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Kathleen Raine and the Symbolic Art*

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This essay was submitted to the original journal Temenos in 1989, but was not published on that occasion. Some might wonder why it is appearing now, and here. Why should a critique of the ideas underlying Kathleen Raine's poetic practice appear in the Temenos Academy Review—a periodical which she founded, and which is dedicated to upholding the values, and the vision, to which her life bore witness?

Philip Sherrard was one of the four founders of the first Temenos, and the editorial which he wrote for its inaugural issue remains a touchstone for the aims and ideals of the Academy. He was a close and treasured friend of Kathleen Raine's, and an exponent of the Sacred for whose learning, wisdom and courage she had the profoundest respect.

But, as the present essay testifies, he did not always agree with her—nor she with him. In conversations and letters down the years their ideas clashed repeatedly but never to the detriment of friendship, and often to the furthering of insight and understanding. The tension between these two remarkable minds, united in their devotion to that which is highest whatever their differences of perspective may have been, played an essential role in the shaping of Temenos.

The publication of these reflections now can be seen as a continuation of their dialogue, for the benefit of ourselves who remain behind. We are fortunate indeed to have such an essay, in which one of the founding spirits of Temenos engages so keenly and so candidly with questions of fundamental importance to our Academy; and in doing so invokes poems of profound and illuminating beauty. A later issue of the Review may include other thoughts, from another hand, concerning the problems considered here. This is how we all learn. Kathleen Raine herself, in dedicating her last book on Blake to Philip Sherrard and the other co-founders, quoted from the epic Jerusalem:

*I never made friends but by spiritual gifts,
By severe contentions of friendship & the burning fire of thought.*

* The editors are grateful to Denise Sherrard for permission to publish this essay, and to Genevieve Overy for having produced an electronic version of the original typescript.

Of all English poets writing today, Kathleen Raine is perhaps the one who has declared what she regards as the nature and function of true poetry most explicitly and who as a poet has set her sights the highest. This puts a particular obligation upon the critic: clearly he cannot begin to assess the poetry unless he first takes into account what the poet herself intends or aspires to fulfil in writing it. Until one knows what the poet is attempting to do, one cannot tell whether or not she has succeeded in doing it. As Dr Raine herself writes: 'I am one of those who hold the unfashionable belief that talent cannot make a poet, and that the *what* of art is more important than the *how* . . . Nor are all poetic ideas of equal value. Donne or Dryden cannot be as great as Milton or Dante because these poets do not attempt themes that bring into play so great a range of imaginative experience' (p. 15).¹ And elsewhere: 'In so little respect is this knowledge [knowledge of what the true poet intends] held that it seems to be assumed by many critics that what the poets meant scarcely matters, and that this poetry can be read without such knowledge, or in terms of some entirely different system of ideas' (p. 111). The message is clear: understanding of the poet's *ars poetica*, in the fullest sense, is a prerequisite of any meaningful appreciation of the poetry itself.

Dr Raine has written several books and papers in which the essential lineaments of her poetics are directly or indirectly articulated. In trying to clarify an understanding of her thought I have relied above all on a single work, *Defending Ancient Springs*, from which the above two quotations themselves are taken. I have done this for two main reasons. The first is that the essays in the book were written at a period when this thought had taken definitive shape in the poet's own mind. Dr Raine had already completed her monumental study on William Blake (although it was not in fact published until a year after *Defending Ancient Springs*); and it was through her study of Blake that, as she writes, 'I was led to discover the almost obliterated traces of the mode of thought which is, implicitly or explicitly, the foundation of all supreme imaginative art' (p. 110). This was because the study of Blake led her inevitably to those sources—Plato, Plotinus, Vedantic literature, Berkeley, Yeats's *A Vision*, Coomaraswamy, René Guénon—that, as she

1. All prose quotations in this paper written by Dr Raine are taken from her *Defending Ancient Springs* (OUP, 1957), and the number in brackets after each quotation refers to the page on which it occurs in this edition of the work. A reprint was published in 1985 by the Golgonooza Press.

writes, 'I needed in order to discover the first principles of the kind of poetry I instinctively recognized as such' (p. 107).

Hence, although Kathleen Raine may subsequently have altered an emphasis here and there, and deepened her understanding of certain central concepts (particularly through her later reading of the works of Henry Corbin), the fundamental statement of her *ars poetica* in this work may be said to represent her thought in a mature and coherent form. The second main reason for confining myself to this particular work is the purely practical one that it is readily available to the reader who may wish both to check my own appraisal of its philosophy in this respect and to deepen his own understanding of it.

What type of poet, then, does Dr Raine aspire to be? Perhaps we can best begin this enquiry by identifying two types of poet that she does not aspire to be. First, Dr Raine emphatically distinguishes her values and intentions from those effective for many poets writing at the present time. 'At the present time,' she observes, 'much that is called poetry is little more than the autobiography of the artist; it is critical fashion to discount the imagination and to make "sincere" feelings or "realistic" description the test of merit' (p. 3). And again: 'The description of sense impressions or personal emotions, or the evocation of group emotions, is assumed, by many writers of the present time, to be the purpose of poetry' (p. 108). This is to say that Dr Raine resolutely takes her stand against those critics and practitioners of art who regard art as some form of individual self-expression, the expression 'of the shabby mortal individuality which refers everything in heaven and earth to its own responses' (p. 19). Consequently she aligns herself with those poets who speak 'from beyond the human personality, from that life of which the individual man is no more than a form or an organ' (p. 15). She would wish her poetry to be patent to the kind of remark that she herself makes about the poetry of David Gascoyne, that 'in his writings there is (whenever he has achieved what he has at all times attempted) little or nothing that is personal' (p. 36).

This means also that Dr Raine does not aspire to be a religious poet, at least in the sense that the devotional poets of the seventeenth century, or Manley Hopkins, are religious poets. She regards the religious experience of such poets as 'self-centred', though 'in no moral or pejorative sense' (p. 15), such as might apply to the writers of the present time to whom she refers above. Presumably the devotional poets of the seventeenth century are self-centred because the drama

of which they write is that of the individual human being—‘the shabby mortal individuality’—confronting his destiny in terms of his personal relationship with God: their poetry is essentially a dialogue between man and God. For Dr Raine, as we shall see, such a dialogue is precluded because her experience of a supra-individual world is equated, not with the experience of God as a trans-psychic reality, but with the experience of the soul. Hence there can be no drama between the individual human soul and the God that it pursues or by whom it is pursued: nothing that corresponds to the action of *The Song of Songs*, or of the poetry of St John of the Cross, or of *The Hound of Heaven*, or even to the poetry of the seventeenth-century devotional poets.

The type of poetry that Dr Raine aspires to write is consequently of a character different from that of these two types of poetry of which we have just been speaking. It is allied to the symbolic art in which she recognizes the distinguishing quality of all true and great art. This in itself may appear to beg the question, or simply to reflect the kind of aesthetics proposed by the symbolist poets, or by the surrealists, or by T. E. Hulme and Herbert Read, from which Dr Raine explicitly dissociates herself. But set within the context within which Dr Raine sets it it takes on quite another meaning.

This context is the doctrine of the law of correspondences as understood in metaphysical tradition. For an authoritative statement of the law Dr Raine cites the metaphysician René Guénón: ‘By virtue of this law, each thing, proceeding as it does from a metaphysical principle from which it derives all its reality, translates or expresses that principle in its own fashion and in accordance with its own order of existence, so that from one order to another all things are linked together and correspond in such a way as to contribute to the universal and total harmony, which, in the multiplicity of manifestation, can be likened to a manifestation of the principal unity itself. For this reason the laws of the lower domain can always be taken to symbolize realities of a higher order, wherein resides their own profoundest cause, which is at once their principle and their end’ (cited p. 112). Or, as Dr Raine elsewhere summarizes: ‘The created world is, at every level, a manifestation (and therefore symbol) of anterior causes’ (p. 70); and hence ‘the symbol—and poetry in the full sense is symbolic discourse, discourse by analogy—has as its primary purpose the evocation of one plane [of reality] in terms of another’ (p. 108).

Yet if poetry in the full sense ‘is symbolic discourse, discourse by

analogy', this does not mean that the poet can employ any symbol, any image, and simply hope that because he uses it it will function as a means through which higher planes of reality are evoked. On the contrary, all great poets 'speak with the same symbolic language and discourse of the immemorial world of the imagination' (p. 94). In other words, there is a universal language of intrinsically intelligible symbols, and it is these symbols that constitute what Blake calls 'the language of divine analogy'. It follows that if the artist is to produce a work of art that is to fulfil the function of truly symbolic art, he has first to learn this language. He has to acquire a knowledge—a metaphysical knowledge—that will allow him to read it. As Dr Raine remarks, 'the idea of the metaphysical is . . . implicit in the very figures of symbolic discourse' (p. 109).

Such knowledge, 'unknown to textual scholars and literary historians', is a 'learning of the imagination' (p. 69). It is the 'exact knowledge' that Yeats speaks of as informing his pursuit of the meaning of Blake's symbolism, and to which he possessed the key from his studies of theosophy, the Cabala and Swedenborg (p. 69). Where Europe is concerned, Dr Raine continues, this knowledge is 'embodied and transmitted principally within that tradition which descended through Orphism to Plato, to the Neoplatonists and Gnostic sects, and to their successors both within Christendom (Dionysius the Areopagite and Dante were of them) and outside it. It is the language of Alchemy and of the Cabala, and of all allied ways of thought . . . It is the language of symbolic art; or one might say rather that symbolic art is the natural language of such thought. The measure of its exactness is its conformity to the spiritual knowledge of the Perennial Philosophy. Just as the terms of mathematics must remain meaningless to those who do not comprehend number, so this symbolic language must remain forever hidden from those for whom its universe of discourse is as if non-existent' (p. 70). Indeed, Dr Raine concludes, 'a revival of the learning of the imagination, and especially in the works of Plato and the Neoplatonists, has been the inspiration not only of the Florentine renaissance and all that followed (in England and elsewhere) but of every subsequent renaissance' (p. 110).

So far this exposition of Dr Raine's poetics has been plain sailing. At this point, however, the waters become, not deeper perhaps, but more troubled, for the exposition seems to part company with Platonic and Neoplatonic doctrine. So far we have established that the foundation

of all true art is a universal symbolic language, this language is 'the great symbolic language of tradition' (p. 13), and that we can acquire the exact knowledge needed to decipher it from studying the works of those who possess 'the higher faculty of immediate perception of intelligibles' (p. 118) and so have thus penetrated its inner meaning. Indeed, the measure of this language, and hence a condition of its use in art if it is to fulfil its function, is 'its conformity to the spiritual knowledge of the Perennial Philosophy': 'without knowledge of this mind and access to its fountains,' Dr Raine writes, 'no true poetry can be written' (p. 20).

Thus there would seem to be two inter-related and yet distinct orders or categories of things—and this would accord with Platonic and Neoplatonic doctrine. There is the world of universal symbols and this is the world of the imagination—the world of the psyche, the *Anima Mundi* or Jung's 'collective unconscious', for Dr Raine equates them all (p. 3); and there is the world of intelligible realities, of metaphysical or theological meanings, in the light of which the significance and intelligibility of the symbols themselves can be understood, this being a pre-condition of using them in accordance with the analogical virtue that is inherent in them. Dr Raine acknowledges this dual order of things when she writes: 'If the psyche reflects figures which on another level contain theological and metaphysical meanings (as Sallust and all traditional definitions would say . . .) it remains true that the figures themselves take form in the psyche' (p. 126). Indeed, were this not the case (were there not these two orders) there would be no need to obtain an 'exact knowledge' of the symbols by studying the thought of Plato, the Neoplatonists, and so on: one would simply use symbols as the surrealists used them, in such a way that they 'do not relate one order of reality to another, still less are they orientated to any source or principle' (p. 113). Neither could symbolic art be described, as Dr Raine does describe it, as the natural language of such thought. What the understanding of the generation in which she was brought up lacked, Dr Raine specifies, 'is, in the metaphysical sense, intellectuality' (p. 108).

If on the universal plane there are these two orders, it would follow—again in accordance with Platonic and Neoplatonic teaching—that they are reflected in two faculties of cognition on the individual human plane. To the world of the universal imagination, the *Anima Mundi*, would correspond the faculty of the human imagination, or the human soul; and to the world of intelligible realities would correspond

what Dr Raine calls 'the higher faculty of the immediate perception of intelligibles', or in Platonic and Neoplatonic terms the *nous* or intellect. It is through the exercise of the first that we evoke the symbols in our own psyche; it is through the exercise of the second that we obtain the knowledge through which we can order the symbols according to what Blake calls the order of eternity (p. 12), so that they will function in our art in an initiatory manner. As Dr Raine writes, 'A characteristic of [symbolic] poetry is the presence of some organizing idea which can only be appraised poetically, some true cosmic or metaphysical apprehension of what Coleridge calls "the eternal in and through the temporal"' (p. 28). And what is quite unambiguously explicit in this understanding of things is that the imagination, as the soul's organ of cognition and vision, is in its own right and through its own natural powers incapable of knowing and perceiving the realities of the intelligible and spiritual order.

Yet although these distinctions would appear to be crucial to Dr Raine's understanding of true symbolic art and its function, they are sometimes so obscured that they disappear altogether, and another conception of things takes their place, in which the two orders seem to coalesce and coincide. Thus after listing a number of traditional symbols (world-tree, birds of the soul, sun, moon, river and so on) and emphasizing that 'knowledge of these symbols is essentially a kind of learning, but it is the learning of the imagination' (p. 13), she goes on to say, with reference to the poet Edwin Muir, that he 'came to the great source of vision without this learning, with little knowledge of traditional forms' (p. 13). Does this mean that he tapped the reservoir of analogical symbols in the *Anima Mundi* without having first to be made aware of their existence through contact with some tradition, as Yeats, for instance, was initially made aware of them through his contact with Irish peasant tradition? Or does it mean that he not only tapped this reservoir instinctively, so to say, but also came to possess an 'exact knowledge' of the metaphysical meaning of the symbols that he there confronted without having to study—as Yeats, and Dr Raine herself, did have to study—the 'monuments of unageing intellect' in which this meaning is enshrined?

Similarly, in writing of the poetry of Vernon Watkins, Dr Raine comments: 'But one may guess that it was not by way of learning of this kind [study of the Perennial Philosophy in one form or another] that the initiatory knowledge of the poet came to him first; but rather,

as he implies, by way of the vital memory of the Welsh Bardic tradition. This tradition transmits, as surely as Plato or Coleridge or Blake, the doctrine of poetic inspiration' (p. 20). Here it seems to be affirmed that it is the initiatory knowledge itself, and not simply an awareness of the universal symbols, that is 'inspired' by way of the vital memory of the Welsh Bardic tradition, without any conscious learning; though a couple of pages later Dr Raine might appear to contradict that interpretation when she writes, 'There is doubtless an esoteric meaning within the Bardic tradition which is perhaps not to be understood apart from Druid learning perpetuated presumably in the Taliesin poems' (p. 22); for this would seem to imply that you cannot possess an initiatory knowledge of the universal symbols handed down by tradition unless you are first initiated—intellectually initiated—into their esoteric meaning. That this is in fact the case might seem to be confirmed by a poet as great as Dante himself who—although born and brought up within an environment of living and numinous universal symbols such as no modern poet can claim as his birthright—put himself through an intensive discipline of intellectual learning—of initiation into their esoteric meaning—before he presumed to use these symbols in his poetry.

This ambiguity—that appears like a departure from the Perennial Philosophy in any form, Platonic, Christian, or Vedantic—is reflected in, or perhaps one should say is an expression of, an ambiguity in the use of the key word in Dr Raine's whole *ars poetica*, the word 'imagination' itself. As we have seen, Dr Raine equates the imagination with the psyche, the *Anima Mundi*, Blake's world of the Imagination, and Jung's 'collective unconscious' (she also identifies it with Plato's world of Ideas, but this surely, however indicative, is a slip, for Plato's world of Ideas is clearly not a psychic world, at least in Plato's own teaching). This of course denotes the imagination as a universal category, not as an individuated human faculty, although the distinction between the two—if there is one—is never specified, and there are occasions when 'imagination' is clearly used with reference to the individuated human faculty without any qualification being made. This in itself is confusing, because while the imaginative world, as a universal category, is said to be 'outside time' (p. 121) and 'outside history altogether' (p. 121), the human imagination is by definition in time and in history, at least until it becomes so integrated with the universal imagination that they coalesce altogether and inseparably (their temporary integration

in the artist is of course a condition of his being able to produce a work of symbolic art at all).

Yet the ambiguity to which I refer resides not so much in this as in something that would appear to have more drastic consequences. Among the categories with which Dr Raine identifies the imagination is Blake's world of the Imagination. What is this world? According to Dr Raine, Blake, taking from Boehme the definition of the divine Logos as 'the imagination of God', names the Eternal Christ 'Jesus the Imagination' (p. 59). I do not know what German word used by Boehme is here translated as 'imagination', nor do I know what Boehme meant when he defines the Logos (the second Person of the Christian Trinity) as 'the imagination of God'. Of what, though, I am quite certain is that in terms of Christian doctrine itself the phrase, 'the imagination of God', could have meaning only in one specific sense. The Logos, the only-begotten Son of the Father, is the image (*eikona*-icon) of the Father. At the same time, in the Logos are contained all the *logoi*, the divine essences of divine Names, that are the causal principles of all that comes into existence. These causal principles thus not only are embraced 'in the image of God' (that is to say, in the Logos) but also themselves constitute 'images' of the Logos. It is in this sense, and in this sense alone, that the Logos could be said to constitute 'the imagination of God', as the *locus* within which the divine images of created things are determined. This, *mutatis mutandis*, could also be made to accord with Neoplatonic doctrine, for it is in the Divine Intellect (*Nous*), first determination and only-begotten Son of the One, that are determined the causal principles, the divine images, of all that is sequent to the Intellect.

Yet if in this sense the divine Logos could be described as 'the imagination of God'—and it may have been with this sense in mind that Boehme himself used the phrase—so that in this sense one could also call the Eternal Christ 'Jesus the Imagination', in no sense at all, either within the Christian or within the Neoplatonic perspective, can the imagination, in this context, be equated with the psyche, or the *Anima Mundi*, or the world of imaginative symbols, or with Jung's 'collective unconscious', which are the categories with which Dr Raine does equate it. To start with, the divine Logos—the Eternal Christ—is not a psychic entity: He is a spiritual or intelligible entity—the Divine Intellect—and the world of divine images that He embraces is a world of celestial Intelligences, not of psychic figures or symbols. Indeed, the

figures and symbols that take form in the psychic world—in the *Anima Mundi*—are precisely images on the lower plane of the imagination of the celestial Intelligences themselves, and it is by virtue of their being such images that they are symbols. But to confuse or conflate these two planes of reality—the intelligible or spiritual and the psychic—and hence to identify the Eternal Christ with the psychic world of imaginative symbols or with the *Anima Mundi* is to disrupt the hierarchic order of things in a manner for which no warranty can be found in any form of the Perennial Philosophy, least of all in its Platonic, Neoplatonic or Christian form.

Yet it is a confusion or conflation such as this that Dr Raine does appear to make. Hence she virtually dispenses with the idea that a true knowledge of the meaning of imaginative symbols, and thus of their creative use in art as analogues or correspondences through which the lower can be linked with the higher, visible with invisible, created with the uncreated, is a function of the intellect and depends upon a prior knowledge of the intelligible world in which these symbols themselves have their origin. Instead, she substitutes for this idea the idea that the soul itself is a self-determining principle capable in its own right and through its own unaided powers of discerning the meaning of such symbols and so of determining their hieratic deployment in the forms of art. Thus she writes that 'the living imagination alone has the key to the meaning of traditional symbols' (p. 119); and elsewhere that now the 'modern movement' has disintegrated the soul must discover the 'principle of order' in itself (p. 127).

This means that ultimately the soul is judge in its own cause: it recognizes no higher principle or order—no body of spiritual knowledge—in accordance with which it must establish its own order and *a fortiori* the ordering of the symbols of which it makes use in the forms of art so that they function in conformity to the law of correspondences. Indeed, in these circumstances it is difficult to see what are the criteria according to which the individual artist does order his symbols, or even is able to distinguish between the images and figures that enter his imagination from the *Anima Mundi* and those that enter it from a source whose intention is to disintegrate and pervert rather than the opposite. To claim that the soul relying solely on its own light instinctively knows when it is inspired 'from above' and when 'from below' would seem to be contradicted by too many examples to the contrary to stand as more than an affirmation of an exception to the

rule. In any case, to evoke figures and images from the *Anima Mundi* in ignorance of and apart from the intelligible reality in which they are founded, and by which they should be controlled, is to invite them to operate both in the individual human psyche and in the collective psyche of a particular society in ways that lead to disintegration and even to destruction. Conrad's Mr Kurtz is a vivid example of the consequences of such evocation, not to mention many historical movements of our own time, not least that represented by Hitler's Nazi-ism.

This apparent deviation from the norms of a wisdom whose cause she elsewhere pleads so eloquently has repercussions in Dr Raine's appraisal of the position in which the artist who aspires to be a symbolic artist finds himself or herself in the contemporary world. In the past the great religious traditions have embodied the treasury of myth and symbol whose language, told and retold in the arts of painting, sculpture, dance and poetry, has constituted a common language intelligible to all—intelligible to all because the knowledge needed to read it has been imparted by the religious traditions themselves. Because of this, tradition and vision have gone hand in hand—there is no gulf between them (p. 119): on the contrary, 'the traditional symbols have at all times been the teachers of the imagination' (p. 137), and the 'learning of the imagination' constitutes 'the literature of Tradition' (p. 95).

All this, Dr Raine affirms, is no longer the case: the 'order of eternity' has now given place to the 'chaos' of individual experience (p. 12). Whether 'we have lost our sense of that order because we have let go of the myths that best embody it, or . . . have relinquished the myths because we have lost sight of the order they exist to make known' (p. 12), the result is the same: 'the myths have lost their hold over the imagination' (p. 136). Where England and the West generally are concerned, responsibility for this loss of mythological and metaphysical consciousness is attributed above all to the advent of Protestantism: 'Iconoclastic Protestantism largely destroyed, in England, the images which had always been, and must normally be, the natural language of spiritual knowledge' (p. 118), Dr Raine writes; and again: 'England seems to have lost her supernatural population, for the most part, about the time of the Reformation' (p. 129). 'The neglect of the importance . . . of the perennial wisdom in its European guise of Neoplatonism,' she notes, 'is a reflection of the metaphysical ignorance of the post-Protestant West' (p. 94),

Thus it is Christianity itself, at least in its Protestant form, that has helped to obscure 'a culture of knowledge' of which it had been the bearer and with which it had nourished the great Christian civilization of medieval Europe; and it had done this by taking 'the bias of a temporal pragmatism' (pp. 118–19). 'If it has become difficult to use Christian canonical symbolism,' Dr Raine writes, 'may it not be precisely in so far as the canonical symbols have come to participate in history, in the temporal, that they are unusable?' (p. 122).

The argument is not entirely easy to follow. Dr Raine fully accords with Coleridge's description of the symbol as characterized by 'the Translucence of the Eternal in and through the Temporal' (p. 113), which would seem to imply that a symbol, to be a symbol, must by definition participate in the temporal. This implication is reinforced when she states unequivocally that 'the symbol is . . . itself rooted in nature' (p. 191), as it is also by what she writes to the effect that 'symbolic images come, of necessity, from the perceptible world; for this world is, in the nature of things, and unalterably, the "given", inseparable from our human nature as incarnate beings; all the knowledge of the soul must come to it in terms of this world of embodiment' (p. 115)—that is to say in terms of the world that by definition exists only in the temporal and the historical dimension. Why, then, Christian symbols should lose their usability because they participate in the temporal and historical—which, by definition, according to Dr Raine, all symbols must do—is not at once evident. Moreover, three contemporary poets that Dr Raine particularly admires—Edwin Muir, Vernon Watkins and David Gascoyne—are, as she acknowledges, Christian poets who do make use of Christian symbolism: indeed Dr Raine particularly stresses that Edwin Muir became a Christian 'by convergence of symbol, not . . . by subscription to doctrine' (p. 12). In any case, genuine traditional symbols can never lose their potency; and if one finds it difficult to relate and respond to them that is ultimately because one is not inwardly attuned to the metaphysical or spiritual realities to which they correspond.

In spite of this, Dr Raine's conclusion is that, although there are still poets who are able to use the Christian symbols in a living way, 'it becomes increasingly difficult to know what is our own, still more to know what is communicable to readers no less eclectic than ourselves. In such uncertainty we can be certain only of what to other periods seemed the least certain of all symbols—those of our own dreams and

visions. These, and not the cult, have become the touchstone of truth' (p. 137). And she continues: 'If the present use of symbolism can no longer be in the form of old religious myths, we must, knowing as we now do that the mythological order is an interior order, follow those figures who were at one time objectified in the cults of the old religions, into their own country. Into that interior world the figures of the gods and their myths have withdrawn, drawing after them the old cults, there to renew their immortality by re-immersion in the source: which has at all times been the only source of the life of the cults themselves' (p. 138). She has herself, she affirms, 'rediscovered the power of ancient symbols through a renewed contact with the source' (p. 137).

Again the argument is not entirely easy to follow. First of all, where the 'old religions' are concerned, the cult has never been 'the touchstone of truth': the touchstone of truth is, as Dr Raine elsewhere acknowledges, the tradition itself, 'which recognizes a difference between knowledge and ignorance' and 'which cannot come to terms with a world in which there are no longer any standards by which truth and falsehood may be distinguished' (p. 34). The standards by which truth and falsehood may be distinguished are of course enshrined in the doctrine of the religion in question, or in the Perennial Philosophy in the particular doctrinal form of that religion. Dr Raine is ill at ease with doctrine, and tends to regard it as constrictive of the imagination: she contrasts Edwin Muir as a Christian poet 'by convergence of symbol' with T. S. Eliot as a Christian poet 'by subscription to doctrine', adding that Muir's wine 'could never be measured in any pint-pot of orthodoxy' (p. 12) – forgetting it seems for the moment that it was in such a pot that Dante 'measured' his *Divina Commedia* and that the architects of Aghia Sophia, Chartres, and the other great cathedrals of Europe 'measured' their artefacts; forgetting, too, that you can reject one kind of orthodoxy only in the name of another kind. And elsewhere she writes: 'the knowledge which myths and dreams alike mediate and embody is not conceptual knowledge; in symbols the soul can speak, but not the discursive reason' (p. 127) – forgetting here it seems both that the reason is also a faculty of the soul and that in all the 'old religions' conceptual knowledge is essentially a support and complement to, not at cross-purposes with, the 'learning of the imagination'. Also it is not clear why what to other periods 'seemed the least certain of all symbols – those of our own dreams and

visions' have now, in our times been transformed into the touchstone of truth itself.

Yet more basic appears to be the contradiction between this conclusion—that 'the present use of symbolism can no longer be in the form of old religious myths'—and all that Dr Raine has maintained in the main thesis of her *ars poetica* as this has been outlined in the opening pages of my account of it. The 'learning of the imagination' is, Dr Raine there affirms, an immemorial wisdom embodied and transmitted principally, where Europe is concerned, in and through the tradition or traditions she specifies, and whose touchstone is 'conformity to the spiritual knowledge of the Perennial Philosophy'. As such it is available to all who will take the trouble to study it and who accept the conditions through which it can be learnt; and she adduces Blake and Yeats as two poets who have done precisely this in order to produce their symbolic poetry. Even in the case of a lesser poet, Vernon Watkins, who drew on the symbols of the Welsh bardic tradition, itself essentially Druidic, the same applies; and Dr Raine confirms that 'it is certainly true that, while loaded with the riches of the past, these symbols are no less appropriate to the present' (p. 22). Why, then, has all this suddenly ceased to be applicable, to the extent that the contemporary symbolic artist must rely now not on 'the great symbolic language of tradition' (p. 13), but on his or her own private dreams and visions, these having become the touchstone of their own truth quite apart from whether or not they conform to the spiritual knowledge of the Perennial Philosophy and to the law of correspondences to which this philosophy provides the key?

I think the way in which Dr Raine has reached this conclusion, even if it appears to contradict the major premisses of her philosophy of poetry, is implicit in what I have already said about the manner in which she seems to confuse, or conflate, the two planes of reality—the intelligible or spiritual and the psychic, the world of the celestial Intelligences and the world of the imagination. If you think that the soul is a self-determining principle (p. 127) and is in itself, by virtue of its own unaided natural powers, capable not only of knowing the intrinsic intelligible meaning of the symbols that arise within it, but also of deploying these symbols in the forms of art according to the metaphysical law of correspondences on which the harmony of the universe, and man's own interior harmony, depend, then of course the soul is equally capable of producing a genuine symbolic art simply by,

as it were, being obedient to itself and to its own promptings, without any reference to any transcendent or supra-psychic order or principle or to any metaphysical doctrine in which the knowledge of this order or principle has been enshrined.

This means that the soul can dispense not only with God as a transcendent and supra-psychic principle, as well as with the whole intelligible order that pertains to Him, but also with the religious forms, doctrinal and symbolic, in which the spiritual knowledge of this principle and order is incorporated. Only if the soul by virtue of its own unaided natural powers *cannot* know the intrinsic intelligible meaning of the symbols or the metaphysical law of correspondences according to which they must be deployed if they are to constitute an authentic symbolic art, but is dependent for such knowledge on a knowledge of God and the intelligible order attained either through direct perception of these realities or through the doctrine of a metaphysical tradition through which it is mediated, is this latter knowledge indispensable for the symbolic artist.

Dr Raine, in order to reach the conclusion she has reached, clearly must align herself with the first of these alternatives, even if it appears to contradict what she affirms elsewhere. And she is able to do this, in spite of the contradiction that it appears to involve, because she has invested the psyche with the status of the divine Logos. This in its turn she has been able to do because she has assumed that the meaning that the word 'imagination' has for Boehme and Blake when they speak of the imagination of God and of Jesus the Imagination is equivalent to that which it has for her when she equates the imagination with the *Anima Mundi* or Jung's 'collective unconscious', and that this gives her the authority, so to speak, to equate the Eternal Christ with these latter psychic categories. But if you do make this equation, then the divine Logos Himself—God Himself—becomes automatically for you the determining principle of the soul not as a transcendent and supra-psychic principle but as endemic to and connatural with the soul itself; and the world of the eternal *logoi*, of the divine images or Names that the Logos embraces, ceases to be regarded as a reality that the imagination, as the soul's organ of cognition and vision, cannot know or perceive through its own unaided natural powers, and is seen instead as identified with the world of symbols and symbolic forms embraced by the psyche itself.

This is to say that the soul is now regarded as deiform or divinized

not by virtue of participation in a principle that in itself transcends it, but in its own right and because it is in itself its own divine principle, the divine Logos, Jesus the Imagination. Hence, too, what issues from the soul in the forms of dreams and visions is *ipso facto* regarded as graced with the soul's 'naked numinosity' (p. 132)—informed, that is to say, by the soul's connatural and endemic ordering and organizing principle, the divine Logos. Consequently it is itself the touchstone of its own truth, and there is no need for it to conform to any Perennial Philosophy, still less to the canonical tradition, doctrinal or symbolic, of any particular religion, for it to function in accordance with the metaphysical law of correspondences and so to fulfil its analogical role in an authentic work of symbolic art. In other words, the soul is regarded to all intents and purposes as a self-sufficient autonomous principle, absolute mistress in its own house—in fact, master and mistress, since the Logos—the Eternal Christ—is connatural with it. It alone 'sees things as they really are' (p. 113), and to it alone is attributed the capacity to act not only as the formative agent of the symbols it uses in its art but also as the discriminatory organ of their intelligible and analogical meaning.

These distinctions and qualifications may appear to be of such an abstract and theoretical nature that they amount to no more than philosophical nit-picking or hair-splitting, of little or no relevance where the actual fabric of Dr Raine's poetry is concerned. Yet, as pointed out in the opening paragraph of this study, precisely such an assessment of what the poet regards as the nature and function of the type of poetry that he or she intends or aspires to write has to be made before one is in a position to talk of the poetry itself in any meaningful way: as Dr Raine affirms, poetic practice cannot be detached from the view of things in which it is grounded (p. 191); and in fact, as we shall see when we turn to the poetry itself, this seemingly abstruse analysis of her poetics is of immediate relevance in determining the sphere within which the poetry operates and the essential significance and achievement of its communication.

The ground, then, on which Dr Raine takes her stand is the ground of the soul; and given that every poet—every poet, that is to say, for whom myth and symbol, in the sense attributed to them above, and the realities in which they are founded, constitute the essential matter of poetry—tends to make one symbolic theme, or some few symbolic

themes, especially his own, it is hardly accidental that Dr Raine should have chosen to make her own, or have been chosen by what is perhaps the archetypal myth of the soul in the treasury of Platonic and Neoplatonic tradition: the myth of the descent of the soul from its native realm into an alien and hostile world, and its final return to the land of its origin.

In its classic form—which again is re-enacted in Dr Raine's reliving of it (because such myths have to be relived—re-experienced—by the artist before they can become the living matter of his art, for otherwise they are lifeless and academic)—it is the myth of Demeter and Persephone, of mother and daughter: of the daughter's defection and estrangement from the maternal source of life, and of the mother's search to find her and to restore her to her native heritage. Although this myth is not, for reasons that cannot be gone into here, part and parcel of Christian mythology (which may help to explain Dr Raine's lack of accord with the metaphysics of Christian myth), in her articulation of it it is interwoven with elements from this mythology that can readily be assimilated to it, namely above all the myth of the fall from and return to Paradise.

It is also linked in Dr Raine's case with a bias (if that is the word) that it does not possess in its Platonic and Neoplatonic form, and that is not present either in the Christian myth of the loss and regaining of Paradise. This bias might be said to be peculiarly English, in that it appears to have been given more vivid expression in English poetry (particularly perhaps in the poetry of Traherne and Wordsworth) than in any other poetry with which I am familiar. It consists of equating the vision of Paradise with the vision of childhood, so that the regaining of Paradise in its turn is equated with the regaining of the vision of childhood. This may tend to give it what might be regarded as a certain naturalistic bent—to link it with the child's experience of nature and the natural world—that would not perhaps find its equivalent in the interpretation of the myth according to Neoplatonic doctrine. Thus:

Do you remember, when you were first a child,
Nothing in the world seemed strange to you?
You perceived, for the first time, shapes already familiar,
And seeing, you knew that you had always known
The lichen on the rock, fern-leaves, the flowers of thyme,

As if the elements newly met in your body,
 Caught up into the momentary vortex of your living
 Still kept the knowledge of a former state,
 In you retained recollection of cloud and ocean,
 The branching tree, the dancing flame. (p. 99)²

Or:

Then, I had no doubt
 That snowdrops, violets, all creatures, I myself
 Were lovely, were loved, were love.
 Look, they said,
 And I had only to look deep into the heart,
 Dark, deep into the violet, and there read,
 Before I knew of any word for flower or love,
 The flower, the love, the word.

They never wearied of telling their being; and I
 Asked of the rose, only more rose, the violet
 More violet; untouched by time
 No flower withered or flame died,
 But poised in its own eternity, until the looker moved
 On to another flower, opening its entity. (p. 85)

Or, from a poem entitled 'Childhood':

I see all, am all, all.
 I leap along the line of the horizon hill,
 I am a cloud in the high sky,
 I trace the vein of intricate fern.
 In the dark ivy wall the wren's world
 Soft to bird breast of round eggs is mine,
 Mine in the rowan-tree the blackbird's thought
 Inviolate in leaves ensphered.

2. [Here and below, Philip Sherrard supplied references to Kathleen Raine's *Selected Poems* (Golgonooga Press, 1988). These have where possible been changed so as to refer to *The Collected Poems of Kathleen Raine* (Golgonooga Press, 2000): the definitive and also the most readily accessible collection (Ed.).]

I am bird-world, leaf-life, I am wasp-world hung
 Under low berry-branch of hidden thorn,
 Friable paper-world humming with hate,
 Moss-thought, rain-thought, stone still thought on the hill.

(pp. 157-8)

Yet one must be careful not to identify this visionary state, this state of oneness with the whole world of creaturely life, with the state of childhood simply in the literal autobiographical sense. Dr Raine is not a 'nature' poet in this Wordsworthian sense, or indeed in any of the senses usually attributed to the designation. She might be described as an animist poet, if by 'animism' is understood the doctrine that all phenomenal life is the product of an immaterial *anima*, or soul, distinct from matter, and thus pre-supposes the reality of the *Anima Mundi*. For what is being described in these citations is the state of the individuated human soul when it is still 'in its mother's bower': it is the vision of Persephone when she is still at one with Demeter, the higher visionary principle, the *Anima Mundi* itself. It is then that the soul is young, is in a state of childhood, sees with and through the vision of the *Anima Mundi*. And since all things in the creaturely world have their imaginative analogues in the *Anima Mundi*, and these analogues are the inner reality of which all things in the creaturely world are the semblances, or 'signatures', it follows that the soul still at one with the source—with the mother, the *Anima Mundi*—is by virtue of that union also at one with all things in the creaturely world, identified with their inner reality.

The child, in the literal sense of the word, may also share in that union, because it is still newly born from the *Anima Mundi* and still retains its recollection of its original state and still has not lost the vision that goes with it: 'shades of the prison-house' have not yet fallen densely enough to obscure or obliterate it. It is because of this that the pilgrimage of the lapsed soul—of the soul that has committed 'the crime of being born' and has entered the world of generation—to recover its original state of vision can be seen as a search simultaneously to recover the lost state of childhood and to find the face it had before the world was born: the two amount to the same thing, for both pertain to the soul's eternal dayspring, its eternal youthfulness. It is thus that the poet can write:

Gladly I would be again
 Where I began,
 Undone the years between.

Flowers in this summer bloom
 Now as before all to come,
 All that has been.

O my wandering soul
 Are you still
 One who before my days was beautiful?³

Yet over the soul's original vision the shades of the prison-house do begin to fall—begin to fall indeed by virtue of the very fact that the soul enters the world of generation, that it vests itself in human clay, puts on 'This shabby menial self, and life-long time . . .' (p. 163).

This is Persephone's defection and estrangement from her mother, the soul's lapse from the *Anima Mundi*. And once again one must be careful, in reading this poetry, not to identify the 'mother' who is one of its main *personae* too literally with the poet's mother simply in the biological sense: the poet is not recording fragments of her own personal autobiography. The 'mother' may also be the poet's own mother in the biological sense, but if this is the case it is only in so far as she does herself symbolize with the eternal Mother, the *Anima Mundi*, only in so far as her own soul and being are themselves rooted in that more-than-human, more-than-mortal state. In fact it is only by virtue of such assimilation to her archetype—only in so far as she enshrines the universal principle of motherhood itself—that the 'mother' in the biological sense becomes 'mother' in the full meaning of the word. It is with these connotations in mind that one must read a poem which, like the following, is the individuated human soul's confession of its defection from its original source:

Finding in a friend's garden columbines
 It was as if they were those my mother grew,
 And above all those coloured like a shell
 Of rosy pearl seemed hers,

3. *Selected Poems*, p. 127; not included in the *Collected Poems*.

Returned, in all their freshness, from her garden
 To remind me of, it should have been, happy days
 When I was sheltered by her love and shared her flowers.
 But by the vague bitter sorrow that arose
 Out of the shadowy present of the past
 I knew that it had not been so.
 Wilful and unloving had been the daughter
 My mother made, and all her flowers in vain
 Offering her life to mine.
 What did I hope to find when I turned away from her
 Towards a cold future, now my sum of years,
 From the unprized only love earth had for me,
 Demeter's for her lost Persephone. (pp. 252-3)

This wilfulness of the soul that leads it into the world of exile is as enigmatic as the problem of evil itself. All that can be said is what Plato taught:

That we ourselves have chosen what will befall.
 In the Book of the Dead, the people of dreams,
 By will and by compulsion drawn to birth
 Live as punishment what each to live desires:
 We are ourselves the evil dreams we suffer – (p. 114)

lost travellers all; and in that life we dream

Is monster in the labyrinth of each soul its own being (p. 113)

and:

Our words keep no faith with the soul of the world. (p. 124)

In this state of exile, all those forms of creaturely life, each 'poised in its own eternity', in which the childhood vision had perceived images of Paradise, even Paradise itself, are now seen:

. . . across a void
 Wider and deeper than time and space.
 All that I have come to be
 Lies between my heart and the rose,

The flame, the bird, the blade of grass.
 The flowers are veiled;
 And in a shadow-world, appearances
 Pass across a great *toile vide*
 Where the image flickers, vanishes,
 Where nothing is, but only seems. (p. 85)

At the extreme limits of self-estrangement, of loss of self-identity, the soul enters absolute wilderness, a state of virtual self-negation and dereliction:

Here we are come
 To the worst. Look down
 That chasm where all has fallen,
 The rose-bush and the garden
 And the ancestral hills,
 Every remembered stone.
 Of that first house
 There is no trace, none.
 You'll never cross that burn
 Again, nor the white strand
 Where lifted from the deep
 Shells lie upon the sand
 Or among sea-pinks blown,
 Never hear again
 Those wild sea-voices call,
 Eider and gull rejoicing.
 Turn away, turn
 From the closed door of home,
 You live there no longer,
 Nor shall again.
 You have no place at all
 Anywhere on earth
 That is your own, and none
 Calls you back again. (p. 105)

This last counsel of despair—that ‘none calls you back again’—is in fact a denial of the reality of things; because whether we like it or not, or know it or not, our soul is always being called back, is always

sought for: Demeter never abandons Persephone, the mother her daughter, however far into the world of illusion and negation the latter may flee: always is she present, summoning, beseeching:

Look, beloved child, into my eyes, see there
 Your self, mirrored in that living water
 From whose deep pools all images of earth are born.
 See, in the gaze that holds you dear
 All that you were, are, and shall be for ever.
 In recognition beyond time and seeming
 Love knows the face that each face turns towards heaven. (p. 81)

It is the call to conversion, to return to the source. But like all forms of conversion, this form cannot be accomplished without the recognition on the part of the lapsed soul of the nature and extent of her 'crime of being born' into a separate, self-willed existence: it demands a repentance for the sin of mortality, for the sin of the ego-impelled, vanity-filled, self-seeking life-in-time that the soul has chosen to live:

Death, I repent
 Of these hands and feet
 That for forty years
 Have been my own
 And I repent
 Of flesh and bone,
 Of heart and liver,
 Of hair and skin –
 Rid me, death,
 Of face and form,
 Of all that I am . . .

. . . Not this or that
 But all is amiss
 That I have done,
 And I have seen
 Sin and sorrow
 Befoul the world –
 Release me, death,
 Forgive, remove

From place and time
 The trace of all
 That I have been. (pp. 79–80)

Once more one must be careful of identifying the death that is invoked too literally with mere physical death: rather it is a death to the attachment to self-will and to the desire for the spurious and illusory independence that has resulted in the soul's descent into the menial, mortal state in the first place—that has resulted in the loss of the eternal vision that is its birthright.

The conversion, then—the return of the soul to its source—is also a return home, a homing and a homecoming; and the home is also the memory—the recollection—of the childhood vision:

Home is an image written in the soul,
 To each its own: the now-born home to a memory. (p. 126)

It is as if one returns to the 'place' that one first started from, to the ancient isle that is one of the isles of the blessed, where all seems familiar because all is in fact what one knew before one sank into the stream of Lethe, the stream of self-forgetfulness:

So like, they seem the same,
 The young shoots of the yellow iris sheathed leaf through leaf,
 Lit green of glittering blades and shadows quivering on the
 sanded turf
 Where limpet shells are strewn among the celandine
 And driftwood from the surf.
 So like they seem, almost I to my own memories had come home.
 Never green leaf nor golden flower again;
 Yet from the one immaculate root spring after spring
 Upon this furthest Western shore the one Paradise,
 Earth, sea and sky patterned with the one dream...
 'Memory pours through the womb and lives in the air',
 And childhood with new eyes sees the for ever known . . .
 As I came over the hill to an unvisited shore
 I seemed, though old, at the untold beginning of a familiar tale.

(p. 165)

By the same token, this return home is the reuniting of the lapsed soul with the original source of its life, the *Anima Mundi*: the re-uniting of daughter with mother, Persephone with Demeter:

Lifelong the way –
 I never thought to reach her throne
 In darkness hidden, starless night
 Her never-lifted veil;
 Too far from what I am
 That source, sacred, secret from day;
 But, suddenly weeping, remembered
 Myself in her embrace,
 In her embrace who was my own
 Mother, my own mother, in whose womb
 Human I became.
 Not far, I found, but near and simple as life,
 Loved in the beginning, beyond praise
 Your mothering of me in flesh and blood.
 Deep her night, but never strange
 Who bore me out of the kind animal dark
 Where safe I lay, heart to heartbeat, as myself
 Your stream of life carrying me to the world.
 Remote your being as the milky way,
 Yet fragrance not of temple incense nor symbolic rose
 Comforted me, but your own,
 Whose soft breasts, nipples of earth, sustained me,
 Mortal, in your everlasting arms.
 Known to the unborn, to live is to forget
 You, our all,
 Whose unseen sorrowing face is a farewell,
 Forgotten forgiver of forgetfulness.
 Lifelong we seek that longed-for unremembered place. (pp. 230–31)

Daughter and mother are now one, in the original Earthly Paradise:

Beside the river Eden
 Some child has made her secret garden

On an alder strand
 Marked out with pebbles in the sand,
 Patterned with meadow flowers,
 As once I did, and was.

My mother who from time past
 Recalls the red spots on the yellow mimulus
 That nodded in the burn
 To her alone
 Was that same child,

And hers, bedridden,
 Mused on an old cracked darkened picture of a salmon river
 Painted in Paradise so long ago
 None living ever saw those tumbling waters flow.
 By her imagination made miraculous
 Water of life poured over its faded varnished stones.

All is one, I or another,
 She was I, she was my mother,
 The same child for ever
 Building the same green bower by the same river. (p. 159)

And this reunion with the source is, for reasons we have explained above, also inevitably reunion with all that is, with the whole world of creaturely existence:

Nothing in that abyss is alien to you.
 Sleep at the tree's root, where the night is spun
 Into the stuff of worlds, listen to the winds,
 The tides, and the night's harmonies, and know
 All that you knew before you began to forget,
 Before you became estranged from your own being,
 Before you had too long parted from those other
 More simple children, who have stayed at home
 In meadow and island and forest, in sea and river.
 Earth sends a mother's love after her exiled son,

Entrusting her message to the light and the air,
 The winds and waves that carry your ship, the rain that falls,
 The birds that call to you, and all the shoals
 That swim in the natal waters of her ocean. (pp. 100–101)

For, finally, the liberated soul—the soul free from the trammels of time and place, and from its own false assumption of an individual existence—is not only at one with all that is—it *is* all that is; for it is now perfectly attuned to the universal music in which all things live, move and have their being:

No matter what I am,
 For if I tell of winter lightning, stars and hail,
 Of white waves, pale Hebridean sun,
 It is not I who see, who hear, who tell, but all
 Those cloud-born drops the scattering wind has blown
 To be regathered in the stream of ocean,
 The many in the one;
 For these I am,
 Water, wind and stone I am,
 Gray birds that ride the storm and the cold waves I am,
 And what can my words say,
 Who am a drop in ocean's spray,
 A bubble of white foam,
 Who am a breath of wandering air,
 But what the elements in me cry
 That in my making take their joy,
 In my unmaking go their way?
 I am, but do not know, my song,
 Nor to what scale my sense is tuned
 Whose music trembles in me and flows on.
 A note struck by the stars I am,
 A memory-trace of sun and moon and moving waters,
 A voice of the unnumbered dead, fleeting as they –
 What matter who I am? (pp. 235–6)

The winter scales are cast from the living tree, the lost is found, the Earthly Paradise regained, and the soul, at the eternal springhead of its

youth, is restored to its own place, the bower it never left except in evil dream:

April's new apple buds on an old lichenized tree;
 Slender shadows quiver, celandines burn in the orchard grass –
 This moment's image: how long does a moment stay?
 I look, and look away, and look again, and see
 The morning light has changed a little, the linnet flown;
 but who can say
 When one moment's present became the next moment's past
 To which this now was still the yet-to-be?
 It seems, in this old walled garden, time does not pass,
 Only mind wanders and returns; I watch attentively
 And see not one green blade move out of its place.
 The Easter daffodils, the shadows and the apple-trees
 Phrases in music continuous from first to last.
 To be is to be always here and now.
 The green linnet flits from bough to bough. (p. 162)

Thus is the drama of the soul's journey consummated—this journey of descent, exile and return. Its three main phases together constitute what might be called the Soul's Mysteries. They may not be the only Mysteries. In fact they may but constitute the Lesser Mysteries, those that bring us to the threshold of the Greater Mysteries, the Mysteries of the Intellect whose consummation is precisely the Soul's crowning by the Divine Intellect, its Transfiguration, and whose enactment requires that the Soul goes out of and beyond itself altogether, not now towards the world of creatures, but towards God, something which through its own unaided powers it cannot accomplish. But these are Mysteries that few are granted the grace to live, let alone to celebrate in their art; and we must be more than thankful that in an age as mean-spirited and purblind as our own we have been privileged to have among us a poet who possesses the gifts of imagination and language, the intelligence and dedication, the courage manifest not least of all in a willingness to suffer and to pay the price, that are needed to bear living witness to this age-old, ever-contemporary drama of the Soul and to express it in the forms of an art worthy of its nobility.

The few poems that I have cited here in order to delineate the main structure of the myth into which the personal initiatory experience is woven are taken from a body of work in which practically every poem is an elaboration of the central theme, a deeper exploration of its complexity and significance—and it seems to me that the handful of poems not so orientated are superfluous to the essential *oeuvre*. Other living poets may have written poems that achieve as successfully, or even more successfully, what their authors have intended them to achieve. But to my knowledge no other living English poet has even attempted, let alone has staked his gifts and his life on the unrelenting pursuit of a theme that is of such magnitude and profundity and that brings into play so rich a range of imaginative experience. In so far as what in the end determines a poet's stature is the greatness of the theme that the poetry communicates, the work that I have been here reviewing must establish its author as the only living English poet who writes in the tradition, if not with the ultimate scope, of those great masters of the symbolic art to whom so much of her own prose writing has been devoted.

