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-millennial 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,
more 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