

# That Wondrous Pattern: Essays on Poetry and Poets by Kathleen Raine

*Introduction by Brian Keeble*

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*An adapted and augmented version of the Introduction  
by Brian Keeble*

**N**ot every poet is a prolific essayist, or even a writer of prose, but when a poet does write on other poets and on poetry in particular, even if not their own, it is as well to turn our attention to what they have to say. At the very least it is more than likely that we will find there some guidance as to what forms the context of the unspoken assumptions that have informed the poet's practice. Those very assumptions are, after all, the fertile soil into which the imagination sinks its roots. Such guidance is made all the more necessary when the vision of the poet in question runs counter to the expectations of the reader, referring as that vision may to areas of thoughts and knowledge that are unfamiliar to prevailing currents of literary value: even going so far as to challenge the very mental premises of the age to which they are addressed.

It is also likely that we will find in such a poet's essays a more explicit unveiling of those hidden assumptions as they inform the life-blood of the poet's imaginative energies, being there in a way more didactic than

is appropriate to the more symbolic resonances of metaphor and analogy of poetry as such. Such is the case with the work of Kathleen Raine.

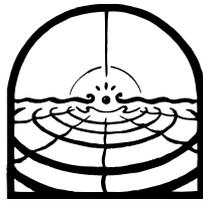


We are in need of a counterbalance. In a world that is in relentless pursuit of a quantitative evaluation of everything, an age that has forgotten that a phenomenal world necessarily entails a noumenal that is transcendent to it—a recognition that every existent being is the effect of a preceding cause—there must arise from time to time a voice to reaffirm the timeless, universal order that relates the one world to the other: joins the realm of ultimate principles to the manifest world where we find the embodied wisdom of our imaginative life in which things are known *sub specie aeternitatis*.

To read Kathleen Raine's essays is to find oneself negotiating a spiritual and intellectual landscape far removed from the preoccupations of what we currently think of as 'culture': those diminishing returns of 'self-expression' we call 'art' sustained by a new elite of purveyors and explainers of banality, anxious to convince us of its superiority to our common-sense reaction, in the face of it, of uncomprehending bewilderment. For this 'culture' the imaginative arts are limited to the expression of the mundane through personal emotion as having an exclusive claim to be the substance of art. What has become entrenched is the idea that the arts can no longer meaningfully relate to anything beyond such evidence as the senses might suggest. This follows from what has been the cumulative acceptance, based on the material sciences, that reality is in essence quantitative and that any appeal to a higher order of thought is at best mistaken, at worst amounts to a subversive heresy. It is a type of prejudice that chooses to ignore the obvious fact that it is in the intuition of conscious awareness, not itself available to scrutiny by means of reason or sensory knowledge, that we know all that we can know, and in which all things possess any reality they can be said to possess. All these diminishments Kathleen Raine's essays challenge head on.

How has this narrowing of the possible accomplishment of the arts as a depository of beauty and wisdom come about? In keeping with the order invoked in her essays it is necessary to recognise the metaphysical

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