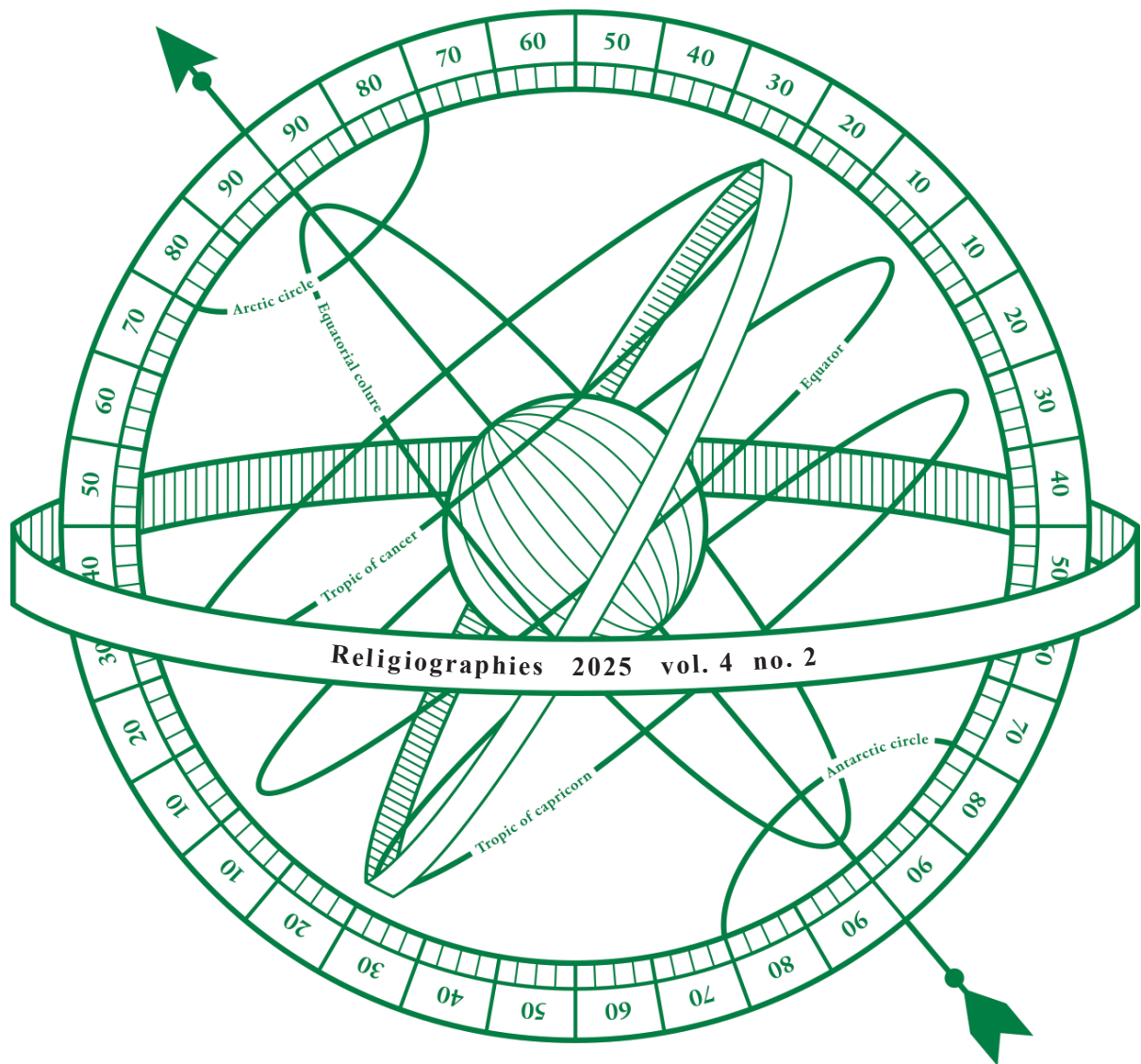


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North and South in Anna Kingsford's *The Painter of Venice* and Beyond

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Abstract

This article explores the fictional work of Anna B. Kingsford (1846–1888) and especially “The Painter of Venice,” a novella published in her collection *Rosamunda the Princess: An Historical Romance of the Sixth Century, and Other Tales* (1875), which has hardly received any scholarly attention. It shows how her early fiction perpetuated stereotypes about Northern and Southern Europe, reflecting an essentialization of the nationalism of her era, as well as her British background. These stereotypes became transfers of an imagined Southern temperament and served as a basis for what Kingsford felt was lacking in the English temperament. These stereotypes highlighted her positive fascination with Italy, which she depicted as a land of intuition, allegory, beauty, art, and secret knowledge. This portrayal starkly contrasted with her view of Britain, which she saw as lacking these more intuitive and aesthetic qualities. While such idealization was partly a product of the nationalism of her time, it was also a projection of her longing for a more spiritually and artistically fulfilling environment, which she associated with the South. Kingsford used these stereotypes and the setting of her novella as an early foundation for developing themes in her later occult works, which interconnected hermetic themes of allegory, intuition, nature, transformation, and beauty.



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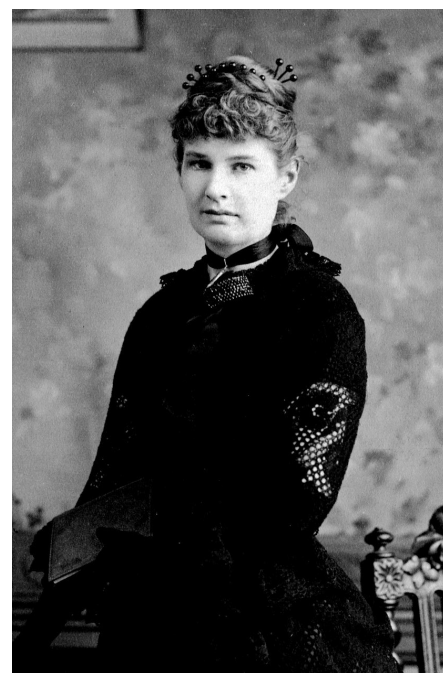
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Introduction

Anna B. Kingsford (1846–1888) lived a short, yet remarkable life during the second half of the nineteenth century. Although only limited research exists on her ideas, she is known in the study of esotericism for her contributions to the revival of occultism, hermeticism, and esoteric Christianity during the nineteenth century.¹ She was born in Essex, England, to John Bonus (1794–1865), a wealthy merchant, and his wife, Elizabeth Ann Schröder (1805–1888). According to the biographical sketches written by Edward Maitland (1824–1897), her companion in spiritual and other matters, she started to have illuminations, visions, as well as a strongly developed sense of intuition, which would play a major role during her life.² She also had lucid dreams, and from all of her impressions, she wrote poetry and fiction from an early age. Her work was published and received good reviews.³ Following her convictions, she became a strong anti-vivisectionist and a campaigner for vegetarianism and women’s rights. She was one of very few English women to obtain a degree in medicine, and, at the same time, she managed to graduate without having experimented on any animals. She also wrote on these topics, for example in *Addresses & Essays on Vegetarianism* (a collection of material published in 1913), *The Perfect Way in Diet* (1881), and *Health, Beauty and the Toilet* (1886). From the late 1860s to the early 1870s, prior to becoming a member of The Theosophical Society and meeting Maitland and other occultists, she was engaged in these subjects and, in 1872, she took over a women’s magazine, *The Lady’s Own Paper*, which promoted women’s rights.⁴

Kingsford also had an interest in Buddhism, Gnosticism, and Hermeticism, which led her to the Theosophical Society. From the very outset of her encounter with the Theosophical Society, she became a prominent member, and in 1883 she became the leader of The London Lodge, founded on June 27, 1878, by Charles Carleton Massey (1838–1905) under the name The British Theosophical Society of the Arya Samaj of Aryavart.⁵

At the lodge, she wrote and gave lectures on what she called “The Perfect Way.” These lectures were published and became part of her significant esoteric work on esoteric Christianity, with titles such as *The Perfect Way* (1882) and *Clothed with the Sun* (1889). Her focus was especially directed towards Hermeticism, esoteric Christianity, and related subjects, which at a certain point led to a clash with the prominent theosophist A. P. Sinnett (1840–1921), whose major focus was on the so-called “Eastern” spiritual tradition, as seen in his popular book *Esoteric Buddhism* (1883). Shortly after this publication, Kingsford broke with the Theosophical Society, and in 1884 she founded her own society, The Hermetic Society, which was active until 1887 and was an important precursor to The Hermetic Order of the Golden Dawn, established in 1888.⁶ This made her one of the significant transmitters of Hermeticism in the nineteenth century. For example, she translated *The Virgin of the World of Hermes Mercurius Trismagistus* (1884) from French into English (the *Korē kosmou*: a Hermetic text-Stobaeian excerpt). Furthermore, she was involved in a circle of occult learning that stemmed from Éliphas Lévi (1810–1875). She also corresponded with Baron Nicolas-Joseph Spédalieri (1812–1898), who transmitted Lévi’s esoteric ideas.⁷ In addition, she had connections



Anna Kingsford, 1880s. Source <http://witchnovel-research.wordpress.com/>. Photograph courtesy of Wikimedia Commons.

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See Alan Pert, *Red Cactus: The Life of Anna Kingsford* (Watsons Bay: Books & Writers, 2007); Alex Owen, *The Place of Enchantment: British Occultism and the Culture of the Modern* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2004), 40–50, 55–77, 89–110, 123–43, 158–80; Christine Ferguson, “Anna Kingsford and the Intuitive Science of Occultism,” *Aries* 22, no. 1 (2022): 114–35.

2

Edward Maitland, *Anna Kingsford: Her Life, Letters, Diary and Work* (London: George Redway, 1896), 1:1–3. Maitland also conjectures that Kingsford might be of Italian descent on her father’s side reaching back to the founding of Venice. Pert, *Red Cactus: The Life of Anna Kingsford*, 67–73.

3

Pert, *Red Cactus*, 1–16.

4

Pert, 35–42.

5

Pert, 81–90, 107–25.

6

Owen, *The Place of Enchantment*, 41, 53, 55–56, 59. Pert, *Red Cactus*, 127–33.

7

Maitland, *Anna Kingsford*, 2:178–79.

with Mary Ann Atwood (1817–1910), who, as early as 1850, wrote a significant work on spiritual alchemy, *Hermetic Mystery*. The above shows that Kingsford, later in life, had situated herself at an important crossroad, through which she received knowledge and impressions from various channels, from different parts of Europe, including Éliphas Lévi's occultism, to Hermetic and alchemical studies, not to mention Theosophy.

Her involvement in the social currents of her time, particularly the role of women in society and new views on health and animal welfare, is well worth remembering and exploring in addition to her significant contribution to occultism. In more recent years, research on her activities in the social sphere and her wider influence on her contemporaries and her posterity has begun to grow, but still much needs to be done to get a fuller picture of her significance.⁸ Yet another important dimension of her work, which has been almost entirely neglected, is her literary output. Related to the theme of this special issue, this article primarily aims to open up the study of Kingsford's fiction, exploring themes she later developed in her occult works. In addition, the article addresses the reproduction of stereotypes in "The Painter of Venice" (1875) regarding the national and geographical characteristics of Europeans in the wider context of nationalism and literature at the time. In other words, this article shows that Kingsford reproduced stereotypes between Northern and Southern Europe and that these stereotypes were occulculturally colored, also serving her spiritual perceptions, her longing, and themes she pursued in her occult works.⁹

The Novella "The Painter of Venice"

Several of Kingsford's literary works were published in a book called *Rosamunda the Princess, and Other Tales* (1875). This book includes a novella of about sixty pages entitled "The Painter of Venice" (the actual date of its writing is unknown). In the tradition of Mary Shelley, Lord Byron, and Edward Bulwer-Lytton, who situated parts of their work in Italy, this story is set in Tuscany and has direct connections to Venice, as its protagonist is a master painter from this city.

The novella is one of her longest stories and has been chosen for its representative use of stereotypes transferred to the English-speaking world and for the connection with themes in Kingsford's later occult works. The novella can be related to different genres, but its play on mystery and murder and its elements of a ghost story are similar to the gothic genre. It also has a spiritual-ethical message, which is often found in spiritual works that are focused on finding one's soul and warning of dangers of materialism, jealousy, and matters of the world.¹⁰

The plot is set in the fifteenth century and follows a Dominican friar and his two adopted children, Angelo and Teresa. They meet a master painter from Venice, Domenico Veneziano and his companion, a painter named Andrea del Castagno; they are both working on a commission to paint in the Santa Maria Chapel of Venice for Cosimo de' Medici.¹¹

The story is mainly composed of dialogue. The young boy, Angelo, whom the friar adopted, engages in long dialogues with the Venetian painter, and through these dialogues we learn that this boy does

8

Natasha Rebry Coulthard, "Becoming What You Eat: Anna Kingsford's Vegetarian Posthuman," *Victorian Literature and Culture* 50, no. 2 (2022): 325–53; Mitch Goldsmith, "The Unfinished Business of Anna Kingsford: Towards an Enchanted Animal Ethic," *Trace* 7 (2021): 24–45; Ruby Ekel, "Vegetarians, Vivisection and Violationism: Gender and the Non-Human Animal in Anna Kingsford's Life and Writing," *Lilith* 28 (2022): 73–96; Amanda Kluvel, "Kingsford, Anna Bonus," in *Dictionary of Gnosis and Western Esotericism*, ed. W. J. Hanegraaff et al. (Leiden: Brill, 2005), 663–65.

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In this article the use of "occulture" refers to the aesthetic and literary use of themes and symbols that are often associated with occultism, the occult, and esotericism, such as higher knowledge, secret knowledge, gnosis or the intuitive faculty, correspondences, analogies, living nature, transformation, initiation, spirits, ghosts, demons, etc. See the editorial of this special issue by Giuliano D'Amico.

10

Algeron [Anna B.] Kingsford, "The Painter of Venice," in *Rosamunda the Princess: An historical romance of the sixth century, and other tales* (Oxford: James Parker and Co., 1875), 155–217, 214–17.

11

Kingsford, "The Painter of Venice," 156.

not possess a bright, strong intellect but has other abilities. He is very pure, or “close to his soul,” as Anna Kingsford would probably say.¹² The master painter possesses the knowledge of art and beauty. Their conversation thus sparks the notion that it is possible to connect with the soul of things, the more sublime side of life. An individual is pure and escapes the dominance of the intellect, opening up to intuition; this connection can happen through art. The story thus deals with themes such as art versus materialism and art as the key to both the nature of beauty and the soul.¹³ A similar theme is present in *Zanoni* (1842) by Bulwer-Lytton, whom Kingsford certainly was familiar with, at least later in life.¹⁴

In addition to these themes, stereotypes about the North and the South are present. As the narrator writes,

We cold blooded, dull-hearted denizens of unspeculative England, can but dimly comprehend the deep mysteries that lay hidden beneath the simple wording of those Italian and also German ferry stories [. . .] We miss the philosophical thought, the daring guesses at truth, the wonderful, powerful idea that underlays all of this.¹⁵

The narrator adds:

But farther South, where a brighter sun enlightens the eyes and souls of men by day, and where the skies are so pure and clear that at night one can see the stars down to the very edge of the earth, high and low and water all around the horizon [. . .] there too, the hearts and understanding of the people lay nearer their lips and ears than they do among themselves, so that they speak in allegories of things we do not dare to dream about.¹⁶

Certain stereotypes about the British and the Italians are clearly seen here. Kingsford’s motivation, filtered through her literary text, seems to be an admiration in the form of an opening of a more mystical, allegorical interpretation of mysteries among the Italians, compared to the dull-hearted, unspeculative English. The significance of this quote, however, requires some historical contextualization.

The Positive Other in a Time of Nationalism

Cultures have always nurtured images of other cultures. For the ancient Greeks, it was the uncultivated “Barbarians,” for the Romans the brutal Gauls. During the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries nationalism played a pivotal role in most cultural discussions and literary genres. It was intertwined with various literary movements and genres to foster a sense of national identity and pride. The Romantic movement, in particular, was deeply connected to nationalist sentiments. Romantic writers such as Johann Wolfgang von Goethe (1749–1832) and William Wordsworth (1770–1850) celebrated their national landscapes, folklore, and cultural heritage, thereby promoting a unique national identity. Their works often highlighted the beauty and distinctiveness

12

See the following section below: *Secret, Living Knowledge, and Other Modes of Knowing*.

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Pert, *Red Cactus*, 22.

14

Maitland, *Anna Kingsford*, 2:83.

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Kingsford, “The Painter of Venice,” 159.

16

Kingsford, 159.

of their homelands, encouraging readers to take pride in their national heritage. As a significant genre during this period, historical novels emerged with authors like Sir Walter Scott (1771–1832) in Britain and Alessandro Manzoni (1785–1873) in Italy, using their narratives to evoke national history and identity. These novels not only entertained but also constructed and maintained stereotypes about their nations' past and the characteristics of other nations and their people.

The creation of national epics was another manifestation of literary nationalism. Cultural nationalism was thus expressed in literature with writers striving to construct and promote their native languages and traditions. German poets like Johann Gottfried Herder (1744–1803) emphasized the importance of folk culture and language in national identity. Herder's works, amongst others, emphasized the belief that the true spirit and character of a nation is embedded in its language and cultural practices, thus advocating the preservation of these elements as a means of strengthening national identity and distinction from other nations and peoples.¹⁷

Theories about how climate impacts the temperament had also been widely discussed and formulated into stereotypes in literature. Among many others, Germaine de Staël-Holstein, also known as Madame de Staël (1766–1817), tried to portray European differences, famously calling Northerners productive, honest, and rational and Southern Europeans more lazy, sensual, and passionate. The climate was a cultivating factor the deeply ingrained idea that Northerners were melancholic and Southerners more passionate and lively.¹⁸ Such stereotypes permeated literature and philosophy at the time, and the English and the Italians were portrayed as extreme contrasts.¹⁹ Accordingly, Maria Schoina writes,

Apart from the political system, economy and religion, the sharp contrast in geographical latitude and climate between England and Italy was deemed largely responsible for the existence of difference in human physiology, character and *Weltanschauung*. Stretching in diametrically opposite directions and being separated by the sublime Alps, Italy and England, despite their island (or near island) identity, were often associated with two different worlds in the atlases of literary imagination, namely, the countries *north* of the Alps and the countries *south* of the Alps.²⁰

Studies in moral behavior were also published at the time, such as *Thoughts on the Moral Order of Nature* (1831) by Anne Marie Winter. Quotations from this book point out that “among the various people whom I know best, the Scotch and the Italians seem to me, the only ones distinguished by a sensibly directed imagination,” and that “the imagination of the English and French, is of a middle kind. That of the former, is more inclined however, to direct itself on sensible objects, and that of the latter, on metaphysical.”²¹ In other words, such studies cultivated an understanding of cognitive traits based on nation and geography. In anthropology, it was similarly common to use a ladder to divide the advancement of different cultures. The foundational anthropological work *Primitive Culture* (1871) by Edward B. Tylor

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John Breuilly, “Nationalism and National Unification in Nineteenth-Century Europe,” in *The Oxford Handbook of the History of Nationalism*, ed. John Breuilly (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2013), 149–74; Walter Schnee, “Nationalism: A Review of the Literature,” *Journal of Political and Military Sociology* 29, no. 1 (2009): 1–18.

18

Robert Casillo, *The Empire of Stereotypes: Germaine de Staël and the idea of Italy* (New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2006), 26–33.

19

Casillo, *The Empire of Stereotypes*, 14–27.

20

Maria Schoina, *Romantic “Anglo-Italians”: configurations of identity in Byron, the Shelleys, and the Pisan Circle* (New York: Routledge 2016), 35–36.

21

Anna Maria Winter, *Thoughts on the Moral Order of Nature* (Dublin: J. Chambers, 1831), 1: 410.

(1832–1917) includes a line of progress ranking different peoples; the Italians or Europeans *in toto* were placed above others.²² Thus in the nineteenth century, this was an ongoing train of thought, which was an integrated part of the scientific and nationalist thinking and expression of the time.

It is, however, often overlooked that many of the stereotypes constructed about other nations and peoples in the quest for identity were not always meant to demonstrate superiority. In fact, the cultivation of stereotypes could result in a fascination for the other, the foreign, which came to serve as a literary screen for longing. Similar to the theosophists and their romantic portrait of India, Kingsford clearly talked about Italy with a positive, romantic notion of its culture. Kingsford was, however, not alone in this. It had become common among the creative and upper classes in Great Britain to cultivate an almost double identity or Anglo-Italian identity.²³ Some were very critical of the Italians, like Percy Bysshe Shelley, even though he enjoyed the landscape and parts of the ancient culture.²⁴ Others, like Lord Byron, praised the Italian “temperament.”²⁵ As Schoina continues,

Mediterranean philosophy suited Byron’s temperament, especially for its sensuousness, exuberance and freer moral code—qualities which northerners were believed to lack. The south provided him with an abundance of cultural and physical stimuli and, above all, with abundance of space that could accommodate his overwhelming personality, extravagance, flamboyance and instability of temperament.²⁶

Kingsford’s construction and transfer of stereotypes about the North and South should be understood in this context, but as will be shown below, they also connected with her overall spiritual themes.

Esoteric Connections

As shown above, it was common to essentialize the characteristics of European neighbors in the age of nationalism, and Kingsford clearly reproduced some of the same stereotypes, such as the “dull-hearted English” and the “passionate or flamboyant Italians.” Kingsford, however, used such stereotypes to express attractive traits that were lacking back home in the North, but could be approached more closely in Southern Europe.

These stereotypes, especially of the South and the “occultural” mysteries of Italy, furthermore connect with the theme in Kingsford’s “The Painter of Venice,” especially how beauty and contact with nature can inspire the soul and how true art can enlighten the hearts of men beyond reason, not cultivated in Northern Europe to the detriment of its people.

This theme in Kingsford’s work runs parallel to Bulwer-Lytton’s famous “occultural” novel *Zanoni*, in which the connection between art and the supernatural (or occult) is central, as is the Italian setting. The novel suggests that true artistic inspiration and genius are deeply intertwined with higher, mystical realms of existence. The protagonist,

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Edward B. Tylor, *Primitive Culture* (London: John Murray, 1891), 1: 27.

23

Schoina, *Romantic “Anglo-Italians,”* 89–123.

24

Schoina, 127.

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Schoina, 100, 106.

26

Schoina, 102.

Zanoni, is an immortal Rosicrucian adept and teacher who possesses profound occult knowledge. His mastery of the supernatural is depicted as a source of his artistic and intellectual powers, implying that true art transcends the mundane and taps into the divine or mystical.²⁷

When Kingsford, in her later occult works, sought to rehabilitate what she perceived to be true Christianity (i.e., esoteric Christianity), the pictorial in the form of allegory became the true esoteric key to interpreting all the stories of the Bible and the Greek myths. To her, this was the spiritual key to unlocking the texts, whereas all the materialistic, literal interpretations had ruined spirituality in modern times. Allegory thus revealed the secret or esoteric truths in the ancient texts, but such knowledge is, in the end, a result of intuition or living knowledge.²⁸

Secret, Living Knowledge, and Other Modes of Knowing

In “The Painter of Venice” the “occultural” theme of secret and living knowledge is very present. A destructive force is represented by Castagno, the jealous companion of the master painter, who seemingly ends up killing the master painter. Throughout the story, Castagno tries to lure the secret from his master’s art, as his master’s living knowledge and practice are clearly superior.²⁹ When he is convinced he has received the secret transmission of the art of beauty, he kills the master painter.³⁰ Twenty years later, at the end of the story, he does not recant, rather he recounts; he does not regret his action, but he is haunted by the ghost of the master painter. His only motivation for telling his version of the story is to get it out of his mind and perhaps get rid of the ghost of his master. He says:

Twenty years ago the invitation of Cosmo [sic] de’ Medici associated me with Domenico of Venice in the work of adorning the chapel of Santa Maria Novella. My colleague was master of a great secret which I longed to possess, the secret of a new and marvellous art, transcending in importance and effect all the former discoveries of our sublime calling.³¹

The secret art, of course, only shows itself to the pure and cannot be gained by passion or power.³² Both the transfer of secret knowledge from master to disciple on the art of painting and the soul of things are a part of this story, but it also shows that a possible consequence of the longing for these qualities can lead to certain forms of jealousy.

The novella also includes ideas about other modes of knowing, which often play a part in esotericism. Kingsford focuses on this theme when young Angelo, more in touch with his intuition than most, experiences nature and the Italian landscape:

“Uncle,” said Angelo, stretching out his hands towards the purpling landscape before him, “how is it that, when I look upon all this beauty in such calm moments as these, I feel that it is not enough to look at it? [. . .] I seem to want other modes of apprehending and enjoying it, some other sense than mere sight

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Edward Bulwer-Lytton, *Zanoni* (London: Saunders & Otley, 1842), 202–5, 243.

28

Anna Kingsford and Edward Maitland, *The Perfect Way; or, The Finding of Christ* (Boston, MA: Esoteric Publishing Company, 1888), 6–10, 13–16; Anna Kingsford, “Clothed with the Sun”: *Being The Book of the Illuminations*, ed. Edward Maitland (London: George Redway, 1889), 16–18.



“Veneziano and Castagno, surrounded by various implements of their craft,” image and caption from *Rosamunda the princess, and other tales* by Anna Bonus Kingsford, Internet Archive, <https://archive.org/details/rosamundaprince00kinggoog/page/n251/mode/2up>.

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Kingsford, “The Painter of Venice,” 213.

30

Kingsford, 213–14.

31

Kingsford, 213.

32

Kingsford and Edward Maitland, *The Perfect Way*, 35.

or touch. I want to lose myself in it, to embrace it, to drink it in, to take it all to my soul and become identified with its perfect peace and loveliness.”³³

This boy, who can be said to represent the faculty of intuition important to Kingsford, expresses this other mode of understanding the world, which is beyond the senses and can bring one closer to the soul of things. Thus, before Kingsford wrote any esoteric works, these themes were present in her literary work.

It is clear, when reading both *The Perfect Way* and *Clothed with the Sun*, her so-called esoteric works, that intuition is one of the central points of her doctrine.³⁴ To Kingsford, the faculty of intuition is the secret source of all religions. It illuminates higher things and is the feminine principle that can complete the human being and reveal the secrets of heaven. As Kingsford puts in *The Perfect Way*:

This then is the nature and function of the intuition by living so purely in thought and deed as to prevent the interposition of any barrier between his exterior and interior, his phenomenal and his substantial self; and by steadfastly cultivating harmonious relations between these two—by subordinating the whole of his system to the Divine central Will whose seat is in the soul—the man gains full access to the stores of knowledge laid up in his soul, and attains to the cognition alike of God and of the universe. And for him, as is said, “there is nothing hid which shall not be revealed.”³⁵

This synthetic ability can unite the outer and the inner in a higher form. Kingsford’s early fascination with Italy and the stereotype of a southern European temperament was thus a longing for something more occult she felt was lacking in the Northern people, but she perhaps sought to transfer it through her work and emphasis on intuition.

The Hermetic beauty of nature also runs through her writing and is important to this notion. *Hermeticism* has always emphasized the importance of reflections and even meditative practices, of understanding the order of the beauty of nature, how nature is permeated by a continuous divine creation, and how the Hermeticist can help restore or advance nature in the divine likeness.³⁶ Nature, Kingsford writes, is constantly seeking to bring the earth closer to heaven. Her writing thus reveals this idea of a mirroring process and an advancement of nature, bringing nature to a more perfect state, which is also what art can do. This is a process that, much like alchemy, transforms base metal into gold, thus accelerating nature. Later, in *Clothed with the Sun*, Kingsford wrote: “God manifests, rises gradually through nature to meet God unmanifest. Every level of nature rises out of itself to merge in every other level.”³⁷ In *The Perfect Way*, she added: “This perfect condition was, and still is, reached-in the aggregate, as in the individual, by a process of evolution, or gradual unfoldment and growth from the lowest to the highest.”³⁸

The Perfect Way depicts a progress or evolution, a gradual unfoldment and growth from the lowest to the highest. Such a Hermetic process of spiritual evolution or transformation is present in her early



“With marble face and gasping lips the aged Maestro [Andrea del Castagno] rose in his bed and stretched his hands to heaven,” image and caption from *Rosamunda the princess, and other tales* by Anna Bonus Kingsford, Internet Archive, <https://archive.org/details/rosamundaprince00kinggoog/page/n251/mode/2up>.

33

Kingsford, “The Painter of Venice,” 160.

34

Ferguson, “Anna Kingsford and the Intuitive Science of Occultism,” 114–35.

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Kingsford, *The Perfect Way*, 35.

36

Brian P. Copenhaver, “Corpus Hermeticum V,” in *Hermetica: The Greek Corpus Hermeticum and the Latin Asclepius in a New English Translation, with Notes and Introduction*, ed. Brian P. Copenhaver (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1992), 18–20, 67–92.

37

Kingsford, “*Clothed with the Sun*,” 202.

38

Kingsford, *The Perfect Way*, 158.

as well as in her later work, which indicatively shows how her imaginative nature, focusing on poetry and fiction about nature, beauty, and art might have led her to esotericism later in life. Such themes also clearly resonate with the Italian Renaissance and its mixture of art, nature, beauty, and esotericism. As Bulwer-Lytton puts it in *Zanoni*,

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Bulwer-Lytton, *Zanoni*, 203–4.

40
Kingsford, “The Painter of Venice,” 159.

Nature is not to be copied, but exalted [. . .] the loftiest order of art, selecting only the loftiest combinations, is the perpetual struggle of Humanity to approach the Gods. The great painter, as the great author, embodies what is possible to man, it is true, but what is not common to mankind.³⁹

In this sense, Kingsford’s early interest in exploring art, beauty, and secret knowledge in her “The Painter of Venice” and the stereotypical imagining of the South, “where a brighter sun enlightens the eyes and souls of men by day, and where the skies are so pure and clear that at night one can see the stars down to the very edge of the earth, high and low,”⁴⁰ were an expression of nationalist European identity politics. But they also connected with occult themes that later became the core of her esotericism, which emphasised allegory and intuition, rather than what might be perceived as lower reason. Kingsford thus sought the beauty of uniting high and low in nature and art.

Conclusion

Anna Kingsford was a significant occultist whose contributions to literature have often been overlooked. Focusing on the novella “The Painter from Venice,” this article has shown that part of her early fictional writing reproduced stereotypes about Northern and Southern Europe, reflecting an essentialized nationalism that was part of her time and British background. However, such stereotypes also served another purpose in her work because the distinction highlighted her positive fascination with Italy and the “Southern temperament,” which she depicted “occulturally” as associated with intuition, allegory, soul, beauty, art, and secret knowledge. Kingsford’s portrayal of Italy contrasted sharply with her view of Britain, which she saw as lacking these more intuitive and aesthetic qualities. While this idealization or stereotyping in some respects was a product of nationalism, it was not merely a reflection of contemporary stereotypes, but a projection and occultal aestheticization of a longing for a more spiritually and artistically fulfilling environment, which was projected onto the South and transferred to the English-speaking world through her writings. Kingsford also used the stereotypes and the setting of her novella as an early platform for her development of themes in her occult works, where the connection between allegory, intuition, nature, transformation, and beauty clearly shines through. In this sense, Kingsford’s writings embraced the occultal prior to the occult.