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DOCUMENT A

THE HUMAN FORM DIVINE

The human contours are so easily lost.
Only close your eyes and you seem a forest
Of dense vegetation, and the lurking beast

5 That in the night springs from the cover
Tears with tiger's mouth your living creatures,
A thousand innocent victims without name that suffer.

Science applies its insect-lenses to the form divine
As up the red river (all life comes from the sea)
10 Swim strange monsters, amoeboid erythrean spawn.

Rock-face of bone, alluvium of cartilage
Remote from man as the surface of the moon
Are vast and unexplored interior desert ranges,

15 And autonomous cells
Grow like unreaped fields of waving corn.
Air filters through the lungs' fine branches as though trees.

Chemistry dissolves the goddess in the alembic,
Venus the white queen, the universal matrix,
Down to molecular hexagons and carbon-chains,

20 And the male nerve-impulse, monition of reality,
Conveys the charge, dynamic of non-entity
That sparks across the void *ex nihilo*.

At the extreme of consciousness, prayer
Fixes hand and feet immobile to a chair,
25 Transmutes all heaven and earth into a globe of air,

And soul streams away out of the top of the head
Like flame in a lamp-glass carried in the draught
Of the celestial fire kindled in the solar plexus.

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30 Oh man, oh Garden of Eden, there is nothing
But the will of love to uphold your seeming world,
To trace in chaos the contours of your beloved form!

Kathleen Raine, *The Pythoness* [1949]. *The Collected Poems of Kathleen Raine*, London: Hamish Hamilton, 1956, pp. 86-87

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DOCUMENT B

[...] Our shepherd is a queer character and hard to place in this wilderness. His bed is a hollow made in red dry rot punky dust beside a log which forms a portion of the south wall of the corral. Here he lies with his wonderful everlasting clothing on, wrapped in a red blanket, breathing not only the dust of the decayed wood but also that of the corral, as if determined to take ammoniacal snuff all night after chewing tobacco all day. Following the sheep he carries a heavy six-shooter swung from his belt on one side and his luncheon on the other. The ancient cloth in which the meat, fresh from the frying-pan, is tied serves as a filter through which the clear fat and gravy juices drip down on his right hip and leg in clustering stalactites. This oleaginous formation is soon broken up however, and diffused and rubbed evenly into his scanty apparel, by sitting down, rolling over, crossing his legs while resting on logs, making shirt and trousers watertight and shiny. His trousers, in particular, have become so adhesive with the mixed fat and resin that pine needles, thin flakes and fibres of bark, hair, mica scales and minute grains of quartz, hornblende, etc., feathers, seed wings, moth and butterfly wings, legs and antennae of innumerable insects, or even whole insects such as the small beetles, moths and mosquitoes, with flower petals, pollen dust and indeed bits of all plants, animals, and minerals of the region adhere to them and are safely embedded, so that though far from being a naturalist he collects fragmentary specimens of everything and becomes richer than he knows. His specimens are kept passably fresh too, by the purity of the air and the resiny bituminous beds into which they are pressed. Man is a microcosm, at least our shepherd is, or rather his trousers. These precious overalls are never taken off, and nobody knows how old they are, though one may guess by their thickness and concentric structure. Instead of wearing thin they wear thick, and in their stratification have no small geological significance.

Besides herding the sheep, Billy is the butcher, while I have agreed to wash the few iron and tin utensils and make the bread. Then, these small duties done, by the time the sun is fairly above the mountain tops I am beyond the flock, free to rove and revel in the wilderness all the big immortal days.

Sketching on the North Dome. It commands views of nearly all the valley besides a few of the high mountains. I would fain draw everything in sight – rock, tree, and leaf. But little can I do beyond mere outlines – marks with meanings like words, readable only to myself – yet I sharpen my pencils and work on as if others might possibly be benefited. Whether these picture-sheets are to vanish like fallen leaves or go to friends like letters, matters not much; for little can they tell to those who have not themselves seen similar wilderness, and like a language have learned it. No pain here, no dull empty hours, no fear of the past, no fear of the future. These blessed mountains are so compactly filled with God's beauty, no petty personal hope or experience has room to be. Drinking this champagne water is pure pleasure, so is breathing the living air, and every movement of limbs is pleasure, while the body seems to feel beauty when exposed to it as it feels the campfire or sunshine, entering not by the eyes alone, but equally through all one's flesh like radiant heat, making a passionate ecstatic pleasure glow not explainable. One's body then seems homogeneous throughout, sound as a crystal.

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50 Perched like a fly on this Yosemite dome, I gaze and sketch and bask, oftentimes settling down into dumb admiration without definite hope of ever learning much, yet with the longing, unresting effort that lies at the door of hope, humbly prostrate before the vast display of God's power, and eager to offer self-denial and renunciation with eternal toil to learn any lesson in the divine manuscript.

55 It is easier to feel than to realize, or in any way explain, Yosemite grandeur. The magnitudes of the rocks and trees and streams are so delicately harmonized they are mostly hidden. Sheer precipices three thousand feet high are fringed with tall trees growing close like grass on the brow of a lowland hill, and extending along the feet of these precipices a ribbon of meadow a mile wide and seven or eight long, that seems like a strip a farmer might mow in less than a day. Waterfalls, five hundred to one or two thousand feet high, are so subordinated to the mighty cliffs over which they pour that they seem like wisps of smoke, gentle as floating clouds, though their voices fill the valley and make the rocks tremble. The mountains too, along the eastern sky, and the domes in front of them, and the succession of smooth rounded waves between, swelling higher, higher, with dark woods in their hollows, serene in massive exuberant bulk and beauty, tend yet more to hide the grandeur of the Yosemite temple and make it appear as a subdued subordinate feature of the vast harmonious landscape. Thus every attempt to appreciate any one feature is beaten down by the overwhelming influence of all the others. And, as if this were not enough, lo! in the sky arises another mountain range with topography as rugged and substantial-looking as the one beneath it – snowy peaks and domes and shadowy Yosemite valleys – another version of the snowy Sierra, a new creation heralded by a thunderstorm. How fiercely, devoutly wild is Nature in the midst of her beauty-loving tenderness! – painting lilies, watering them, caressing them with gentle hand, going from flower to flower like a gardener while building rock
60 70 75 80 mountains and cloud mountains full of lightning and rain. Gladly we run for shelter beneath an overhanging cliff and examine the reassuring ferns and mosses, gentle love tokens growing in cracks and chinks. Daisies too, and ivesias, confiding wild children of light, too small to fear. To these one's heart goes home, and the voices of the storm become gentle. Now the sun breaks forth and fragrant steam arises. The birds are out singing on the edges of the groves. The west is flaming in gold and purple, ready for the ceremony of the sunset, and back I go to camp with my notes and pictures, the best of them printed in my mind as dreams. A fruitful day, without measured beginning or ending. A terrestrial eternity. A gift of good God.

John Muir. *My First Summer in the Sierra [1911]*, ch. 5 "The Yosemite"
(20th July entry). New York: Random House, 2003, pp. 171-177

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DOCUMENT C



Joseph Wright of Derby. *A Philosopher Giving that Lecture on the Orrery, in which a Lamp is put in the Place of the Sun.* First exhibited 1766. Oil on canvas, 1.47 m x 2.0 m. Derby Museum and Art Gallery.