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Narratives of the "not-so-good nurse":

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Rewriting nursing's virtue script

Hecate

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Abstract: The prolonged commemoration of the ANZAC centenary has flooded popular culture with images of the self-sacrificing, ever-reliable, ably competent and often feisty, forthright, female nurse. This notion of 'the good nurse' is prevalent and promulgates what Nelson and Gordon (in *The Complexities of Care: Nursing*

Reconsidered, New York, 2006) term a "virtue script" for, and about, nurses. Following this scripting, nurses portray themselves, and are portrayed, as angelic, sweet, kind carers. This positive feedback loop, ironically, traps nursing and nurses (who are still predominantly women) into a continual one-dimensional, unrealistic and de-humanised portrayal. Nurses are undermined and silenced when only one aspect of their identity is understood. There are, however, other representations of nursing, which offer important counter-points to the "good nurse" which, when examined closely, can yield a more nuanced, albeit sometimes shockingly gritty, realistic reading. Re/reading recent auto/biographies of nurses to move beyond the virtue script reveals how a more nuanced, cosmopolitan reading of these nurses and their profession can promote a clearer understanding of how contemporary nursing identity can be understood, characterised and developed.



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