

THE VOICE OF CASSANDRA: FLORENCE NIGHTINGALE'S *CASSANDRA* (1852)
AND THE VICTORIAN WOMAN¹

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In an undated letter to her sister Parthenope (c. 1844), Florence Nightingale wrote: 'What is life? It cannot be merely a gaining of experience—it is freedom, voluntary force, free-will, & therefore must be a hard fought battle—in order to make a choice, there must be evil & good to choose from' (Vicinus & Nergaard 1990: 25). As a victim aware of the social constraints that Victorian women had to tackle in their development as independent citizens, Nightingale fought for further education, for a life outside marriage and for the establishment of midwifery as a respected profession. In such a gallant endeavour, the most passionate battle which she undertook was to acquire a voice which would enable her to make her own choices and be heard and considered both in the public and private spheres of her time.

This article seeks to analyse the new concepts of womanhood and femininity that Florence Nightingale depicts in her essay entitled *Cassandra* (1852) within the context of the reception of this classical figure. Nightingale's use of the myth differs in many ways from much Victorian discourse on the silenced prophetess, configuring the heroine as shorthand for the vindication of the rights of women. From the various classical sources that narrate passages of the history of Cassandra the ones that have been most reworked by the arts of the western world are Homer's *Iliad*, both Aeschylus' and Seneca's *Agamemnon* and Euripides' *Trojan Women* (Reid 1993: 285–88). Although these last three plays were staged in Britain before the nineteenth century,² the most widely known episode of the history of Cassandra in Victorian times was the one recounted by Homer.³

Homer's *Iliad* was refigured in a number of different artistic genres throughout the nineteenth century: in poetry, drama, engravings, in painting and comic opera.⁴ The classical figures of the Trojan cycle were also evoked in essays, novels and even in the illustrated papers of the time. Some of the most fruitful of these refigurations are, for instance, Flaxman's illustrations of the late eighteenth century;⁵ however, other most unexpected readings, like the juvenile play *The Siege of Troy, or the Giant Horse of Sinon*, which was performed as a serious play in the Astley's Amphitheatre in 1833, were also popular among the reading public (Speaight 1946: 218; 1999: 28).

With regard to the figure of Cassandra, the aspects of the myth that were generally highlighted in the Victorian era are her lack of the gift of persuasion and her prophetic visions in Troy and Argos. Although the main source for the nineteenth-century Cassandra was Homer's *Iliad*, powerful symbols associated with these interpretations—like the prophetic frenzy reflected in the body and the discourse of the heroine—directly recall other texts like Aeschylus' *Agamemnon*. Even though the first documented full-length production of this tragedy is only 1880 (Macintosh et al. 2005: 155–57), earlier translations of the age meant that it was widely available (Foster 1966: 2–9). *Agamemnon and Cassandra; or, the Prophet and Loss of Troy*, a dramatic burlesque written by Robert Reece in 1868, for example, is based on the *Agamemnon* of Aeschylus. The Homeric and Aeschylean Cassandra is frequently represented in the Victorian arts rending her hair or tearing her clothes; mocked, despised and uttering a

constant stream of barely intelligible words. Florence Nightingale, however, sensed the possibilities of the figure of Cassandra as the symbol of women's limitations throughout the century, but also as the voice of their appropriation of a forbidden sphere of action reversing the conservative reworkings of the myth that had prevailed throughout.

PROPHETS AND SAGES IN EARLY VICTORIAN ENGLAND

The configuration of the prophet throughout the first half of the nineteenth century is clearly marked by the works of the sage writers; in particular by Thomas Carlyle, whose reflections on the hero collected in the lectures given in 1840 and printed one year later in *On Heroes, Hero-Worship, and the Heroic in History* represent a landmark in the thought of the age. Together with Carlyle, John Ruskin, Matthew Arnold, J. H. Newman and Walter Pater were the greatest exponents of Victorian sage writing,⁶ which was, according to Landow, an essayistic narrative which signalled some contemporary phenomena, interpreted them showing the evils of straying from the path of virtue, and predicted the disasters to come if no measures were taken to improve the situation (Landow 1986). John Holloway's *The Victorian Sage* (1953), the first extended study on Victorian sage writing, puts together the works of Carlyle, Disraeli, Newman, Matthew Arnold, Thomas Hardy and George Eliot,⁷ acknowledging in his introduction that even though they succeeded in different genres, what united them in his book was an: 'interest of a general or speculative kind in what the world is like, where man stands in it, and how he should live' (1953: 1). Similarly, the more recent *Victorian Sages and Cultural Discourse* (1990) approaches the concept of the Victorian Sage in a broader sense, conceiving sages' texts from a postmodernist perspective and focusing on gender analysis in its understanding of nineteenth-century aesthetics (Morgan 1990: 2).

Florence Nightingale's appropriation of sage writing leads to a gendered reappraisal of the figure of the sage woman, who abandons the pejorative signs associated with her possession of truth/knowledge and places her voice at the centre of the discourse as a speaker.⁸ According to Landow (1990), Nightingale follows the pattern of the Victorian sage writings in the construction of her essay. However, her 'aggressive (re)interpretation' of the genre (as set out in the title of Landow's analysis) is founded not so much on stylistic matters as on the topics that she discusses. As Landow states: 'She denies societal restrictions on female interpretations by making such interpretations in the first place, and she makes them specifically those of the female sage by aggressively reinterpreting the commonplaces of male-centred biblical and classical interpretation' (1990: 41). Even though Nightingale wasn't alone in her appropriation of the genre (Morgan 1990: 66–104, 171–86), her refiguration of Cassandra is ground-breaking in the reception of the myth throughout the nineteenth century, when prophetesses, sages, gipsies and fortune-tellers were common referents in the society, arts and leisure of the time. The presence of these stereotypes in the collective consciousness of the age can be clearly mapped with reference to the theatre and the press.

The recurrence of the history of John of Leyden and the Revolt of Munster in the early Victorian theatre, for instance, evidences the fascination that surrounded the figure of the prophet beyond the social criticism of Carlyle and his fellow sage writers. In particular, we need to consider the theatrical backdrop against which these plays were staged. These had previously confronted the upper—and middle-class audiences with other prophets, gipsies and fortune-tellers in, for example, *The Knights of the Cross or the Hermit is Prophecy* by S. Beazley and *The Gypsy's Warning* by G. Linley and R. B. Peake, both performed in the Drury Lane in 1826 and 1838 respectively. The

episode of the Munster was staged in *Le Prophète*, a lyrical drama in five acts, which was first performed in England at Covent Garden in an Italian translation from E. Scribe's French text by Manfredo Maggioni and music by G. Meyerbeer.⁹ The playscripts of the Lord Chamberlain's Play Collection at the British Library also record a burlesque version of Meyerbeer's opera written by Edward Fitzball with the title *The Prophet*,¹⁰ which was performed throughout the late months of that same year in Astley's Royal Amphitheatre,¹¹ and also *The Prophet or the Revolt of Munster*, which was licensed to be performed at the Theatre Royal in Manchester in 1851.

Prophecies and those who predicted them also appear in almanacs. For example, the *Illustrated London News* (24 December 1842: 527) advertises: 'the best almanack for 1843, entitled VOX STELLARUM; or OLD MOORE'S ALMANACK', which includes in its wonders 'a Prophetic Hieroglyphic adapted to the times'. In this sense, most important here is *The Prophetic Momus or Laughing Cassandra* (1834), which approaches the genre merging the clichés associated with magical truths with a humorous description of the social events expected for the following season. The news reported in the press of the age also calls attention to fortune-telling as part of the entertainment of the Victorian middle and upper classes. The chronicle of the Greenwich Fair in 1843, for example, published in the *Illustrated London News* (22 April 1843: 269–71) highlighted fortune-tellers and gipsies as some of the greatest attractions of the day. Both the text and the illustration of the chronicle draw attention to a particular anecdote that relates with amusement how a young couple was exposed to their futurity. A similar episode, involving the famous actress Mrs Mary Ann Keeley when she is appealing to the fates with a gipsy woman, is illustrated in the Theatrical Portraits of the *Illustrated London News* on 13 August 1842.¹²

As these few examples show, the possession of knowledge throughout the nineteenth century was allowed in the middlebrow and high social entertainments of the age as long as it was within the bounds of respectability and, most importantly, within the control of the institutions. As the claims for equal rights of the poorer classes were sweeping through the late decades of the century, knowledge and independence of mind became a menace to the foundations of the patriarchal order. What had amused the Victorian mid and upper classes in the 1843 Greenwich Fair, for example, needed either to be absorbed by the centripetal forces of the Establishment or secluded. As a consequence, the *Illustrated News* relates in 1858, for example, how Ann Williams was sentenced to one year of hard labour for victimising: 'so large a number of domestic servants of London by the exercises of her black art' (23 October 1858: 381), whilst the Royal Polytechnic was allowed to exhibit the entertainment 'The Modern Delphic Oracle' in 1866 (13 January 1866: 35). Within this context, Florence Nightingale wrote her essay calling for a truth, a knowledge, that would enable the lost Cassandras to gain a voice and a place 'of their own' in society.

FLORENCE NIGHTINGALE'S CASSANDRA

Florence Nightingale's *Cassandra* was only privately printed during the nineteenth century as part of her essay *Suggestions for the Thought to Searchers after Religious Truth* (1852). Six copies of the essay were sent to her father, her uncle Samuel Smith, Richard Monckton Milnes, Sir John McNeill, Benjamin Jowett and John Stuart Mill (Snyder 1993: 254).¹³ The next edition of the essay is dated 1928, when it was reprinted as an appendix to Ray Strachey's *The Cause: a Short History of the Women's Movement in Great Britain*.¹⁴ The first version of *Cassandra*, conceived as a fictionalized autobiographical novel, develops the theme of the confinement of the

upper-class woman of her time through a dialogue between two characters, Fariseo and Nofriani, reported by the former after his sister's death.¹⁵ The main alterations of the early text after the comments of Jowett and Mill are a shift from Nofriani's first-person singular narrator to a plural 'we' and 'they', which refer to women in general, and the deletion of autobiographical details and romantic descriptions (Snyder 1993: 27). The third part of this *Cassandra*, edited by Snyder in 1996, ends with the following sentences, which are not included in the final text:

Oh! call me no more Nofriani, call me Cassandra. for I have preached + prophesied in vain. I have gone about crying all these many years, Wo to the people! And no one has listened or believed. And now I cry, Wo to myself! For upon me the destruction has come.
(1996: 278)

This is the only instance in which the heroine is mentioned in the essay. What remains of that Cassandra in the printed version is her discourse; a first-person female prophetic narrator that denounces the lack of activity and the absence of a female voice in the lives of upper-class women of the Victorian times.

Florence Nightingale was neither a poet nor a playwright. When she wrote *Cassandra* in 1852 she was a young lady of thirty-two in thirst of knowledge, who wasn't allowed to fulfil her intellectual ambitions in a society that placed a number of constraints on women. Daughters of William Edward Nightingale and his wife Frances, both Florence and her sister Parthenope were brought up with every advantage of wealth. At home, their father was in charge of their education in Greek, Latin, German, French, Italian, history, grammar, composition and philology, while a governess was employed only for music and art. When the two sisters were ready for society, Florence defied all conventions, claiming that her future wasn't in marriage but in actively helping the needy. Known for her actions during the Crimean War, where she improved the hygienic conditions of the hospitals and reorganized the acquisition of equipment for the army and the sick, Florence Nightingale—'the lady of the lamp'—pressed for drastic reforms in the provision of healthcare in the British Empire.

Nightingale's intellectual ambitions were not so much those of a writer as of a woman as social reformer. Thus, one must read her many works on religion, the hospitals and the health system of the Empire in that context. The social critique presented in *Cassandra* involves, fundamentally, the role of women in Victorian England.¹⁶ As such, not only does it reflect upon gender equality, it also represents a powerful tool for Nightingale to express her concerns about her own future and lack of occupation.¹⁷ The personal notes and letters written between 1820 and 1854, before the Crimea years, shed light on many of her approaches to the topics set out in her essay. In addition, particular events of her youth draw personal connections with the classical myth that expound her conceptions of the figure of the sage woman as a social reformer.

In *A Plan for the Conduct of Female Education in Boarding Schools* (1797), Erasmus Darwin explains the different issues that should be included in the female education of his time. Together with the academic matters, Darwin considers other aspects such as what women should wear, eat or talk about in order to win social endorsement. With regard to conversation, Darwin states that women must:

speak agreeable in respect to manner conflicts in a voice clear, yet not loud; soft, yet not plaintive... . In respect to the matter it should be such, as coincides with the tastes or pursuits of those, to whom the

conversation is address'd ... But as young ladies are not expected to speak with the wisdom, or precision of philosophers; and as the careless cheerfulness of their conversation, with simplicity of manner, and with the grace, ease, and vivacity natural to youth, supplies it with its principal charms; these should be particularly encouraged, as there are few artificial accomplishments, which could compensate for the loss of them. ([1797] 2001: 64–8)

A more contemporary account is Sarah Stickney Ellis's *The Woman of England* (1839), where the author claims that:

Conversation, understood in its proper character, as distinct from mere talk, might rescue her from this [being a slighted wife]. Not conversation upon books, if her husband happens to be a fox-hunter; nor upon fox-hunting, if he is a book-worm: but exactly that kind of conversation which is best adapted to his tastes and habits, yet at the same time capable of leading him a little out of both into a wider field of observation, and subjects he may never have derived amusement from before, simply from the fact of their never having been presented to his notice. (1839: 97–8)

Simon Dentith (1998) shows how the male roles in society were also depicted in a number of conduct books that were addressed to men in Victorian times. However, the main difference with the ones devoted to female education and manners lies in the consideration of women as inferior human beings. Their stronger subjugation in conversational matters is reported by Nightingale in an undated private note written around 1851, where she states the following:

But why, oh my God, cannot I be satisfied with the life which satisfies so many people? I am told that the conversation of all these good clever men ought to be enough for me—why am I starving, desperate, diseased upon it? Why has it all run to vanity in me, to—what impression am I making upon them? ... That, as [Channing says] the ground of sincerity lies in talking of what you are interested about—so none of the subjects of society interests me enough to draw me out of vanity. (Vicinus & Nergaard 1990: 47)¹⁸

The same idea is presented in *Cassandra* where Nightingale denounces that:

You are not to talk of anything very interesting, for the essence of society is to prevent any long conversations and all *tête-à-têtes*. 'Glissez, n'appuyez pas' is its very motto. The praise of a good '*maîtresse de maison*' consists in this, that she allows no one person to be too much absorbed in, or too long about, a conversation. She always recalls them to their 'duty'. ([1852]1979: 33)

Even though women's lack of voice in society is a recurrent topic in *Cassandra*, Nightingale develops her ideas on the matter more deeply in the second section of her essay, where she emphasizes the social differences between men and women that allow the first to have an occupation without the interruptions of the 'domestic duties'—that were always carried out by women—and to cultivate intellect in society:

But a woman cannot live in the light of intellect. Society forbids it. Those conventional frivolities, which are called her 'duties', forbid it What are these duties (or bad habits)? — Answering a multitude of letters which

lead to nothing, from her so-called friends— keeping herself up to the level of the world that she may furnish her quota of amusement at the breakfast-table; driving out her company in the carriage. ([1852]1979: 37)

The well known theory of the male and female spheres by which society forbade women a public discourse is refuted and challenged by Nightingale, when she points to this silence as one of the symptoms of the social malady of her time: ‘This system dooms some minds to incurable infancy, others to silent misery’ ([1852]1979: 37).

As stated above, Nightingale’s unusual talent and keenness to learn exceeded her family expectations. A few women relatives and friends whose intellectual interests did not fit in the traditional feminine mould of the time responded sympathetically to her aspirations; but these were only rare exceptions. In particular, she found strong opposition to her plans in her mother and sister, whose lifestyle was closer to what Nightingale rejected rather than to what she expected from women. The ambivalence toward women that Nightingale inherited from her relation with Fanny and Parthenope Nightingale is clear in *Cassandra* where she claims for freedom to make choices at the same time as she makes women, in particular mothers, responsible for their yoke:

Women are never supposed to have any occupation of sufficient importance *not* to be interrupted, except ‘suckling their fools;’ and women themselves have accepted this, have written books to support it, and have trained themselves so as to consider whatever they do as *not* of such value to the world or to others, but that they can throw it up at the first ‘claim of social life.’ They have accustomed themselves to consider intellectual occupation as a merely selfish amusement, which it is their ‘duty’ to give up for every trifler more selfish than themselves. ([1852] 1979: 32)

Before she started her ‘mission’, Nightingale fell into a number of deep depressions caused by the social obligations that forced her to comply with the domestic duties that distracted her from other intellectual activities. In a private note written in December 1850, Nightingale states:

I have no desire now but to die. There is not a night that I do not lie down in my bed, wishing I may live no more. Unconsciousness is all that I desire. I remain in bed as late as I can, for what have I to wake for? I am perishing for want of food—& what prospect have I of better? While I am in this position, I can expect nothing else. Therefore I spend my days in dreams of other situations which will afford me food. (Vicus & Nergaard 1990: 44)

This idea is developed in *Cassandra* specifying that the food she longs for is the food of the soul and the intellect: ‘To have no food for our heads, no food for our hearts, no food for our activity, is that nothing? If we have no food for the body, how we cry out ... But suppose one were to put a paragraph in the “Times”, *Death of Thought from Starvation*, or *Death of Moral Activity from Starvation*, how people would stare, how they would laugh ...’ (Nightingale [1852] 1979: 41).¹⁹

Isobel Hurst’s recent work *Victorian Women Writers and the Classics: the Feminine of Homer* (2006) shows the powerful influence that women’s acquisition and also lack of knowledge/education had over the lives and the imagination of the mid- and upper-class Victorian families. Moreover, Hurst explains the dichotomy of the roles of the male mentors of these women who instructed their pupils, sisters and daughters at the same time as exercising a form of censorship over their access to and the practice of

such knowledge (Hurst 2006: 130–63), which was the object of caricatures and pejorative forms of address as the various sketches by John Leech published in *Punch* regarding women and intellectual professions show (*Ladies of Creation* 1851). As demonstrated above, a recurrent topic in Nightingale's essay is the social differences between men and women that result in the want of intellectual activity for women. She confronts this forced situation with the laws of God that have provided every human being with a special gift to pursue: 'What is this but throwing the gifts of God aside as worthless, and substituting for them those of the world?' (Nightingale [1852] 1979: 38). A fierce opponent of the full development of women is then: 'the conventional society, which men have made for women, and women have accepted' (ibid.: 26); taking as an example the obligations of marriage, Nightingale explains her own interpretation of this powerful social institution as follows:

When shall we see a woman making a *study* of what she does? Married women cannot; for a man would think, if his wife undertook any great work with the intention of carrying it out, —of making anything but a sham of it — that she would 'suckle his fools and chronicle his small beer' less well for it, —that he would not have so good a dinner — that she would destroy, as it is called, his domestic life. (ibid.: 44)

A personal note written in 1846 provides further evidence of her rejection of such an oppressive bond:

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 as clearly marked out some to be single women as He has others to be wives, and has organized them accordingly for their vocation. (Vicinus & Nergaard 1990: 41)

The vocation of Florence Nightingale was mainly rooted in a need to overcome the idleness and passivity that ruled the lives of women in the nineteenth century, and also from the firm belief that she had received a call from God. Four times she records some mystical experience.²⁰ The first one was on 7 February 1837, before her seventeenth birthday: 'She wrote that God had spoken to her and called her to His service, although what that was to be was unclear' (Vicinus & Nergaard 1990: 17). In 1848 she received her second call, only four years before the publication of *Cassandra*. The archives held at the Florence Nightingale Museum in London show how she was often unwell during those years: she had a nervous collapse in 1843 and became ill again at the beginning of 1844 and 1845. Those were the days when she started to write to her aunt Hannah Nicholson about religion and her habit of daydreaming. In an undated letter written around 1844 or 1845, she confessed:

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 ... That this can only be done in an Asylum, I am afraid, is too evident ... The invariable effect of madness in disordering the circulation & depressing the life & warmth of the extremities gives, it adds, the *physical* cause as well, of the wonderful effect of working in the open air upon Insanity. The rich Insane, & especially the female part, are I believe, much worse off than the poor in that way—& have consequently less chance of happiness & of recovery. (Vicinus & Nergaard 1990: 22)

The habit of daydreaming is the centre of discussion of the first part of Nightingale's essay, and she considers it an evasion of the idle lives of young women, the only place where they can actively develop their intellectual, spiritual and social inclinations:

They talk in fancy of that which interests them most; they seek a companion for their every thought; the companion they find not in reality they seek in fancy, or, if not that, if not absorbed in endless conversations, they see themselves engaged with him in stirring events, circumstances which call out the interests wanting to them. ([1852] 1979: 44)

The scorn of her want of knowledge, the strong belief in the call from God, the habit of daydreaming that pushed her to fear her own madness, and the physical collapses suffered in those years inevitably link the life of Florence Nightingale with the nineteenth-century representations of the figure of Cassandra. In 1861, in response to a letter written by Nightingale to Benjamin Jowett on his comments about her work, Jowett expresses his apologies to his friend for having misunderstood her writings and taken her as Cassandra:

About Cassandra I see that I was mistaken. I did not exactly take Cassandra for yourself, but I thought that it represented more of your own feeling about the world that could have been the case. (Quinn and Prest (eds) 1987: 8)

Despite this affront to the sensitivity of her friend, the truth is that as late as 1874, after the articles written by W. R. Greg in the *Contemporary Review* under the title *Rocks ahead; or the Warnings of Cassandra*, Jowett was still addressing Nightingale in one of his letters in a very familiar, and consented, way as 'My dear Cassandra' (Quinn 1987: 264). It is not surprising, then, that when she decided to write her essay, she chose to place this female heroine at the centre of her thoughts.

The facts of Nightingale's personal life that I have described in this section show that even though her own experiences fit in the conventional mould of representation of sage women—Cassandras—of her age, her text doesn't stand by the patriarchal tradition that resentfully scorns the words that come from a menacing *other*. Nightingale's Cassandra is not mad nor frenzied, and the physical after-effects that she suffers derive from the impositions of the dominant structure. The hysterical episodes of the Victorian woman that she represents stem from the forced idleness that rules her life and not from the possession of any menacing knowledge. Nightingale states: 'I see the numbers of my kind who have gone mad for want of something to do' (quoted in Vicinus & Nergaard 1990: 39). Thus, in spite of her continuous rejections of any feminist label (Woodham Smith 1950: 485–7), her *Cassandra* stands out as a crucial text for the liberation of the voice of women in the nineteenth century.

SPEECHLESS MADNESS VS. VOICED KNOWLEDGE

Between the writing of *Cassandra* in 1852 and its wide publication in 1928, late nineteenth-century refigurations of Cassandra begin to exploit, by and large, models of the 'evil' women that have been much studied by Victorian scholarship over the last decades (Auerbach 1982; Casteras 1982; Dijkstra 1986; Stott 1992). With the social and intellectual advances of women in the second half of the century, especially with the passing of the Divorce and Matrimonial Causes Act in 1857, the concept of sage women began to be related to other more pejorative labels such as witches, sorceresses, fallen women and ultimately *femme fatales*, which evidenced the fear with

which the patriarchal structures of the age approached the freedom of women and their access to knowledge. This results, as we will see, in the syncretism of the representational forms of this demon-esque woman sage with the figure of Cassandra by the turn of the century.

Culture, religion and politics were interrelated in Victorian times. The influence of clergymen and their sermons on social life and public opinion was, consequently, profound. John Cumming was a significant preacher in London in the middle of the nineteenth century, and one of the most popular topics for his sermons was apocalyptic prophecies (see Mitchell 2004). His ideas were published in over thirty books and pamphlets between the 1840s and 1870s, which illustrate how the popularity of the prophetic sermon went beyond the church. Pamphlets and magazines like the *Penny Pulpit* were also at the service of the ideas spread in these public lectures, which is an important issue to bear in mind when it comes to dealing with the transmission of the figure of Cassandra.

Allusions to Cassandra in philosophical or political essays of the time were frequent. A single instance is enough to illustrate this function of the myth: Greg's political text *Rocks Ahead or The Warnings of Cassandra* (1874) refers to the Greek heroine both in the title of his essay and in the prologue. In line with the tradition of the time, Greg states that:

The part of Cassandra can never be a pleasant one for any man to play. It makes others uncomfortable and himself unpopular. It is always annoying both to individuals and nations to be warned, with irritating pertinacity and lucidity still more exasperating, of dangers imminent or future which may be unavoidable, and which will be probably fatal if not averted. The more unanswerable the prophet, the more hated he is sure to be, and the more neglected he is likely to be. (1874: 1)

In 1854, the struggles of Cassandra had been satirized in John Robert O'Neil's (Hugo Vamp) play *The Siege of Troy; or, the Miss-Judgement of Paris* (1854), which was licensed on 21 August to be performed at Astley's Amphitheatre on Monday 28 of August of the same year. The following decade, Robert Reece's burlesque *Agamemnon and Cassandra; or the Prophet and Loss of Troy* (1868) scorns the predictions of the heroine related to the House of Atreus through the characters of Aegisthus and Clytemnestra. These two plays show how Cassandra as a prophetess was a familiar figure in burlesque; and the various plays devoted to the character of Schamyl the prophet performed in 1854 at the Standard and Princess's Theatres in London illustrate how the general motif of the prophet itself was equally very popular in the 'serious' drama of the second half of the century.

In 1862, George Meredith published his long poem 'Cassandra' included in *Modern Love and Poems of the English Roadside*, in which Cassandra is repeatedly referred to as 'Ilion's fierce prophetic flower' (3.3, 9.3). As was common in the nineteenth century, Meredith brings together Cassandra's predictions in the *Iliad* with the foretelling of her death in Aeschylus' *Agamemnon*. Eight years later, in 1870, D. G. Rossetti's 'Cassandra' sonnets—collected in *Sonnets for Pictures* along with the drawing with the same title, sketched by Rossetti himself—insist upon the commonplaces that define the heroine in terms of a prophetess whose predictions are disregarded. Furthermore, they also align Cassandra with the representation of some of the sages and the fallen women of the Pre-Raphaelite movement, with whom she shares the configuration of her body in the moments of frenzied possession. Rossetti's footnote to his drawing reads as follows:

As stated above, Florence Nightingale's *Cassandra* only became widely available with the publication of the 1928 edition. After all, it seems that, although Nightingale's Cassandra-like voice won an overwhelming endorsement from the 1850s, after her actions in the Crimean War and her intervention in the reform of the British Army, her literary *Cassandra* was not to be much heard until the twentieth century. Even though Florence Nightingale's approach to Cassandra constitutes a novelty within the context of the genre of sage writing, she wasn't alone in her reading of the myth. The American journalist Margaret Fuller (1810–1850) also chose Priam's daughter to claim a higher education for women, far from the idleness that the social obligations of the time imposed on them. Fuller became first editor of *The Dial* in 1840, and by 1845 she had accepted a position in the literary department of the *New York Tribune* (Urbanski 1980: 9, 101). In 1843 she wrote the essay 'The Great Lawsuit: Man versus Men; Woman versus Women' for *The Dial*, which was transformed in *Woman in the Nineteenth Century and Kindred Papers Relating to the Sphere, Condition and Duties of Woman*, published in 1845. In her essay, Fuller refers to Cassandra thus:

Women are, indeed, the easy victims both of priest-craft and self-delusion; but this would not be, if the intellect was developed in proportion to the other powers. They would then have a regulator, and be more in equipoise, yet must retain the same nervous susceptibility while their physical structure is such as it is.

It is with just that hope that we welcome everything that tends to strengthen the fibre and develop the nature on more sides. When the intellect and affections are in harmony; when intellectual consciousness is calm and deep; inspiration will not be confounded with fancy. Then 'she who advances | With rapturous, lyrical glances, | Singing the song of the earth, singing | Its hymn to the Gods,' will not be pitied as a mad-woman, nor shrunk from as unnatural.

The Greeks who saw everything in forms, which we are trying to ascertain as law, and classify as cause, embodied all this in the form of Cassandra. ([1845]1971: 105)

Like Fuller herself, Nightingale's *Cassandra* confronts these clichés and starts the discursive rebellion that will underlie the characterization of the myth down to the twentieth century. Nightingale's *Cassandra* and the feminist appropriation of the myth itself, provide a missing link in the history of the voice of women in Victorian England.

With the publication of *Cassandra* as an appendix to Ray Strachey's *The Cause*—a history of the Women's Liberation Movement written by one of its activists—and Virginia Woolf's reference to the essay in *A Room of One's Own* (1929) only one year after its publication, *Cassandra* re-entered feminist discourse. The scope of interpretations of *Cassandra* in feminist texts widened, as did the potential readings of Nightingale's essay as an 'outcry' against the oppression of women, especially after the more conservative and patriarchal reworkings of the myth of the second half of the nineteenth century. It could be argued that the transmission of the *Cassandra* myth in Nightingale prepares the ground for other, future revisionings of the female figure, which search for the subjectivity of the Greek heroine. Nightingale's *Cassandra* doesn't only represent an important step in the liberation of the voice of women in contexts of male oppression, it also points out the salient features of the heroine that are essential for the evolution of the transmission of the myth in the contemporary arts. As a consequence, *Cassandra*'s words and thoughts are brought to the foreground in Christa Wolf's *Cassandra* (1983), Julia Pascal's *Theresa* (1990) or Coss, Sklar and

Segal's *The Daughter's Cycle* (1977–1980), for instance, forcing the audience to hear her wailing not only as a 'mad' prophetic but also as a refugee or a rape victim. In these modern representations of the myth, both the patriarchal voice that scorns her knowledge and the grotesque representations of her signs of madness gradually fade in favour of the emancipated cry that Nightingale longed for in her *Cassandra*.

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ENDNOTES

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² I refer here both to the original texts and adaptations. For the history of the performances of *Agamemnon* see Macintosh et al (2005).

³ For a list of translations of Homer's *Iliad* in the eighteenth and early nineteenth centuries see Clarke (1986).

⁴ For an account of the interpretations of the homeric Cassandra as a prophetess see Iriarte (1999: 51). For further references see Neblung (1997).

⁵ John Flaxman's illustrations of Homer (1793), Aeschylus (1795) and Dante (c. 1793) became famous in the eighteenth century; his fame resulted in a large number of editions of his works published well until the end of the nineteenth century

⁶ Bellringer and Jones (1975) also include J. Sterling, T. B. Macaulay, B. Disraeli, C. Kingsley, J.S. Mill, G. H. Lewes, F. Harrison, T. Arnold, L. Stephen, H. Spencer, C. Darwin, S. Butler, T. H. Huxley, and W. Morris in their anthology of Victorian sages.

⁷ Despite her early articles and essays, Landow disagrees with Holloway and considers Eliot not a sage writer but a novelist who creates 'credibility for a wisdom-speaking narrator' (1990: 33).

⁸ For an account of Nightingale's revision of the myth of Cassandra as a feminine reappraisal of Carlyle's theories on the 'prophet' see Jenkins (1994: 16–26).

⁹ For a review of the première in Paris see *ILN* 21 Apr. 1849: 258; for the advertisement of the play in London see *ILN* 14 July 1849: 22; for a review of its première at the Royal Italian Opera see *ILN* 28 July 1849: 55.

¹⁰ BL Add. Ms 43020. Vol. CLVI (22) ff. 865–918.

¹¹ For a review of the première see *ILN* 6 Oct. 1849: 234.

¹² The image shares the icons that John Leech will use in 1853 in his sketch for *Punch, An Easy Forecast*. Cf. *An Easy Forecast* [Image] 1853. <http://john-leech-archive.org.uk>. Last accessed 18 July 2007

¹³ Paradoxically though it may seem, Nightingale chose six men as recipients of her manuscript instead of major female writers of the time (such as Elizabeth Gaskell and Harriet Martineau) who were also her acquaintances; this choice responds once more to her ambivalence toward women (Showalter 1981: 406).

For the correspondence between Nightingale and Jowett in relation to her work see Quinn and Prest (1987: 4, 8–9, 206, 264); for the relation between Nightingale and John Stuart Mill see McDonnald (2003: 369–410).

¹⁴ Ray Strachey acknowledges her debt to Lady Stephen, Miss B. A. Clough, Mrs. Vaughan Nash and other members of the Nightingale family for facilitating the printing and the access to the original manuscript. (Strachey 1989 [1928]: 7).

¹⁵ For an analysis of the revision and edition of the text from the first manuscript see Snyder (1996). The theme of the confinement in Victorian women's writing is amply studied by Sandra M. Gilbert and Susan Gubar (1998 [1979]).

¹⁶ For an analysis of the influence of Nightingale's own biography in the development of her particular feminism see Showalter (1981).

¹⁷ For an analysis of Florence Nightingale's use of language in *Cassandra* within the context of the effects of rage, in psychoanalytical terms, on the feminine narrative voice of the essay see Kahane (1995).

¹⁸ Note that Matthew Arnold's pejorative comments on Charlotte Brontë's *Villette* referred to the mind of the author of the novel as containing 'nothing but hunger, rebellion and rage' (qtd in Alexander 2004). Retrieved March 20, 2007 from <http://www.oxforddnb.com/view/article/3523>.

¹⁹ The want of food images are recurrent in the depiction of the heroines of the Victorian novel (e.g.: Charlotte Brontë's *Jane Eyre* and *Villette*). See Michie (1987: 12–29).

²⁰ For an account of the different interpretations that explain Nightingale's mystical experiences see Showalter (1981: 398 n7) and Calabria (1987).

²¹ All references to Rossetti's sonnets and picture are from Rossetti, D. G. (1968 [1870]143–44).

²² For the configuration of Cassandra in D. G. Rossetti see Monrós (2006).

²³ For an account of the creation of the woman reader in the first decades of the nineteenth century see Pearson (1999). Deborah Cherry explains how: 'Paintings of witches and sorceresses were among the many images in high art and popular culture to negotiate the representation of the learned woman and thus to participate in ferocious and at times violent contestations over middle-class women's education and professional training'. (Cherry 2000: 162)

²⁴ Casteras studies Sandy's painting in her approach to the representation of sage women in Victorian art and claims that: 'Madness or possession by supernatural forces is another common denominator shared by many of the women in these paintings. The sorceresses have great mental powers and cunning, but they are seized either by uncontrollable rage or a force greater than themselves that propels their evil magic. Often the female body seems possessed, from twisting torso and clothes, to electric hair, riveting gaze, telekinetic powers, and open mouth' (Casteras 1982: 169).