

Thalia Field

Anna Kingsford, Clothed in Clouds
(1846-1888)



Anna Kingsford you were not quite made of skin. You told your story through a man's mouth. Or did you? It wasn't your husband, or lover, it was the divine touchless Adonai.

Anna Kingsford, clairvoyant, what could you see? Unconscious cerebrations, clothes in clouds, garments of intertwining threads.

How did you do that doctor's degree, with private tutors, and without going to the operating theater?

Anna Kingsford, you couldn't breathe, or could you?

Pain is pain, no matter the subject. Injustice, injustice, no matter the victim. Anna Kingsford, you knew the experience of the hunt on the fox. In Stratford in Essex, you were a fox named Annie Bonus, collapsing from exhaustion.

Anna Kingsford, a woman with horns, the beauty of an animal, the weakness of an animal. She had the strengths of an animal strapped to a table.

Anna Kingsford, a moon wandering to hell. You wrote a book at age seventeen, of a saint Beatrice "left almost alone, an orphan and a Christian, in the midst of a pagan people."

Annie Bonus, young Anna, with a habit of freezing the narrative to study Beatrice in a striking pose: the 'motionless figure' tinted by moonlight "with a hue that made it appear rather like a piece of exquisite statuary than a living form."

Anna Kingsford, chasing oracles in dreams. "The night time of the body is the day time of the soul." Testing the influence of fasting on lucid dreams, which come in the waking hours of dawn, in the second sleep.

Dr. Anna Kingsford received her real teachings in these illuminations, in Paris during the years of her medical study, 1870's.

O the gadfly stings me again! I must move on, mad in the study of pain.

"If torture were indeed the true method of science, then would the vaunted tree of knowledge be no other than the upas tree of oriental legend, beneath whose fatal shadow lie hecatombs of miserable victims slain by its poisonous exhalations, the odor of which is fraught with agony and death!"

Anna Kingsford, you made appeal to the people of Paris.

Anna Kingsford, wife with a wife, child with a child, carrying your guinea pig, Rufus. This is not medicine as anyone would know it. You people the animals in their transcendent refusal. Animals are knowledge, and people should know how to rescue knowledge from the wrong questions.

Anna K, white cow crossing the night sea. Bosphorus.

AK, famished and fainting. Where does the frenzied road take you?

Doctor Bernard you are no doctor, no teacher of doctors, you are the gadfly which drives her mad, and madly she wanders the country to speak against your methods. Doctor or no doctor, she talks of white magians, the knowledge of a pure soul, which cures the body's ills.

"An abominable crime is every day committed in your midst. Your magnificent city, which should be the support of civilization, is today the centre of the most barbarous practices. Under the pretext of studying physiology, men devote themselves to the most cruel torture of inoffensive creatures who work for you and who love you; they inflict upon them the endurance of slow and painful agony in order to obtain, as they say, knowledge useful to humanity."

AK, you wrote your dreams and had stories.

Doctors, you are provoking a sick soul to madness with your tormenting. You are pursuing a wretched girl with your inflictions of suffering.

How can I help the animal escape this experiment? How can I not be such an animal cleaved with pain? Mask of a dog, tongue all the way out.

Anna Kingsford you thought you were Io, bigger than life, without the chance to breathe easily, an asthma forever pressing you to the ground. Move to higher ground, dryer ground. Rufus on your lap.

Anna Kingsford, accompanied. A husband for letting go. A man beside you, another older widowed man, to write your bio, to tell stories of Io.

Anna Kingsford, London can't train you as a doctor. Paris boasted. Anna, your daughter Aedith seems incompatible. What is it about her that you find so irritating? Rufus will go with you. A motherless creature and a mother without a child.

Io, lithe and beautiful. She made love with clouds. She was too much a man, she was hidden in a cow. She was never enough mother, she crossed the rivers. A horned virgin, mad-moon in a clearing sky. But other women felt jealous, she

was a beautiful cow. A cow in heat. Lecturing on ugly things.

Anna Kingsford, does anyone love your fainting face? Does anyone love your angry face? You would kill some men but you will not cut into flesh.

The doctors assail her with animal screams, goading her forward.

Dr. Anna, or your mouth-man Edward Maitland, writing your diary with two right hands: "what of life remains to me I will live in doing my utmost against every form of cruelty; but it would be cruelty in me to condemn another like myself to the fruitless strife. So at least it seems to me. More and more every day it appears to my mind that I am not of this world. Visions float about me in the night that seem to warn me of some unknown change perhaps awaiting me. I do not know; but my state of mind of late has been singularly clear and expectant. I fancy that there is a Future, and that I am meant to have some special work beyond this plane of existence, something for which I have been put to school here."

Anna Kingsford, what is your rule of life?

"It seemed as though suddenly all the laboratories of torture throughout Christendom stood open before me, with their manifold unutterable agonies exposed, and the awful future an atheistic science was everywhere making for the world rose up and stared me in the face."

To win against the "modern inquisition," Anna Kingsford you had tongue and pen out – you longed for the words, "Mort de..." Richet. Bert. Bernard. Pasteur.

"A method which is morally wrong cannot be scientifically right. The test of conscience is the test of soundness."

Anna Kingsford. Seizure. rue Jacob. Your first. Living as the niece of an unrelated man.

"My malady has resolved itself into three symptoms – bleeding from the lungs, sickness and weakness."

Anna Kingsford, you know there's no cure in curare. "Not that, but for administering to horses and dogs hyperaesthetics, and for inflicting on them, when in this state of exalted sensitiveness, what is described by one of themselves, Claude Bernard, as the 'most atrocious suffering the mind of man can conceive'" –

Anna Kingsford, losing all consciousness in the fall to the floor. Lips ash-

white. Heart stilled. What can you see from the floor as your body is rubbed back to life?

When you hear of Claude Bernard's death, murderous vindication, you might think the affliction has ended, the gadfly is dead.

Prometheus: "It is worth it to indulge in weeping over evil doings if one is likely to win the tribute of a tear from the listener."

Anna Kingsford, when you hear of Claude Bernard's death, you think you had much to do with it, your powerful will, and white magic.

Io: Zeus inflamed by passion's dart has called upon me to unite in divine union. Hiding in the pastures, I became animal, and spurred by the gadfly now toil with revealing this body of truths.

When she spoke, she heard herself moo. When she looked, she saw a cow and tried not to choke at this fat ugly version. Anna, did you like your jewels?

Chorus: What a tale to strike our ears with sufferings so hard to look upon or hear about; grievous to endure. We shudder to behold the plight of an animal.

Does it not seem that Gods are violent in their desire for union with the mortal maid – and in making her sick and vexed and galloping?

Anna Kingsford, called monstrous. Not-woman, not-man – they said – she couldn't pass the exams the first time. Wild grief lowings. Oestrus, the lunacy she mastered, in the mastery of esoteric interpretation.

Io: "Oh! Oh! Alas! Once again convulsive pain and frenzy, striking my brain, inflame me. Harrassing me. I am stung by the gadfly's barb, unforged by fire. My heart knocks at my ribs in terror; my eyeballs roll wildly round and round. I am carried out of my course by a fierce blast of madness; I've lost all mastery over my tongue, and a stream of turbid words beats recklessly against the billows of dark destruction.

[She departs from the company of Prometheus.]

Half-woman, half-animal, Anna seizes in terror. Maddened by Claude Bernard's knives and straps, scalpels and muzzles, ovens and poisons.

Io: "Stung, sting, stung, torment of animals, to push her onward."

To amble, gad about, knock around, straggle, traipse, trek, tramp, roam,

amble, bat around, meander, range, saunter. To live the apocalypse? To know a new age?

Anna K, you won't touch flesh. To cut or eat. There is a problem in the epistemology of the science: a girl unveiling – naked white stone for the eyes – a statue at the foot of the stairs – training in the medical school.

Dr. Anna Kingsford, you passed your test. "You may inform your opponents that, so far from your informant having failed to pass his examination – he – meaning she – has passed with the highest note, save one, attainable."

AK, your body barely moves as you seize.

Anna Kingsford, did you really have those dreams?

"This question of vivisection, which should be a burden upon the public conscience of nations, cannot be left to the caprice of men of science, and above all to a class of specialists who, professing materialism, boast of suppressing conscience, and of being independent of that which human morality may be able to sanction."

"Perhaps it will be said to you: 'This is a question of which science alone can judge, she only can decide its importance; public conscience has not part in this scheme of investigation.'"

"We maintain that the truth is contrary to such a proposition and that when science forgets what she owes to civilization, the public conscience must intervene to remind her of it."

"It is not a question of the public having not acquired the scientific spirit; it is, on the contrary, the case that scientists have lost the spirit of morality."

"We feel assured that you will join with us in bringing to an end a state of things which sullies and infringes public morality, and which will be the shame of our century."

Anna Kingsford you caught a cold, or some Karma, or you caught pneumonia visiting the labs of the devil Pasteur, rue d'Ulm, in the pouring rain. This malady lasted a good year, while your writing and lectures took you away.

Anna Kingsford, aka Rosamunda the Princess, aka the Virgin, aka the Martyr, aka the Hermetic Mystic, aka Killer of killers, aka Joan of Arc, aka Faustine, aka.

Anna Kingsford, your last days all bedsores and morphine and sleeplessness. "One of her last utterances was that she could carry on the work better from the other side, where she would be free of her physical limitations..."

The work of an animal is done to be just. Anna, you chose a cow. Did you

like the paradox, being cursed by a god and chased by a question, a genius, an aeon?

AK, finally, you wrote with the power to persuade. Even a cow was someone's child, once someone's mother, the mother of all animals, she saw the problem clearly:

"It is precisely the subtle but enormous differences existing between the manifestations and characters of the nervous system as we see them in man and as we see them in other animals, which distinguishes the former from the latter, and which endows vivisection with the legal right they now possess to inflict on anthropoid apes injuries and mutilations which, if they inflicted the same on men, would be held to render the perpetrators guilty of crime. When, therefore, it is understood that this occult nervous differentiation is capable of constituting a distinction so vast, how is it possible to suppose that the study of biological function in the beast is capable of explaining satisfactorily the mysteries of human life?"*

*Anna Kingsford, "Unscientific Science: The Moral Aspects of Vivisection".