

# ***I know why the caged Nightingale does not sing:***

Para uma leitura de  
*Cassandra* (1852), de  
Florence Nightingale  
(1820-1910)

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**Resumo.** O inesperado surto pandémico, à escala global, da covid-19 veio colocar no topo das agendas políticas mundiais questões de saúde pública. Tendo este facto em atenção, o presente texto aborda o ensaio *Cassandra*, escrito em 1852 por Florence Nightingale (1820-1910), enquadrando-o na longa era vitoriana e relacionando-o com a “questão feminina” e *The Subjection of Women* (1869), de John Stuart Mill (1806-1873).

**Palavras-chave:** Florence Nightingale; *Cassandra*; Feminismo vitoriano; John Stuart Mill; *The Subjection of Women*.

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**I know why the caged Nightingale does not sing: Reading *Cassandra* (1852), by Florence Nightingale (1820-1910).** *The unexpected outbreak, at global level, of the Covid-19 pandemic placed issues concerning public health at the top of the world's political agendas. Bearing this fact in mind, this article presents *Cassandra*, an essay written in 1852 by Florence Nightingale (1820-1910), setting it in the context of the long Victorian age and relating it to the "female question" and *The Subjection of Women* (1869), by John Stuart Mill (1806-1873).*

**Keywords:** *Florence Nightingale; Cassandra; Victorian Feminism; John Stuart Mill; The Subjection of Women.*



"The next Christ will perhaps be a female Christ." (Nightingale, 1979, p. 53)

Às Prof.<sup>as</sup> Doutoras Teresa Almeida e Iolanda Ramos (NOVA FCSH)

O inesperado surto pandémico, à escala global, da covid-19 (2020) veio colocar no topo das agendas políticas mundiais questões de saúde pública, envolvendo e mobilizando cientistas e investigadores, médicos, farmacêuticos, enfermeiros e auxiliares, as respectivas ordens, governos, ministérios, direcções gerais e administrações regionais, a OMS, a EMA, etc., bem como a implementação de normas e medidas legislativas e processuais e a (re)criação de infraestruturas administrativas, assistenciais e sanitárias. Tendo este facto em atenção, o presente texto procurará abordar um ensaio de Florence Nightingale: *Cassandra*, redigido em 1852, pouco antes do envolvimento na Guerra da Crimeia (1854-1856), que viria, como se sabe, a fixar a imagem histórica de *The Lady with the Lamp*<sup>(1)</sup>.

1 Poderemos talvez considerá-la, de algum modo, a equivalente hospitalar de *The Angel in the House*, tomando de empréstimo o título do célebre poema de Coventry Patmore (1823-1896), dividido em quatro partes: *The Betrothal* (1854), *The Espousals* (1856), *Faithful for Ever* (1860) e *The Victories of Love* (1863).

O título do ensaio em apreço justifica algumas breves palavras sobre a figura de Cassandra na mitologia e literatura clássicas. Assim, Robert Graves apresenta-a como uma profetisa, filha de Príamo e Hécuba, amante de Agamémnon, e, tal como ele, morta pela respectiva esposa, Clitemnestra (Graves, 1988, pp. 149-150), enquanto *The Oxford Companion to Classical Literature* acrescenta um dado importante: a maldição de Cassandra por Apolo, na sequência da qual “the god rendered useless the gift of prophecy that he had bestowed on her, by causing her prophecies never to be believed” (Harvey, 1983, p. 92)<sup>(2)</sup>. Por analogia com a Cassandra clássica, poder-se-á, pois, pensar que a visão implicitamente proposta por Florence Nightingale – a ‘Cassandra vitoriana’ – estará condenada a não passar de uma irrealizável utopia... O final do ensaio, marcado por uma saudação e celebração elegíacas da morte como uma ansiada libertação ou via para a liberdade, corrobora esta leitura:

The dying woman to her mourners: – ‘Oh! if you knew how gladly I leave this life, how much more courage I feel to take the chance of another, [...] you would put on your wedding-clothes instead of mourning for me!’

‘But,’ they say, ‘so much talent! so many gifts! such good which you might have done!’

‘The world will be put back some little time by my death,’ she says; [...] but it is by the death which has taken place some years ago [...], not by the death which is about to take place now.’ And so is the world put back by the death of everyone who has to sacrifice the development of his or her peculiar gifts [...] to conventionality.

‘My people were like children playing on the shore of the eighteenth century. I was their hobby-horse, their plaything; and they drove me to and fro, [...] till I, who had grown to woman’s estate and to the ideas of the nineteenth century, lay down exhausted, my mind closed to hope, my heart to strength. ‘Free – free – oh! divine freedom, art thou come at last? Welcome, beautiful death!’ (Nightingale, 1979, pp. 54-55)

A excelente introdução de Myra Stark enquadra Nightingale na sociedade vitoriana, relacionando-a com alguns autores e publicações coevos

2 Cf. Stark, in Nightingale, 1979, pp. 22-23, n. 35.

sobre a condição feminina (Stark, in Nightingale, 1979, pp. 14-15), envolvendo não apenas mulheres, mas também John Stuart Mill (1806-1873), esposo da destacada feminista Harriet Taylor (1807-1858) e autor de *The Subjection of Women*, ‘manifesto’ liberal escrito em 1861 e publicado apenas em 1869, dois anos após a promulgação da segunda Lei da Reforma eleitoral (*Reform Act*). Como escreve Mill, logo na abertura:

[...] the principle which regulates the existing social relations between the two sexes – the legal subordination of one [...] to the other – is wrong in itself, and [...] one of the chief hindrances to human improvement; and [...] it ought to be replaced by a principle of perfect equality, admitting no power or privilege on the one side, nor disability on the other. (Mill, 2019, p. 1)

Apesar das profundas e evidentes diferenças nos planos retórico, argumentativo e estilístico, seria interessante confrontar mais de perto as questões e posições ideológicas plasmadas em ambos os ensaios, tanto mais que Mill admirava Nightingale, referindo-se-lhe (e a *Cassandra*) em *The Subjection of Women*, se bem que de forma elíptica<sup>3</sup>. Segundo Stark, o feminismo de Florence Nightingale manifestar-se-ia, porém, mais no campo da reivindicação de qualificações e oportunidades educacionais e profissionais para as mulheres do que em manifestações e campanhas em prol dos direitos cívicos, conforme ressalta do seguinte passo de uma carta a Stuart Mill:

That women should have the suffrage [...] no one can be more deeply convinced than I. It is so important for a woman to be a ‘person’, as you say... But it will be years before you obtain the suffrage for women. And in the meantime there are evils which press much more hardly on women than the want of suffrage [...]. (Stark, as cited in Nightingale, 1979, p. 18)

Não obstante esta ligeira divergência no que toca à ordenação de prioridades, Anderson e Zinsser recordam: “In 1866, 1,499 eminent women, including Florence Nightingale, Harriet Martineau and Mary Sommerville

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3 “A celebrated woman, in a work which I hope will some day be published, remarks truly that everything a woman does is done at odd times” (Mill, 2019, p. 74).

[...] signed a petition for the vote which was presented to the House of Commons, where eighty members voted in favor of women's suffrage" (Anderson & Zinsser, 1990, p. 361).

Além de enfermeira, patrocinadora e fundadora de escolas de enfermagem e obstetrícia<sup>(4)</sup>, Florence Nightingale foi, ainda que a título oficioso, uma 'Directora-Geral de Saúde' profundamente empenhada, conhecedora e rigorosa, tendo sido distinguida por Edward VII (1901-1910) com a Ordem do Mérito (1907) e louvada por Lytton Strachey (1880-1932) em *Eminent Victorians* (1918)<sup>(5)</sup>; é, de resto, a única figura feminina homenageada pelo ensaísta, que, reportando-se ao conflito da Crimeia, a evoca nos seguintes termos:

At first some of the surgeons would have nothing to say to her, and, though she was welcomed by others, the majority was hostile and suspicious. But gradually she gained ground. Her good will could not be denied, and her capacity could not be disregarded. With consummate tact, with all the gentleness of supreme strength, she managed at last to impose her personality upon the susceptible, overwrought, discouraged, and helpless group of men in authority who surrounded her. She stood firm; she was a rock in the angry ocean; with her alone was safety, comfort, life. (Strachey, 1986, p. 122)

Não obstante estes encômios e reconhecimentos, poder-se-ia dizer, aproveitando e adaptando para o efeito um título de Maya Angelou (1928-2014)<sup>(6)</sup>: *I know why the caged Nightingale does not sing...* As razões subjacentes a este 'não-canto' (e mesmo desencanto, conforme veremos) da 'Rouxinol' inglesa distribuem-se por algumas áreas organicamente

4 Nightingale School and Home for Nurses, integrada no St. Thomas Hospital, e Training School for Midwives, King's College Hospital, ambas em Londres e financiadas por um fundo criado em 1855 (*The Nightingale Fund*).

5 "Her *Notes on Hospitals* (1859) revolutionized the theory of hospital construction and hospital management. She was immediately recognized as the leading expert upon all the questions involved; her advice flowed unceasingly and in all directions, so that there is no great hospital today which does not bear upon it the impress of her mind. Nor was this all. With the opening of the Nightingale Training School for Nurses at St. Thomas's Hospital (1860), she became the founder of modern nursing" (Strachey, 1986, p. 147) e "Her training school [...], with all that it involved in initiative, control, responsibility, and combat, would have been enough in itself to have absorbed the whole efforts of at least two lives of ordinary vigour" (Strachey, 1986, p. 151).

6 *I Know Why the Caged Bird Sings* (1969).

inter-relacionadas(áveis), todas elas focadas na extensa bibliografia existente sobre a sociedade, a vida profissional e doméstica e a mentalidade vitorianas<sup>(7)</sup>. Entre essas áreas, avulta a chamada “questão feminina” (*the woman question*), cuja relevância procuraremos documentar através de excertos de *Cassandra*, obra já descrita como “an impassioned indictment of the confinement of privileged women” (Anderson & Zinsser, 1990, p. 167).

Tomemos como ponto de partida a seguinte passagem:

Why have women passion, intellect, moral activity [...] and a place in society where no one of the three can be exercised? [...] In the conventional society, which men have made for women [...] they *must* have none, they *must* act the farce of hypocrisy, the lie that they are without passion – and therefore what else can they say to their daughters, without giving the lie to themselves? [...] Passion, intellect, moral activity – these three have never been satisfied in woman. In this cold and oppressive conventional atmosphere, they cannot be satisfied. To say more on this subject would be to enter into the whole history of society, of the present state of civilization. (Nightingale, 1979, pp. 25-29)

Estas palavras denunciam, de forma surpreendentemente directa e mesmo incisiva, a falta de reconhecimento e o subaproveitamento vitorianos das capacidades das mulheres, nos quais assenta e dos quais emana a reivindicação de oportunidades de educação<sup>(8)</sup>, formação e emprego, também mencionada por Stuart Mill:

The claim of women to be educated as solidly, and in the same branches of knowledge as men, is urged with growing intensity, and with a great prospect of success, while the demand for their admission into professions and occupations hitherto closed against them, becomes every year more urgent. (Mill, 2019, p. 13)

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7 Cf., por exemplo, Altick, 1973, pp. 50-59, Houghton, 1985, cap. 13, pp. 341-393, e Anderson & Zinsser, 1990, pp. 129-196.

8 “[...] in 1880 women were for the first time **allowed** to take degrees at the University of London. Women’s colleges were established at Cambridge and Oxford in 1869 and 1879 respectively, but women could not take degrees at either university until 1920-21” (Altick, 1973, p. 55; negrito nosso).

Paralelamente, e antecipando ideias e posições avançadas por Virginia Woolf (1888-1941) em *A Room of One's Own* (1929), Nightingale aponta, com igual veemência, a desvalorização, mais do que 'mera' subvalorização, social do tempo feminino:

Women are never supposed to have any occupation of sufficient importance not to be interrupted, [...] 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... (Nightingale, 1979, p. 32)

E ainda

Women never have half an hour in all their lives [...] that they can call their own, without fear of offending or of hurting some one. [...] they have 'no time in the day to themselves.' [...] Yet time is the most valuable of all things. [...] But it is laid down, that our time is of no value. [...] women have no right, because it is 'only their time.' (Nightingale, 1979, pp. 34-35)

A denúncia da ociosidade forçada das mulheres<sup>(9)</sup>, limitada a ocupações relacionadas com tarefas e papéis familiares e domésticos, de benevolência<sup>(10)</sup> e/ou cortesias e etiquetas sociais, leva-as, como possíveis vias

9 Na capa da edição utilizada, pode ler-se: "Angry outcry against the forced idleness of Victorian women". Esta edição surge enriquecida pela inclusão, como epílogo, de um poema de Cynthia Macdonald, "Florence Nightingale's Parts" (citado em Nightingale, 1979, pp. 56-58), que integra os seguintes versos: "I am spared for my work./ For richer, for poorer;/ For better, for worse;/ Till death do us part" (Macdonald, as cited in Nightingale, 1979, p. 58).

10 "By adhering in the main to traditional values, increasing numbers of privileged women were able to venture into areas untraditional for women of their class: the prisons, the schools, the hospitals, the homes of the poor, the streets of the new cities. To women expected to confine their activities to domesticity, the easiest way to a life outside of the parlor lay not in overt rebellion, but in the virtuous path of charity work" (Anderson & Zinsser, 1990, p. 177).

de escape, a estados de devaneio<sup>(11)</sup>, alheamento/alienação<sup>(12)</sup>, frustração e mesmo à loucura<sup>(13)</sup>, sobre a qual permanecem referenciais, ainda que privilegiando (con)textos literários, os estudos de Sandra M. Gilbert e Susan Kamholtz Gubar (1979) e Elaine Showalter (1987). Transcrevemos aqui, por particularmente pungentes, as palavras de Nightingale sobre os sonhos, situados algures entre a evasão e o desejo:

Women dream till they have no longer the strength to dream; those dreams against which they so struggle, so honestly, vigorously, and conscientiously, and so in vain, yet which are their life, without which they could not have lived; those dreams go at last. All their plans and visions seem vanished, and they know not where; gone and they cannot recall them. They do not even remember them. And they are left without the food either of reality or of hope. (Nightingale, 1979, p. 49)

Para esta metafórica ‘morte dos sonhos’, ela própria parte da ‘morte em vida’ simbolicamente aludida na transcrição inaugural, muito contribui a subordinação a normas, princípios, códigos, convenções e expectativas de conduta por parte da família<sup>(14)</sup> e de toda uma sociedade hegemónica e estruturalmente patriarcal<sup>(15)</sup>:

Women have no means [...] whereby they can resist the ‘claims of social life.’ They are taught from their infancy onwards that it is wrong, ill-tempered, and a misunderstanding of ‘a woman’s mission’ (with a great M.) if they do not allow themselves willingly to be interrupted at all hours. (Nightingale, 1979, p. 35)

11 “Dreaming always – never accomplishing; thus Women live – too much ashamed of their dreams, which they think ‘romantic’” (Nightingale, 1979, p. 39).

12 “Mothers, who cradle yourselves in visions about the domestic hearth, how many of your sons and daughters are *there* [...], while sitting round under your complacent maternal eye? Were you there yourself during your own (now forgotten) girlhood?” (Nightingale, 1979, p. 27).

13 “The accumulation of nervous energy, which has had nothing to do during the day, makes them feel every night, when they go to bed, as if they were going mad” (Nightingale, 1979, p. 43).

14 Recorremos de novo, como termo de comparação, a Stuart Mill: “The family, justly constituted, would be the real school of the virtues of freedom. [...] What is needed is, that it should be a school of sympathy in equality, of living together in love, without power on one side or obedience on the other” (Mill, 2019, p. 44).

15 Nas palavras de Altick, “*Pater familias*, when he came back from the office after a hard day competing in the business jungle, reigned as lord and master at table and fireside” (Altick, 1973, pp. 52-53).



Uma outra passagem deixa clara a menorização, senão mesmo a negação efectiva, da actividade intelectual da mulher face aos horizontes de expectativa familiares e sociais a que acabámos de aludir:

[...] a woman cannot live in the light of intellect. Society forbids it. Those conventional frivolities, which are called her 'duties', forbid it. Her 'domestic duties', high-sounding words, which, for the most part, are but bad habits (which she has not the courage to enfranchise herself from, the strength to break through) 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. And all these things are exacted from her by her family [...]. (Nightingale, 1979, p. 37)

Algumas páginas após afirmar “Marriage is the only chance (and it is but a chance) offered to women for escape from this death; and how eagerly and how ignorantly it is embraced!” (Nightingale, 1979, p. 38), a autora desconstrói e questiona as motivações, os valores, os códigos, os rituais e as práticas subjacentes ao namoro e ao casamento (Nightingale, 1979, pp. 44-49), social, legislativa e patrimonialmente protegidos pelo patriarcalismo dominante. A própria sacralidade(zação) da lareira (*hearth*), sinodoquicamente representativa do “ninho doméstico”, do “lar, doce lar”<sup>(16)</sup>, do qual a mulher idealizada seria a “fada”, ou da casa, da qual seria a (subalternizada...) “dona”<sup>(17)</sup> – ideias e estereótipos correntes até sensivelmente à década de 1960 –, é desmontada e desmi(s)tificada com uma ironia repassada de amargura:

Sacred it is indeed. Sacred from the touch of their sons almost as soon as they are out of childhood – from its dullness and its tyrannous trifling these recoil. Sacred from the grasp of their daughters' affections, upon which it has so light a hold that they seize the first opportunity of marriage, their only chance of

16 Houghton aponta “the conception of the home as a source of virtues and emotions which were nowhere else to be found, least of all in business and society” (Houghton, 1985, p. 343), acrescentando: “whether a sacred [...] or a secular temple, the home as a storehouse of moral and spiritual values was as much an answer to increasing commercialism as to declining religion” (Houghton, 1985, p. 348).

17 Stuart Mill di-lo-á de forma contundente: “Marriage is the only actual bondage known to our law. There remain no legal slaves, except the mistress of every house” (Mill, 2019, p. 79).

emancipation. The ‘sacred hearth’; sacred to their husband’s sleep, their sons’ absence in the body and their daughters’ in mind.

Oh! mothers, who talk about this hearth, how much do you know of your sons’ real life, how much of your daughters’ imaginary one? Awake, ye women, all ye that sleep, awake! If this domestic life were so very good, would your young men wander away from it, your maidens think of something else?

The time is come when women must do something more than the ‘domestic hearth,’ which means nursing the infants, keeping a pretty house, having a good dinner and an entertaining party. (Nightingale, 1979, p. 52)

Segundo Iolanda Freitas Ramos, “ao passo que nos anos 60 e 70 [do século XX] se procurava denunciar a submissão feminina a pressões patriarcais [...], as décadas de 80 e 90 assistiram ao desenvolvimento de estudos sobre construções sociais e culturais de autonomia das mulheres face ao domínio masculino” (Ramos, 2014, p. 277) Ao falecer em 1910, Florence Nightingale não pôde já testemunhar o envolvimento maciço das mulheres britânicas no mercado de trabalho ditado por uma volátil economia de guerra, incluindo o da produção fabril de munições e explosivos, nem muito menos a conquista feminina (que não concessão masculina!) do direito de voto, viabilizada a dois tempos pelos diplomas cívico-eleitorais (*Representation of the People Act*) de 1918<sup>(18)</sup> e 1928. Contudo, independentemente de latitudes e longitudes – não apenas geográfico-espaciais, mas também culturais e mentais –, a consagração e a implementação, à escala global, de uma efectiva equidade de género(s) e igualdade de condição(ões), oportunidades, direitos e deveres continuam, cem anos volvidos, a ser sonhos, utopias ou profecias cassândricas por cumprir. Do mesmo modo, a constatação de que “the generality of the male sex cannot yet tolerate the idea of living with an equal” (Mill, 2019, p. 49) permanece actual, mais de século e meio sobre o seu registo.

Um estudo aprofundado da(s) representação(ões) e sublimação(ões) artística(s) dos ‘confinamentos’ e das solidões e clausuras das mulheres durante a longa era vitoriano-eduardina (que corresponde, afinal e na prática, ao período de vida adulta de Florence Nightingale) implicaria uma atenção particular à pintura (nomeadamente a produzida pelo movimento

18 “Only in 1918, after many years of militancy [...], did women win participation in national elections, as a reward for their contribution to the war effort; even then, the franchise was limited to those over thirty” (Altick, 1973, pp. 57-58).

pré-rafaelita, emergente em 1848) e, dentro desta, a espaços e objectos, físicos e simbólicos, como quartos, janelas, espelhos, gaiolas, cordas, correntes ou amarras e às próprias posturas corporais e gestuais das figurações femininas. Numa variação deste quadro, Richard Altick faz notar: “The woman of the well-off middle class lived, in effect, under one of those spacious glass domes which protected parlor bric-a-brac – stuffed birds, ornate shell, papier-mâché constructions, wax fruit and flowers – from dust” (Altick, 1973, p. 53) Tal investigação, pela sua riqueza e complexidade pluridisciplinares, não se compadece, porém, com os propósitos e limites deste ensaio, razão pela qual concluiremos simplesmente com uma reflexão de Geoffrey Chaucer (c. 1342-1400), em “The Manciple’s Tale”, que ainda hoje dará que pensar:

Take any bird and put it in a cage  
And let your heart’s intention then engage  
To foster it tenderly with food and drink,  
With every dainty mess that thought can think,  
And keep it clean as nearly as you may,  
Caged in a cage of gold however gay,  
That bird would rather twenty thousand fold  
Be in a forest which is rough and cold,  
Feeding on worms and other wretched trash.  
It’s on the watch, and ready in a flash  
To escape out of the cage and to be gone.  
Freedom is what it sets its heart upon. (Chaucer, 1982, p. 497)

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