

PART V OF  
“EVIL WOMEN”:

# **NURSE RATCHED & THE CUCKOO’S NEST**

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Lovers and madmen have such seething brains,

Such shaping fantasies, that apprehend

More than cool reason ever comprehends.

The lunatic, the lover, and the poet

Are of imagination all compact:

One sees more devils than vast hell can hold;

That is the madman....

Theseus in Shakespeare's A Midsummer Night's Dream



Nurse Ratched



Abstract Evil

Diabolical Machine

Devouring Mother/Nurse

Amoral Agent

(in wider landscape of societal malevolence)

“An abstraction of evil, without any of the human eccentricities that a truly dangerous tyrant has”

Stephen Farber in “Americana, Sweet and Sour” (1976)



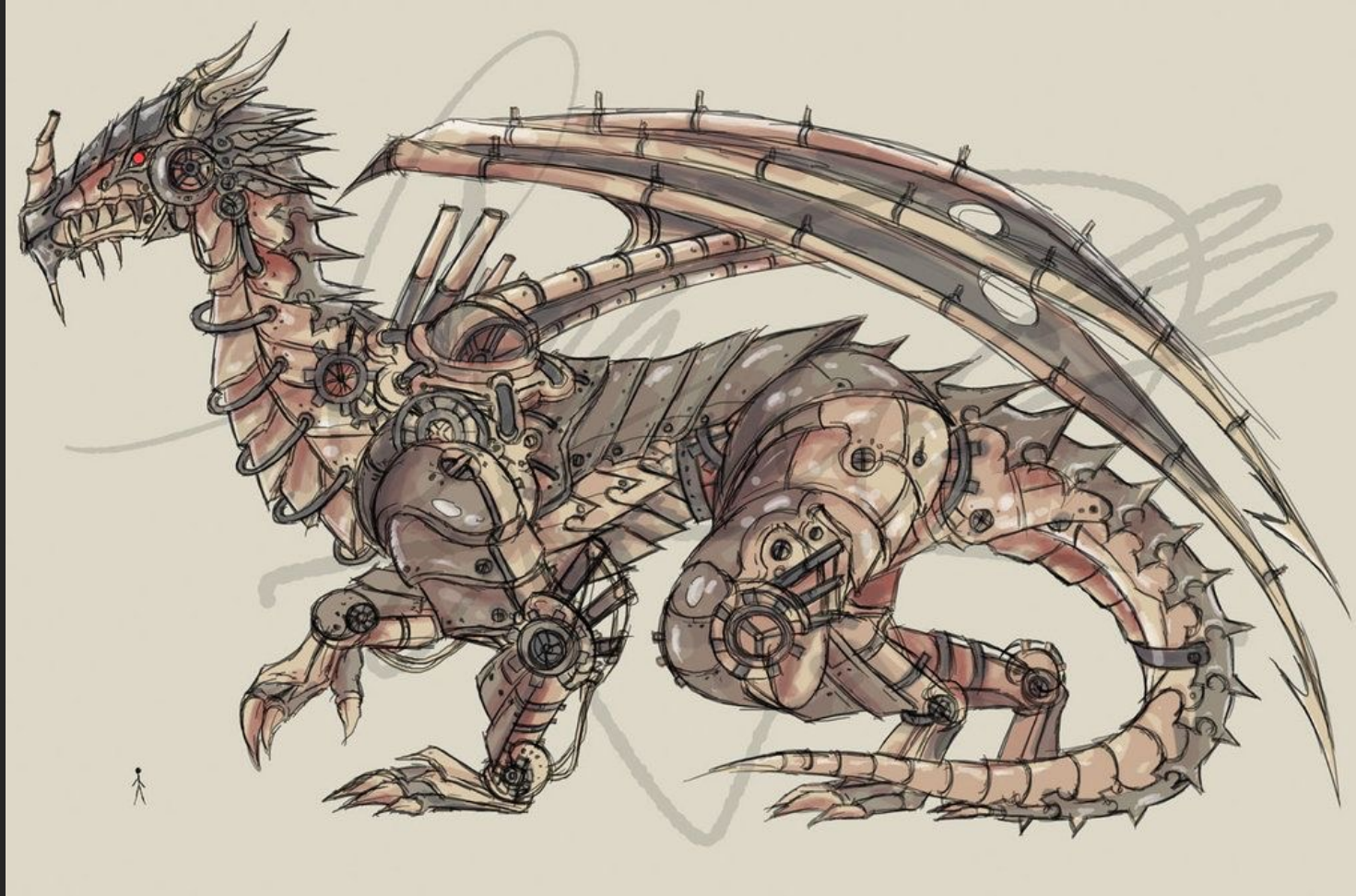


Evil Woman as  
“Diabolical Machine”



Nurse Ratched = Ratchet





She is a Mechanical Dragon of the Apocalypse





Evil Nurse/Mother





Chief observes that she chose “to ignore the way nature had tagged her with those outsized badges of femininity, just like she was above him, and sex and everything else that’s weak and of the flesh”.



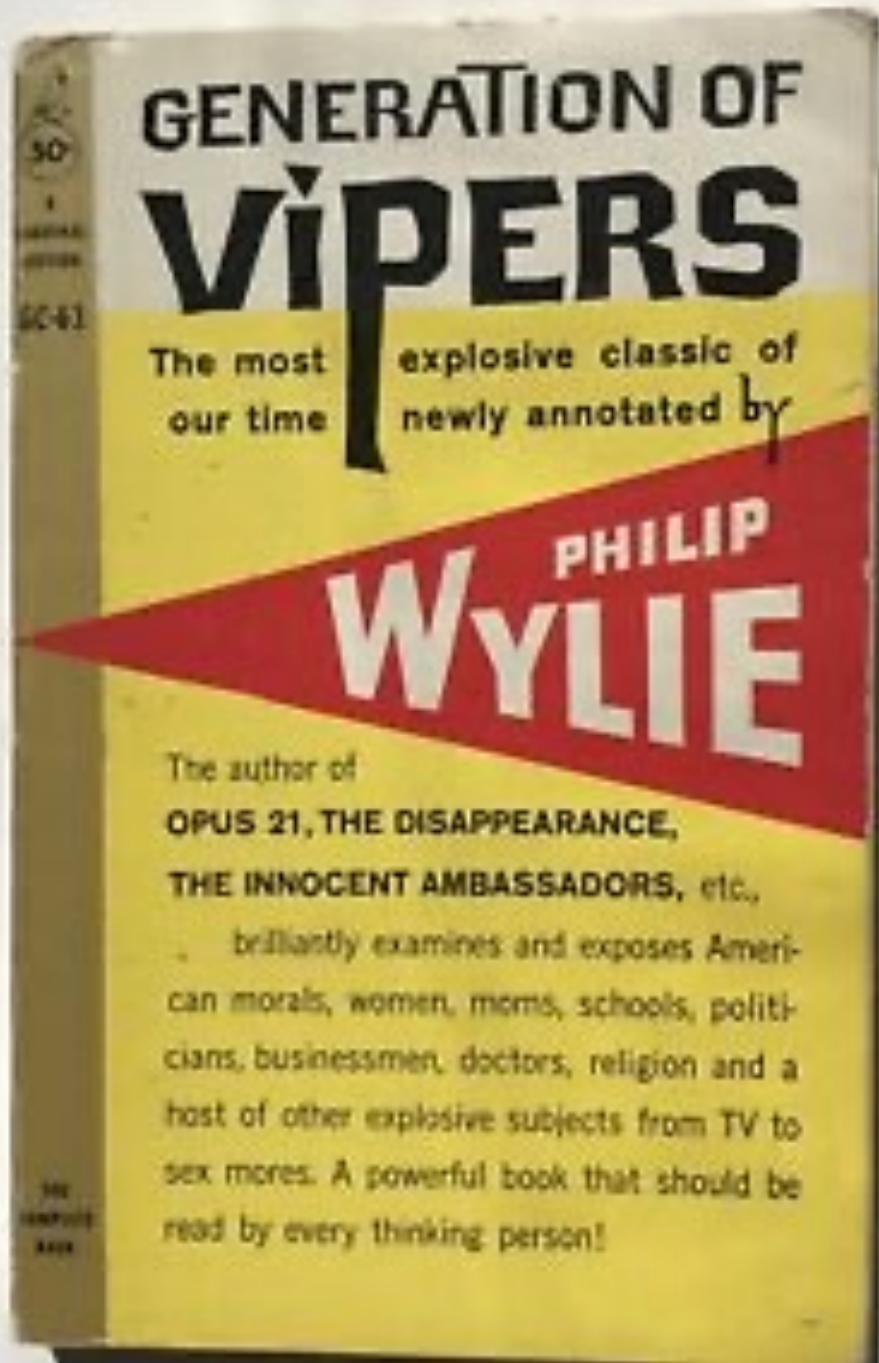
Billy Bibbet; Ruckley;  
Dale Harding: “We are all victims of a Matriarchy here”



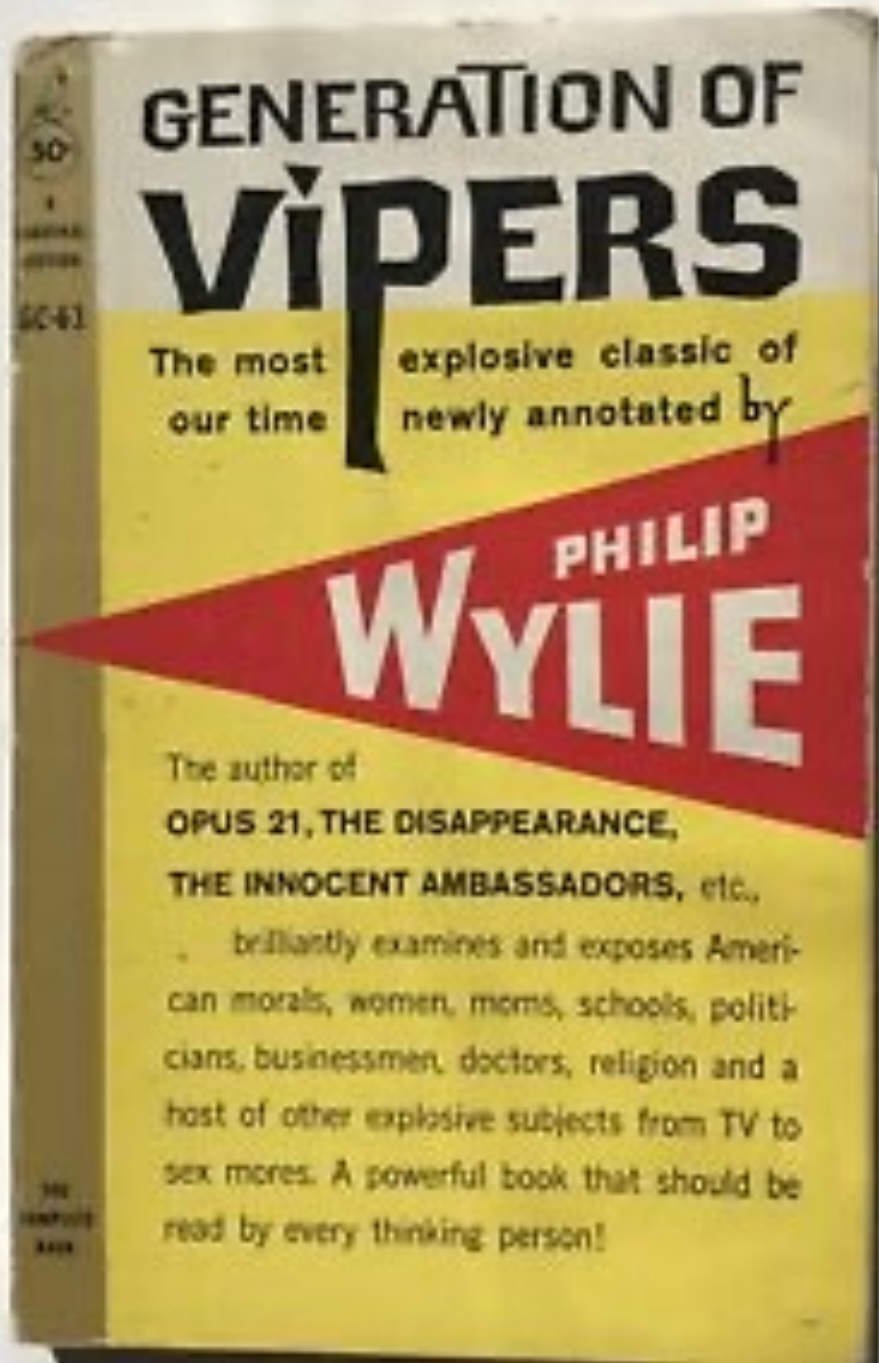


Patients need “a good strong wolf like the nurse  
to teach us our place”





“Momism:  
Philip Wylie,  
Generation of Vipers (1974)



The “mealy look of men today is the result of momism and so is the pinched and baffled fury in the eyes of womankind”.

Cold War:

women were

“overprotective” but also “maternally cold”;

promiscuous, yet frigid.

# THEIR MOTHERS' SONS

*Edward A. Strecker, M.D.*

This book by one of America's most eminent psychiatrists is a sterling exposé of the great American "Mom" and of the trouble she is making of her children's lives. No parent who wants happy, well-adjusted and emotionally mature children can afford to ignore the vital warning and advice given here by Dr. Strecker.

Edward Strecker

(President of the American Psychiatric Association):

“Momarchies”



How to deal with “Momarchies”:  
Rape



Evil is individualized and feminized.  
The Big Nurse is Evil,  
while the “Combine” is simply all-powerful.



How to deal with “Momarchies”:  
Sacrifice

Reviewers echo rather than critique.



“Good Women”

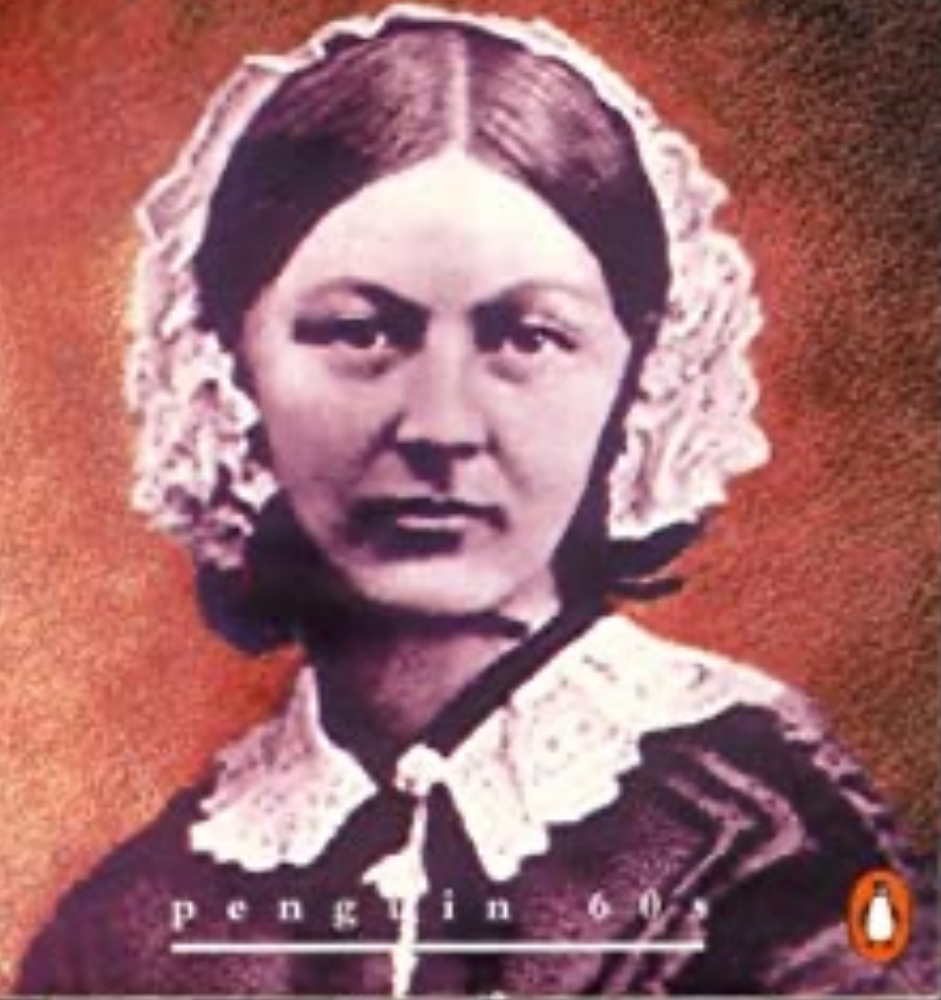


“Good Nurse”



# LYTTON STRACHEY

FLORENCE NIGHTINGALE



penguin 60s



Lytton Strachey's 1918 portrayal  
of Florence Nightingale



Race



# Evil Woman and Totalising Institutions





Chief:

“It’s not just the Big Nurse herself, but it’s the whole Combine, the nation-wide Combine that’s the really big force, and the nurse is just a high-ranking official for them”.

1975 critic:

The “humanistic values of McMurphy  
are pitted against the neo-fascist vices of Big Nurse”





# ASYLUMS

ESSAYS ON THE  
SOCIAL SITUATION OF  
MENTAL PATIENTS  
AND OTHER INMATES



ERVING GOFFMAN



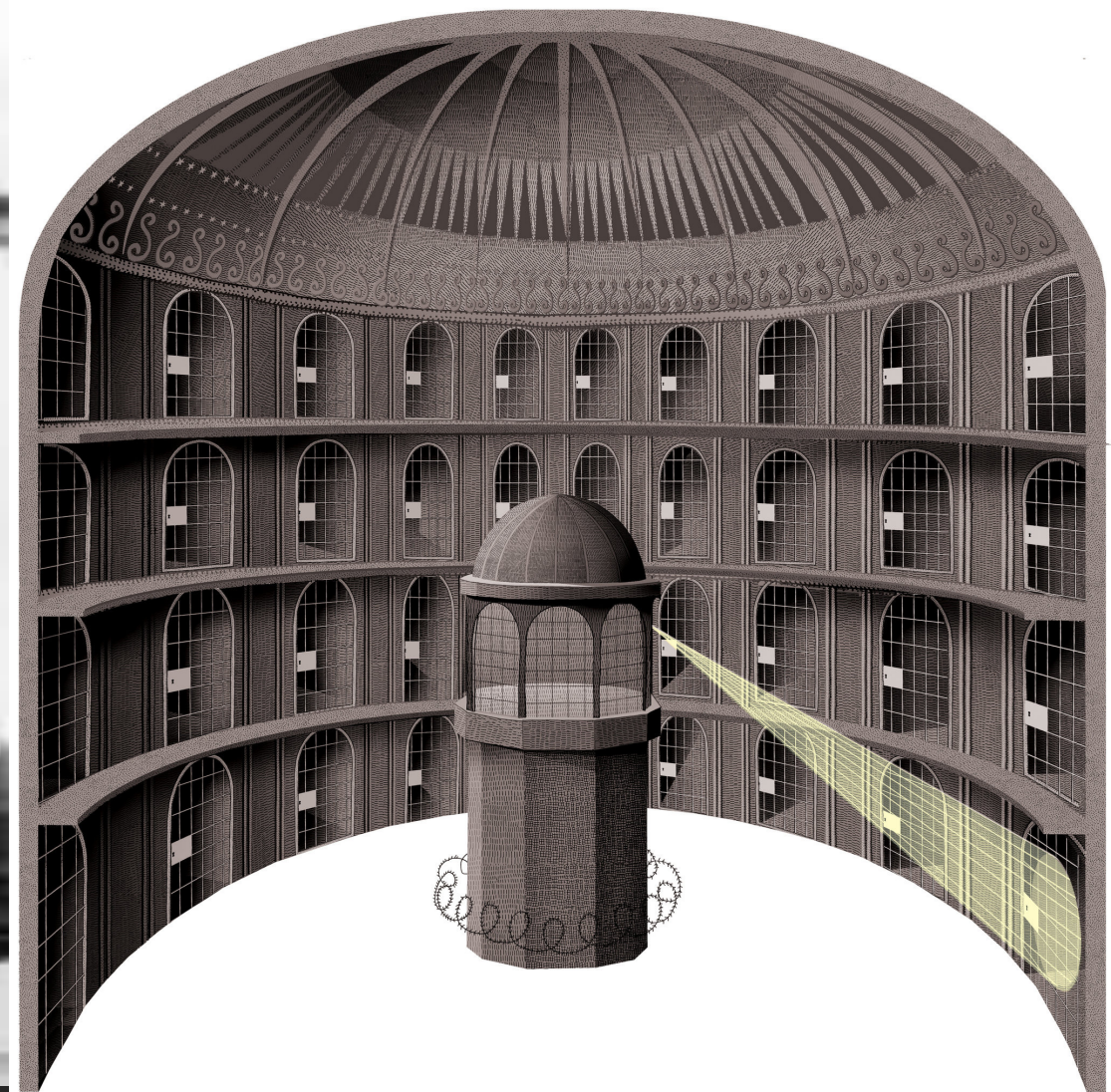
Erving Goffman's Asylums (1961)





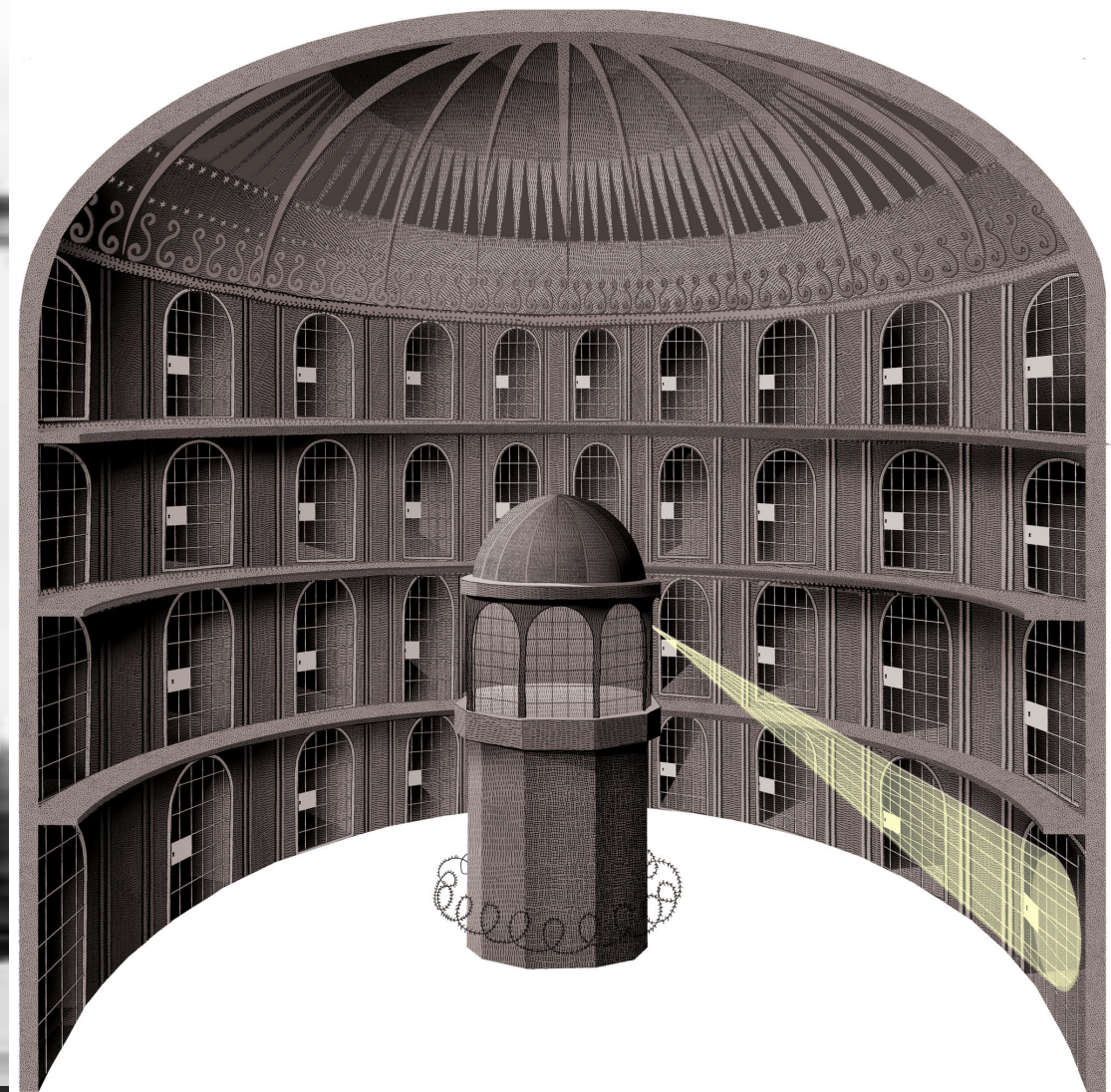
Nurse Ratched:

“A good many of you are in here because you could not adjust to the rules of society in the Outside world”.



Jeremy Bentham's Panopticon





## Michel Foucault's Discipline and Punish





Lobotomy or what McMurphy calls  
“frontal lobe castration”

# The Photoplay

HUGO MUNSTERBERG



A PSYCHOLOGICAL  
STUDY



Changes in perceptions of Nurse Ratched



Changes in perceptions of Nurse Ratched





Deteriorating standing of the anti-hero McMurphy



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For the first 4 lectures in this series:

<https://www.gresham.ac.uk/series/evil-women/>

**NEXT TALK: Myra Hindley – Thursday 13<sup>th</sup> May at 6pm GMT**