

Natasha Reby Coulthard, *Becoming What You Eat: Anna Kingsford's Vegetarian Posthuman, Victorian Literature and Culture*, 50:2 (2022): 325-353.

As Natasha Reby Coulthard observes, scholars of Anna Kingsford (1846-1888) encounter challenges in achieving a 'holistic view' of the English writer, Theosophist, feminist, and social reformer's ideas (346). The burning of Kingsford's unpublished materials by her close collaborator, Edward Maitland, after her death allowed his 1896 biography, *Anna Kingsford*, to strongly influence the existing narrative of her life. Maitland's colourful stories of Kingsford's time as a medical student and passionate antivivisectionist in Paris are ubiquitous within expositions of her work, including her notorious reported campaign of psychic revenge against vivisectors such as Claude Bernard. For Christine Ferguson, critical focus on these events has obscured Kingsford's historical significance as a literary figure and an early qualified female doctor within British medicine. This marginalisation also reflects Kingsford's position as 'a woman who, if scientifically trained and credentialled, was never herself of science', insistently and subversively combining her scientific research with occultism, spiritualism, and animal advocacy (Ferguson, "Intuitive Science of Occultism", 117). Coulthard's article, "Becoming What You Eat: Anna Kingsford's Vegetarian Posthuman", contributes to scholarship renewing critical attention towards Kingsford's heterogeneous literary-scientific project. Complementing recent scholarship on Kingsford's antivivisectionism, Coulthard turns toward her writings on an equally significant topic within nineteenth-century animal advocacy, vegetarianism.

Among other works, Coulthard explores Kingsford's pro-vegetarian doctoral thesis, *The Perfect Way in Diet* (1881) – an influential text among late Victorian British vegetarians – as exemplifying Kingsford's "hybrid discourse of Theosophy, chemistry, and dietetics" (326). Coulthard rigorously situates this compound methodology within the similarly diverse constellation of concerns animating broader Victorian debates on food, particularly focusing on the Victorian interest in dietetics, a Foucauldian technology of the self used to shape and constitute character and identity through controlled consumption. She reads dietetics as co-emergent with insights from Darwinian evolutionary science and organic chemistry, which introduced indeterminacy into the primacy and exceptionality of humanity by emphasising the shared material composition and evolutionary origins of humans and nonhuman animals. Dietetic discourse adopted a similar "scientific, evolutionary emphasis"; its broad assertion that 'you are what you eat' offered a means to negotiate, constitute, or unsettle these embattled boundaries of human selfhood, including within vegetarian and anti-vegetarian discourse (328). Coulthard highlights that Kingsford used physiology, chemistry, and evolutionary science to assert the human's frugivorous origins, opposing dietetic discourses that viewed animal consumption as a reification of "naturally omnivorous" 'Man's' evolutionary primacy over nature. Kingsford countered that "fruit-eating—not meat-eating—made man *Man*"; the vegetarian's reclamation of their frugivorous nature and exercise of their unique capacity for compassionate morality would ensure their evolutionary perfectibility, eating their way to precedence over a harmonious natural world (332).

Coulthard argues for Kingsford's vegetarianism as a "gastro-ethical becoming-with", wherein vegetarian dietetics enable an ethically reconstituted human being to emerge within an equally transformed multispecies environment (340). 'Becoming-with', a term from Donna Haraway figuring change as necessarily ecological and relational, distills the article's discourse between Kingsford's reconceptualization of the human and a comprehensive array of contemporary theoretical projects with resemblant aims, including posthumanism, continental philosophy, and animal studies. Coulthard convincingly identifies Kingsford's feminist, disruptive multispecies ethic as precursive of numerous concerns central to these fields, including her emphasis on vital embodiment in opposition to Cartesian dualism, her account of the human's embeddedness and entanglement within more-than-human environments, and her utopian call for the radical reconceptualization of interspecies relations. Equally laudable is Coulthard's ability, in Haraway's terms, to 'stay with the trouble' posed by placing Kingsford's humanist investment in the human's perfectibility and moral superiority in dialogue with these anti-anthropocentric theories. While Kingsford's vegetarianism affirms the human's capacity to transcend their 'dirty' imbrication in animal flesh, Coulthard highlights that this dietetic conception of self as evolved from within a network of matter itself resonates with posthumanism's porous conception of embodied selfhood (332). Her insight that Kingsford thus unsettles humanism "from within, using humanist logic to promote non-anthropocentric responsibility" has broader resonance in the interpretation of late-nineteenth-century animal advocacy, which frequently weds humanist accounts of humans' exceptionalism and mastery with declarations of their exceptional duties of stewardship towards nonhuman others (333).

This article thus offers nuanced reflections on underexplored figure within the study of Victorian science and literature. Coulthard offers an inclusive overview of what Kingsford herself described as "the scientific, the hygienic, the aesthetic, and the spiritual" valences of her vegetarianism, without ignoring their generative "tensions and contradictions" to achieve this holism (336, 342). This opens her pioneering work onto a contemporary critical field which similarly mobilises the literary-aesthetic, scientific and ethical in thinking towards just interspecies futures, providing broad theoretical contexts sure to inform more granular textual analyses within future Kingsford scholarship.

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