certainly Nightingale could be autocratic, even overbearing in pursuit of her goals, particularly when confronting such lethargic, male-dominated institutions as government, military, and medical bureaucracies. Nevertheless, ample evidence of her reported conduct shows that she could also be highly diplomatic. Moreover, her correspondence clearly indicates that Nightingale *was* in fact a caring, nurturing woman who fought not for her own rights but for the interests of those who were neglected, deprived, and underprivileged. Her struggles with the medical profession shaped her strong convictions about medicine versus healthcare. As McKenna (2005) notes,

Florence Nightingale (1959) was of the opinion that medicine and nursing should be clearly differentiated from each other, and during her time this was indeed the case. . . . She did not believe that doctors cured; rather [she felt] that nature or a healthy environment was responsible for the curing. (pp. 85-86)

Early in her nursing career during the Crimean War (1853-1856), Nightingale witnessed the harm caused by mismanaged and underfunded medicine. From the moment that she and her staff of 38 nurses arrived in early November 1854 at the British Army's Barrack Hospital in Scutari, Turkey,

Nightingale faced the challenges of caring for thousands of wounded soldiers in overcrowded, unventilated, and unclean wards, with shortages of medicine, fresh food, and clean clothing and bedding (Bostridge, 2008, pp. 219-220). More soldiers died from infections and diseases caused by unhealthy hospital conditions than from their original war wounds (pp. 245-246).

A gifted organizer, Nightingale undertook many preventive measures to create a healthy environment by improving the cleanliness, hygiene, and sanitation in the hospital wards. She acted heroically, often on several fronts at once in ways that are well documented in biographical sources. Considered in Shakespearean terms, Nightingale seemed like an actor playing multiple roles in a complex life-and-death drama. She performed brilliantly and, even after falling seriously ill, carried on her duties fully from her sickbed.

Returning to Britain after the Crimean War ended in early 1856, Nightingale distilled her wartime experience and subsequent thinking into her seminal work, *Notes on Nursing* (1859, 1860/2010b, 1861/2010a). Nightingale argued that prevention, not cure, is the main goal of nursing; she also encouraged the public to take primary responsibility for its own health.

*Notes on Nursing: What It Is and What It Is Not* became a series of best-selling guides to good health care. The first edition (1859) was not a training manual for nurses but, in Nightingale's words, "hints for thought to women who have personal charge of the health of others," spelling out the clear implication that "every woman is a nurse" (Nightingale, 1859, p. 3). While aimed at domestic servants responsible for childcare, it soon found a wide middle-class audience. The concise seventy-six-page book was "in homes everywhere" (Bostridge, 2008, pp. 357-358). Its sensible advice dealt with ventilation and heating, nutrition, bedding, regulation of lighting and noise, cleanliness of rooms and of persons, and

observation of the sick. The expanded second edition of *Notes on Nursing* (1860, 1860/2010b) (also subtitled *What It Is and What It Is Not*) was double the first edition's length and became a principal text in the Nightingale Training School at St. Thomas's Hospital, London, which Nightingale founded in the same year. A third edition (1861) appeared as an inexpensive "sixpenny" volume featuring simplified language for use in working-class homes, with a new title, *Notes on Nursing for the Labouring Classes* (1861/2010a), as noted by Bostridge (2008, pp. 359-360). Penner (2014) explains that the popularity of *Notes on Nursing* came, in large part, from its familiar style:

Nightingale allows her sanitary advice to be infiltrated by the language of fictional narrative. Instead of appealing to statistics and / or the language of science, she uses language reminiscent of the sensational tabloid—at just the time when sensation novels were beginning to be popular among the middle-class readership she envisioned. (p. 24)

Nightingale clearly understood how to reach and hold her readers, as all successful writers do, by speaking the language of the audience.

Altogether, the three distinct versions of *Notes on Nursing* offered many preventive measures for nursing care throughout society—in individual homes and communities as well as in hospitals. The three editions blended "sanitary knowledge" with Nightingale's personal experiences of nursing as both nurse and patient. Bostridge (2008) asserts:

Above all, the book encourages the notion that good nursing stems from an ability to engage in imaginative sympathy with someone else's feelings, feelings that by definition you can never have felt (p. 357).

Nightingale (1860) explains this "imaginative sympathy" herself: "The very alphabet of a nurse is to be able to interpret every change which

comes over a patient's countenance, without causing him the exertion of saying what he feels" (Nightingale, 1860, p. 196). *Notes on Nursing*, in its three editions, appealed to the imagination of diverse social audiences in ways not unlike the imaginative hold of the plays of Shakespeare on audiences from all levels of society. In short, both Shakespeare and Nightingale offered something for everyone.

Shifting perspective now, an assessment of Nightingale's place in nursing is complicated by many myths among the facts of Nightingale's achievements. As Dingwall et al. (2003) observe,

One of the great problems for anybody studying the history of nursing in the nineteenth century is to find a way of coming to terms with the powerful and enigmatic figure of Florence Nightingale, a woman who became the stuff of which myths are made even in her own lifetime. (p. 35)

Such enduring myths depict Nightingale problematically as "a 'heroine legend' in nursing, a morality tale to inspire her successors" (p. 35). Nightingale attained national celebrity of truly mythic stature, a media superstar of her time. As Tye (2020) contends:

Think of the rock stars who are so famous they only need one name to be instantly recognized: Elvis, Cher, Bono, Madonna. In the world of healthcare, there is only one such rock star: Florence. Though she certainly would have chafed at being called a rock star, Florence's legacy was earned by her enormous contributions to the profession of nursing, the design and organization of hospitals, her pioneering work for public health and epidemiology, and her commitment to the care of soldiers, veterans, and their families. (p. 1)

Both the myths of Florence Nightingale and her very substantial legacy persist into modern times,

and separating the myths from the achievements remains a difficult task.

The Crimean War made Nightingale a mythic figure, as wartime publicity elevated her to instant fame. Bostridge (2008) notes, “[O]ne of the most enduring and iconic images of the modern age—and of the nursing profession in particular” depicted Nightingale as *The Lady with the Lamp*. The image first appeared in the 24 February 1855 issue of the *Illustrated London News*, as part of its extensive coverage of the Crimean War (Bostridge, 2008, p. 251). The British public quickly saw in Nightingale precisely what it wanted, an idealized image of a self-sacrificing woman with redemptive powers. The British press elevated her to “secular sainthood,” using such Victorian language as “guardian angel” and “Angel of Mercy” (pp. 252-254). Even comparisons to Joan of Arc were heard (Bostridge, 2008, p. 262). History seemed to be repeating itself: a young maid from the countryside had been “called by God” into military service to lead a noble campaign of national salvation.

“Florence Nightingale mania,” in the words of Bostridge (2008), arose from Nightingale’s adoration by the British troops in Crimea and swept through Britain in 1855-1856. Countless popular songs and poems in praise of Nightingale circulated, while a publication, a coffee-house, an ironclad ship, and even a racehorse were named for her—as were quite a few newborn children (Bostridge, 2008, pp. 261-262). In these excerpts from “The Nightingale in the East” (n.d.), Nightingale is described in the most adulatory terms:

Now God sent this woman to succour the  
brave,  
Some thousands she’s sav’d from an untimely  
grave  
Her eyes beam with pleasure, she’s bounteous  
and good,  
The wants of the wounded are by her  
understood. . . .

Her heart it means good—for no bounty she’ll  
take  
She’d lay down her life for the poor soldier’s  
sake,  
She prays for the dying, she gives peace to the  
brave,  
She feels that a soldier has a soul to be  
saved. . . . (Logan, 2016, p. 84)

This is hardly deathless verse, but it is typical of the many hastily composed hymns of praise to Florence Nightingale for her care of the sick and dying.

Against the tangle of myths and realities about Florence Nightingale, twenty-first century critics seek a balanced assessment of her legacy. Among the positive assessments of Nightingale’s enduring achievements, Nelson and Rafferty (2010) contrast the “before and after” images of nurses in the nineteenth century:

Compare the drunken, dirty, and dishonest nurse, characterized by Charles Dickens as Sairey Gamp, with the young, bright, and honest “Nightingale” who has transformed nursing and the hospital. There are also tales of dedication and selflessness in wartime and other emergencies when nurses had a major role, perhaps the only women to have done so. (p. 12)

In her own time, Nightingale elevated nursing from a disreputable stereotype to a respectable profession for women. Similarly, as Selanders and Crane (2012) argue, Nightingale pioneered “advocacy” in nursing through her highly ethical promotion of “both egalitarian rights and leadership activities” which raised nursing to a professional status. These are all tangible and uncontested achievements that stand in sharp contrast to the frequently exaggerated claims of myths constructed about Nightingale in her own time.

By contrast, Dingwall et al. (2003) acknowledge Nightingale’s substantial contributions but argue that her endeavors in public health were hardly



unique, as sanitary reform was one of the great political issues of the early Victorian age (pp. 35-37). In effect, Nightingale has not always been evaluated in a proper historical context. Dingwall et al. (2003) complain, "The difficulty of assessing the contribution of Florence Nightingale to nursing reform in the nineteenth century is that so much of the writing about her has been biographical rather than historical" (p. 35).

While such complaints have validity, I argue in this paper that certain neglected areas of Nightingale's biography, notably her literary interests and her life as lived in the context of her times, provide valuable insights into Nightingale's personal character. Accordingly, this section ends by endorsing a less commonly taken way to understand Nightingale's thinking and her personal views of nursing, which is to examine the literary influences that shaped and guided Nightingale's mind.

These influences include Nightingale's lifelong appreciation of Shakespeare's plays but also the literary-like dramas that she personally enacted throughout her long career in nursing. Shakespeare figured significantly in Nightingale's emotional life and in her meditations on human existence. Shakespearean storylines and characters resonate in Nightingale's own lived experience as an actor in significant public dramas. She once wrote, "I have lived a more public life than ever queen or actress did" (Bostridge, 2008, p. 213). Her love of theater and poetry was reflected in her willingness to use self-dramatizing language and action to shape public events. Moreover, Nightingale's life and writings show her faith in the power of imaginative literature to enrich and deepen our understanding of the world.

### **Using Shakespeare to Develop Students' Perspectives on Nursing**

A liberal arts course for nursing students might take the title of "Literature and Medicine." It could highlight Florence Nightingale's appreciation for

the works of Shakespeare as a major influence on her growing understanding of human nature which in turn guided her thinking about nursing and caregiving.

Shakespeare's works could be used in such a class in a number of specific ways to ask students to reflect deeply on literature and on life:

1. Discuss the themes of suffering, mortality, and healing in Shakespeare's plays and how they relate to the nursing profession.
2. Analyze characters in Shakespeare's plays who are caretakers or healers, such as Juliet's nurse in *Romeo and Juliet*, and compare them to the work of nurses in the modern day.
3. Compare Nightingale's philosophy of nursing to the values and beliefs expressed in Shakespeare's plays.
4. Study how Shakespeare's works were received and interpreted during Nightingale's time and how her own reading of the plays may have been influenced by the social and cultural context of the Victorian era.

Incorporating Shakespeare's works into a "Literature and Medicine" course would provide nursing students with a new perspective on the history of nursing and the role of literature in shaping attitudes towards illness, care, and healing. Understanding the works of Shakespeare that Nightingale was exposed to would give context to her life and her thoughts. This would allow students to better understand why certain ideas and themes were important to Nightingale and see how they shaped her views on nursing and caregiving.

Such a course would lead students to a deeper understanding of Nightingale's thought processes and show how she arrived at her conclusions about nursing and health. These insights would shed light on the development of Nightingale's theories about nursing and the ways in which she

blended her personal experiences and beliefs with her knowledge of literature and art.

Ultimately, students would reach a deeper understanding of the broader historical context in which nursing developed as a profession. Such connections to the past would help to highlight the continuity of nursing as a discipline and the ongoing evolution of its theories and practices.

Finally, learning about the influence of Shakespeare on Nightingale would deepen students' appreciation of literature and its role in shaping important ideas and movements. Understanding the ways in which Shakespeare's works have had an impact on nursing would reveal the power of art to inspire and inform, and to help students better understand the world around them.

In their professional training and future practice, nursing students need good models of behavior and discourse and a growing understanding of human psychology. Florence Nightingale acquired many models and deep psychological awareness from imaginative literature, particularly Shakespearean drama and poetry. Great artistic models can still inspire nursing students today, enriching their awareness of human nature in ways that balance the science of healing with the insights of art.

### Conclusion

One of Nightingale's literary editors observed that Nightingale herself once proposed a "thought experiment" about Shakespeare's influence upon her when Nightingale wrote:

Suppose Shakespeare, who had the very great advantage of writing in a dramatic form, had, instead of putting some of those very deep things he says into the mouths of his personages, which has saved our stupidity from falling foul of him, written them straight on as coming from himself, and that we had interpreted them all

as being verbally inspired (I suppose there was something of this kind in the Greek tragedies). How we should have missed the truth of Shakespeare! (MacDonald, 2002, p. 174)

In Nightingale's view, studying Shakespeare has the advantage of saving us from "our stupidity" and helping us find larger truths in Shakespeare that illuminate our own lives.

The works of William Shakespeare had a profound and lasting impact on Florence Nightingale as a human being and as a major contributor to modern nursing theory and practice. Nightingale was influenced by Shakespeare's dramatic explorations of the themes of life and death, ambition and honor, sin and morality, love and sympathy, justice and mercy. These plays helped to shape her views on caregiving and the importance of alleviating suffering, maintaining a moral compass, treating patients with compassion and dignity, and striving for what is right and just.

Through her writing and activism, Nightingale translated these ideas into her own powerful vision of nursing that continues to inspire and guide caregiving professionals to this day. Ultimately, Shakespeare's plays serve as a testament to the enduring power of literature to shape and inform our ideas about the world and our place in it, and they remind us of the importance of compassion and empathy in all forms of caregiving, including nursing practice. Nightingale's *Notes on Nursing* can be revisited in conjunction with a deeper understanding of Shakespeare's plays that would give new and expanded meaning to Ophelia's remark, "That's for remembrance."

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