Classic Poetry Series

Kathleen Raine

- poems -

Publication Date:

2004

Publisher:

PoemHunter.Com - The World's Poetry Archive

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.

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-quised.

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.

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.

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.

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.

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.

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.

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.

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!

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.

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!

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.

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?

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.

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.

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.

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.

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?

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.

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.

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.

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.

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.