

Classic Poetry Series

**Kathleen Jessie Raine**  
**- poems -**

**Publication Date:**

2004

**Publisher:**

Poemhunter.com - The World's Poetry Archive

## Kathleen Jessie Raine(14 June 1908 – 6 July 2003)

Kathleen Raine was born in London in 1908, where she grew up; taking on a number of unsatisfactory jobs. Through one of her later jobs she met the nephew of the Indian mystic Rama Coomaraswamy Tambimuttu, who invited her to contribute to his new magazine, Poetry London, she did of course, and soon developed a lifelong passion for all things Indian. Raine began to seriously write toward her late twenties, and by 1943 she had published her first collection of poetry Stone and Flower, which was illustrated by Barbara Hepworth. Three years later the collection Living in Time was released, followed by The Pythoness in 1949.

Raine married twice, each time unhappily due to dissatisfaction with domesticity. She was even quoted as saying she felt "as if I were living in someone else's dream." This unhappiness led to an affair with a gay writer named Gavin Maxwell. This affair helped to inspire the works in The Year One 1952, which she released in 1952. Raine stayed frequently with Maxwell on the island of Sandaig in the Scottish Islands. The relationship ended in 1956 when Raine lost his pet otter, Mijbil, who inspired Maxwell's best-selling book Ring of Bright Water. She published a book of poems called Collected Poems that same year.

She began her autobiography 1973 and it was out in 1977. Four years later Raine had founded her own magazine, called Temenos, to help articulate her views. Raine went on to win several awards, including the Harriet Monroe Prize, Edna St. Vincent Millay Prize from the American Poetry Society, and the Queens Gold Medal for Poetry in 1992. In 2000, she was made a Commander of the British Empire.

# A Spell For Creation

Within the flower there lies a seed,  
Within the seed there springs a tree,  
Within the tree there spreads a wood.

In the wood there burns a fire,  
And in the fire there melts a stone,  
Within the stone a ring of iron.

Within the ring there lies an O,  
Within the O there looks an eye,  
In the eye there swims a sea,

And in the sea reflected sky,  
And in the sky there shines the sun,  
Within the sun a bird of gold.

Within the bird there beats a heart,  
And from the heart there flows a song,  
And in the song there sings a word.

In the word there speaks a world,  
A world of joy, a world of grief,  
From joy and grief there springs my love.

Oh love, my love, there springs a world,  
And on the world there shines a sun,  
And in the sun there burns a fire,

Within the fire consumes my heart,  
And in my heart there beats a bird,  
And in the bird there wakes an eye,

Within the eye, earth, sea and sky,  
Earth, sky and sea within an O  
Lie like the seed within the flower.

Kathleen Jessie Raine

# Change

Change

Said the sun to the moon,  
You cannot stay.

Change

Says the moon to the waters,  
All is flowing.

Change

Says the fields to the grass,  
Seed-time and harvest,  
Chaff and grain.

You must change said,  
Said the worm to the bud,  
Though not to a rose,

Petals fade

That wings may rise  
Borne on the wind.

You are changing

said death to the maiden, your wan face  
To memory, to beauty.

Are you ready to change?

Says the thought to the heart, to let her pass  
All your life long

For the unknown, the unborn

In the alchemy  
Of the world's dream?

You will change,

says the stars to the sun,  
Says the night to the stars.

Kathleen Jessie Raine

# Confessions

Wanting to know all  
I overlooked each particle  
Containing the whole  
Unknowable.

Intent on one great love, perfect,  
Requited and for ever,  
I missed love's everywhere  
Small presence, thousand-guised.

And lifelong have been reading  
Book after book, searching  
For wisdom, but bringing  
Only my own understanding.

Forgive me, forgiver,  
Whether you be infinite omniscient  
Or some unnoticed other  
My existence has hurt.

Being what I am  
What could I do but wrong?  
Yet love can bring  
To heart healing  
To chaos meaning.

Kathleen Jessie Raine

# Far-Darting Apollo

I saw the sun step like a gentleman  
Dressed in black and proud as sin.  
I saw the sun walk across London  
Like a young M. P., risen to the occasion.

His step was light, his tread was dancing,  
His lips were smiling, his eyes glancing.  
Over the Cenotaph in Whitehall  
The sun took the wicket with my skull.

The sun plays tennis in the court of Geneva  
With the guts of a Finn and the head of an Emperor.  
The sun plays squash in a tomb of marble,  
The horses of Apocalypse are in his stable.

The sun plays a game of darts in Spain  
Three by three in flight formation.  
The invincible wheels of his yellow car  
Are the discs that kindle the Chinese war.

The sun shows the world to the world,  
Turns its own ghost on the terrified crowd,  
Then plunges all images into the ocean  
Of the nightly mass emotion.

Games of chance and games of skill,  
All his sports are games to kill.  
I saw the murderer at evening lie  
Bleeding on his death-bed sky.

His hyacinth breath, his laurel hair,  
His blinding sight, his moving air,  
My love, my grief, my weariness, my fears  
Hid from me in a night of tears.

Kathleen Jessie Raine

# Harvest

Day is the hero's shield,  
Achilles' field,  
The light days are the angels.  
We the seed.

Against eternal light and gorgon's face  
Day is the shield  
And we the grass  
Native to fields of iron, and skies of brass.

Kathleen Jessie Raine

# Heroes

This war's dead heroes, who has seen them?  
They rise in smoke above the burning city,  
Faint clouds, dissolving into sky —

And who sifting the Libyan sand can find  
The tracery of a human hand,  
The faint impression of an absent mind,  
The fade-out of a soldier's day dream?

You'll know your love no more, nor his sweet kisses —  
He's forgotten you, girl, and in the idle sun  
In long green grass that the east wind caresses  
The seed of man is ravished by the corn.

Kathleen Jessie Raine

# In The Beck

There is a fish, that quivers in the pool,  
itself a shadow, but its shadow, clear.  
Catch it again and again, it still is there.

Against the flowing stream, its life keeps pace  
with death - the impulse and the flash of grace  
hiding in its stillness, moves to be motionless.

No net will hold it - always it will return  
Where the ripples settle, and the sand -  
It lives unmoved, equated with the stream,  
As flowers are fit for air, man for his dream.

Kathleen Jessie Raine

# Introspection

If you go deep  
Into the heart  
What do you find there?  
Fear, fear,  
Fear of the jaws of the rock,  
Fear of the teeth and splinters of iron that tear  
Flesh from the bone, and the moist  
Blood, running unfelt  
From the wound, and the hand  
Suddenly moist and red.

If you go deep  
Into the heart  
What do you find?  
Grief, grief,  
Grief for the life unlived,  
For the loves unloved,  
For the child never to be born,  
Th'unbidden anguish, when the fair moon  
Rises over still summer seas, and the pain  
Of sunlight scattered in vain on spring grass.

If you go deeper  
Into the heart  
What do you find there?  
Death, death,  
Death tht lets all go by,  
Lets the blood flow from the wound,  
Lets the night pass,  
Endures the day with indifference, knowing that all must end.  
Sorrow is not forever, ad sense  
Endures no extremities,  
Death is the last Secret implicit within you, the hidden, the deepest  
Knowledge of all you will ever unfold  
In this body of earth.

Kathleen Jessie Raine

# Lament

Where are those dazzling hills touched by the sun,  
Those crags in childhood that I used to climb?  
Hidden, hidden under mist is yonder mountain,  
Hidden is the heart.

A day of cloud, a lifetime falls between,  
Gone are the heather moors and the pure stream,  
Gone are the rocky places and the green,  
Hidden, hidden under sorrow is yonder mountain,  
Hidden, hidden.

O storm and gale of tears, whose blinding screen  
Makes weather of grief, snow's drifting curtain  
Palls th'immortal heights once seen.  
Hidden, hidden is the heart,  
Hidden, hidden is the heart.

Kathleen Jessie Raine

# Lenten Flowers

Primrose, anemone, bluebell, moss  
Grow in the Kingdom of the Cross

And the ash-tree's purple bud  
Dresses the spear that sheds his blood.

With the thorns that pierce his brow  
Soft encircling petals grow

For in each flower the secret lies  
Of the tree that crucifies.

Garden by the water clear  
All must die who enter here!

Kathleen Jessie Raine

# Love Poem

Yours is the face that the earth turns to me,  
Continuous beyond its human features lie  
The mountain forms that rest against the sky.  
With your eyes, the reflecting rainbow, the sun's light  
Sees me; forest and flower, bird and beast  
Know and hold me forever in the world's thought,  
Creation's deep untroubled retrospect.

When your hand touches mine it is the earth  
That takes me--the green grass,  
And rocks and rivers; the green graves,  
And children still unborn, and ancestors,  
In love passed down from hand to hand from God.  
Your love comes from the creation of the world,  
From those paternal fingers, streaming through the clouds  
That break with light the surface of the sea.

Here, where I trace your body with my hand,  
Love's presence has no end;  
For these, your arms that hold me, are the world's.  
In us, the continents, clouds and oceans meet  
Our arbitrary selves, extensive with the night,  
Lost, in the heart's worship, and the body's sleep.

Kathleen Jessie Raine

# Millenial Hymn To Lord Shiva

Earth no longer  
hymns the Creator,  
the seven days of wonder,  
the Garden is over —  
all the stories are told,  
the seven seals broken  
all that begins  
must have its ending,  
our striving, desiring,  
our living and dying,  
for Time, the bringer  
of abundant days  
is Time the destroyer —  
In the Iron Age  
the Kali Yuga  
To whom can we pray  
at the end of an era  
but the Lord Shiva,  
the Liberator, the purifier?

Our forests are felled,  
our mountains eroded,  
the wild places  
where the beautiful animals  
found food and sanctuary  
we have desolated,  
a third of our seas,  
a third of our rivers  
we have polluted  
and the sea-creatures dying.  
Our civilization's  
blind progress  
in wrong courses  
through wrong choices  
has brought us to nightmare  
where what seems,  
is, to the dreamer,  
the collective mind  
of the twentieth century —

this world of wonders  
not divine creation  
but a big bang  
of blind chance,  
purposeless accident,  
mother earth's children,  
their living and loving,  
their delight in being  
not joy but chemistry,  
stimulus, reflex,  
valueless, meaningless,  
while to our machines  
we impute intelligence,  
in computers and robots  
we store information  
and call it knowledge,  
we seek guidance  
by dialling numbers,  
pressing buttons,  
throwing switches,  
in place of family  
our companions are shadows,  
cast on a screen,  
bodiless voices, fleshless faces,  
where was the Garden  
a Disney-land  
of virtual reality,  
in place of angels  
the human imagination  
is peopled with foot-ballers  
film-stars, media-men,  
experts, know-all  
television personalities,  
animated puppets  
with cartoon faces —  
To whom can we pray  
for release from illusion,  
from the world-cave,  
but Time the destroyer,  
the liberator, the purifier?

The curse of Midas

has changed at a touch,  
a golden handshake  
earthly paradise  
to lifeless matter,  
where once was seed-time,  
summer and winter,  
food-chain, factory farming,  
monocrops for supermarkets,  
pesticides, weed-killers  
birdless springs,  
endangered species,  
battery-hens, hormone injections,  
artificial insemination,  
implants, transplants, sterilization,  
surrogate births, contraception,  
cloning, genetic engineering, abortion,  
and our days shall be short  
in the land we have sown  
with the Dragon's teeth  
where our armies arise  
fully armed on our killing-fields  
with land-mines and missiles,  
tanks and artillery,  
gas-masks and body-bags,  
our air-craft rain down  
fire and destruction,  
our space-craft broadcast  
lies and corruption,  
our elected parliaments  
parrot their rhetoric  
of peace and democracy  
while the truth we deny  
returns in our dreams  
of Armageddon,  
the death-wish, the arms-trade,  
hatred and slaughter  
profitable employment  
of our thriving cities,  
the arms-race  
to the end of the world  
of our postmodern,  
post-Christian,

post-human nations,  
progress to the nihil  
of our spent civilization.  
But cause and effect,  
just and inexorable  
law of the universe  
no fix of science,  
nor amenable god  
can save from ourselves  
the selves we have become —  
At the end of history  
to whom can we pray  
but to the destroyer,  
the liberator, the purifier?

In the beginning  
the stars sang together  
the cosmic harmony,  
but Time, imperceptible  
taker-away  
of all that has been,  
all that will be,  
our heart-beat your drum,  
our dance of life  
your dance of death  
in the crematorium,  
our high-rise dreams,  
Valhalla, Utopia,  
Xanadu, Shangri-la, world revolution  
Time has taken, and soon will be gone  
Cambridge, Princeton and M.I.T.,  
Nalanda, Athens and Alexandria  
all for the holocaust  
of civilization —  
To whom shall we pray  
when our vision has faded  
but the world-destroyer,  
the liberator, the purifier?

But great is the realm  
of the world-creator,  
the world-sustainer

from whom we come,  
in whom we move  
and have our being,  
about us, within us  
the wonders of wisdom,  
the trees and the fountains,  
the stars and the mountains,  
all the children of joy,  
the loved and the known,  
the unknowable mystery  
to whom we return  
through the world-destroyer, —  
Holy, holy  
at the end of the world  
the purging fire  
of the purifier, the liberator!

Kathleen Jessie Raine

# Nocturne

Night comes, an angel stands  
Measuring out the time of stars,  
Still are the winds, and still the hours.

It would be peace to lie  
Still in the still hours at the angel's feet,  
Upon a star hung in a starry sky,  
But hearts another measure beat.

Each body, wingless as it lies,  
Sends out its butterfly of night  
With delicate wings, and jewelled eyes.

And some upon day's shores are cast,  
And some in darkness lost  
In waves beyond the world, where float  
Somewhere the islands of the blest.

Kathleen Jessie Raine

# Paradise Seed

Where is the seed  
Of the tree felled,  
Of the forest burned,  
Or living root  
Under ash and cinders?  
From woven bud  
What last leaf strives  
Into life, last  
Shrivelled flower?  
Is fruit of our harvest,  
Our long labour  
Dust to the core?  
To what far, fair land  
Borne on the wind  
What winged seed  
Or spark of fire  
From holocaust  
To kindle a star?

Kathleen Jessie Raine

# Seed

From star to star, from sun and spring and leaf,  
And almost audible flowers whose sound is silence,  
And in the common meadows, springs the seed of life.

Now the lilies open, and the rose  
Released by summer from the harmless graves  
That, centuries deep, are in the air we breathe,  
And in our earth, and in our daily bread.

External and innate dimensions hold  
The living forms, but not the force of life;  
For that interior and holy tree  
That in the heart of hearts outlives the world  
Spreads earthly shade into eternity.

Kathleen Jessie Raine

# Seen In A Glass

Behind the tree, behind the house, behind the stars  
In the presence that I cannot see  
Otherwise than as house and stars and tree.

Tree, house and stars  
Extend to infinity within themselves  
Into the mystery of the world

Where whirl the wheels of power whose pulse beat  
Out of nothing, out of night,  
Leaves, stones and fires,

The living tree whose maypole dance  
Of chromosome and nucleus  
Traces the maze of boughs and leaves.

The standing house of stone that poured  
In molten torrent when was hurled  
Out of chaos this great world,

And suns whose kindling begins anew  
Or ends the course that tree, house, world move through.

Upheld by being that I cannot know  
In other form than stars and stones and trees  
Assume in nature's glass, in nature's eyes.

Kathleen Jessie Raine

# Shells

Reaching down arm-deep into bright water  
I gathered on white sand under waves  
Shells, drifted up on beaches where I alone  
Inhabit a finite world of years and days.  
I reached my arm down a myriad years  
To gather treasure from the yester-milliennial sea-floor,  
Held in my fingers forms shaped on the day of creation.

Building their beauty in three dimensions  
Over which the world recedes away from us,  
And in the fourth, that takes away ourselves  
From moment to moment and from year to year  
From first to last they remain in their continuous present.  
The helix revolves like a timeless thought,  
Instantaneous from apex to rim  
Like a dance whose figure is limpet or murex,  
cowrie or golden winkle.

They sleep on the ocean floor like humming-tops  
Whose music is the mother-of-pearl octave of the rainbow,  
Harmonious shells that whisper forever in our ears,  
The world that you inhabit has not yet been created.

Kathleen Jessie Raine

# Storm

God in me is the fury on the bare heath  
God in me shakes the interior kingdom of my heaven.  
God in me is the fire wherein I burn.

God in me swirling cloud and driving rain  
God in me cries a lonely nameless bird  
God in me beats my head upon a stone.

God in me the four elements of storm  
Raging in the shelterless landscape of the mind  
Outside the barred doors of my Goneril heart.

Kathleen Jessie Raine

# The Ancient Speech

A Gaelic bard they praise who in fourteen adjectives  
Named the one indivisible soul of his glen;  
For what are the bens and the glens but manifold qualities,  
Immeasurable complexities of soul?  
What are these isles but a song sung by island voices?  
The herdsman sings ancestral memories  
And the song makes the singer wise,  
But only while he sings  
Songs that were old when the old themselves were young,  
Songs of these hills only, and of no isles but these.  
For other hills and isles this language has no words.

The mountains are like manna, for one day given,  
To each his own:  
Strangers have crossed the sound, but not the sound of the dark oarsmen  
Or the golden-haired sons of kings,  
Strangers whose thought is not formed to the cadence of waves,  
Rhythm of the sickle, oar and milking pail,  
Whose words make loved things strange and small,  
Emptied of all that made them heart-felt or bright.  
Our words keep no faith with the soul of the world.

Kathleen Jessie Raine

# The End Of Love

Now he is dead  
How should I know  
My true love's arms  
From wind and snow?

No man I meet  
In field or house  
Though in the street  
A hundred pass.

The hurrying dust  
Has never a face,  
No longer human  
In man or woman.

Now he is gone  
Why should I mourn  
My true love more than mud,  
than mud or stone?

Kathleen Jessie Raine

# The River

In my first sleep  
I came to the river  
And looked down  
Through the clear water -  
Only in dream  
Water so pure,  
Laced and undulant  
Lines of flow  
On its rocky bed  
Water of life  
Streaming for ever.

A house was there  
Beside the river  
And I, arrived,  
An expected guest  
About to explore  
Old gardens and libraries -  
But the car was waiting  
To drive me away.

One last look  
Into that bright stream -  
Trout there were  
And clear on the bottom  
Monster form  
Of the great crayfish  
That crawls to the moon.  
On its rocky bed  
Living water  
In whorls and ripples  
Flowing unbended.

There was the car  
To drive me away.  
We crossed the river  
Of living water -  
I might not stay,  
But must return

By the road too short  
To the waiting day.

In my second dream  
Pure I was and free  
By the rapid stream,  
My crystal house the sky,  
The pure crystalline sky.

Into the stream I flung  
A bottle of clear glass  
That twirled and tossed and spun  
In the water's race  
Flashing the morning sun.

Down that swift river  
I saw it borne away,  
My empty crystal form,  
Exultant saw it caught  
Into the current's spin,  
The flashing water's run.

Kathleen Jessie Raine

# The Wilderness

I came too late to the hills: they were swept bare  
Winters before I was born of song and story,  
Of spell or speech with power of oracle or invocation,

The great ash long dead by a roofless house, its branches rotten,  
The voice of the crows an inarticulate cry,  
And from the wells and springs the holy water ebbed away.

A child I ran in the wind on a withered moor  
Crying out after those great presences who were not there,  
Long lost in the forgetfulness of the forgotten.

Only the archaic forms themselves could tell!  
In sacred speech of hoodie on gray stone, or hawk in air,  
Of Eden where the lonely rowan bends over the dark pool.

Yet I have glimpsed the bright mountain behind the mountain,  
Knowledge under the leaves, tasted the bitter berries red,  
Drunk water cold and clear from an inexhaustible hidden fountain.

Kathleen Jessie Raine

# Transit Of The Gods

Strange that the self's continuum should outlast  
The Virgin, Aphrodite, and the Mourning Mother,  
All loves and griefs, successive deities  
That hold their kingdom in the human breast.  
Abandoned by the gods, woman with an ageing body  
That half remembers the Annunciation  
The passion and the travail and the grief  
That wore the mask of my humanity,  
I marvel at the soul's indifference.  
For in her theatre the play is done,  
The tears are shed; the actors, the immortals  
In their ceaseless manifestation, elsewhere gone,  
And I who have been Virgin and Aphrodite,  
The mourning Isis and the queen of corn  
Wait for the last mummer, dread Persephone  
To dance my dust at last into the tomb.

Kathleen Jessie Raine

# Vegetation

O never harm the dreaming world,  
the world of green, the world of leaves,  
but let its million palms unfold  
the adoration of the trees.

It is a love in darkness wrought  
obedient to the unseen sun,  
longer than memory, a thought  
deeper than the graves of time.

The turning spindles of the cells  
weave a slow forest over space,  
the dance of love, creation,  
out of time moves not a leaf,  
and out of summer, not a shade.

Kathleen Jessie Raine

# Worry About Money

Wearing worry about money like a hair shirt  
I lie down in my bed and wrestle with my angel.

My bank-manager could not sanction my continuance for another day  
But life itself wakes me each morning, and love

Urges me to give although I have no money  
In the bank at this moment, and ought properly

To cease to exist in a world where poverty  
Is a shameful and ridiculous offence.

Having no one to advise me, I open the Bible  
And shut my eyes and put my finger on a text

And read that the widow with the young son  
Must give first to the prophetic genius  
From the little there is in the bin of flour and the cruse of oil.

Kathleen Jessie Raine