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## Four Poems About the Natural World

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### **Abstract**

These poems were written in the 1970's, inspired especially by the English poet Kathleen Raine, a Cambridge M.A. in botany and zoology with a strong focus on the natural world. Soon I was asked by my friend Professor Dennis Hurrell to speak to a class on Women's Literature entitled "Form and Function in Literature" and to provide a contrast by focusing on "Form and Function in the Biosphere." In doing so, I read and described the significance of a set of poems that had an ecological context, and slipped in a couple of my own.

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### I

#### RAIN

Autumn,

And the rain falls,

Melting from pristine snowflakes

Crystallized at the cloud's top,

Splinters or patterned hexagons,

Their form a function of the eternal cold

Encroaching from the poles.

And centered at each crystal's icy core

A fleck of dust swirled from a drying land

By winds that, ever restless, come and go,

Or yet a speck of salt flung from the sea,

Bubbled from out the swash of breaking wave,

Or the dead ash of some bright meteor's flare  
Vanished but for the showers it sets in train.

All these may serve to bring to earth again  
Vapor distilled under the summer sun  
From land and wave-worn sea  
Since time began.

## II

FALL

Seeming uncertain of their way the leaves descend,  
Drawn to the forest floor in quiet flight.

We also fall, and falling turn the wheel of Nature round.  
Her creatures, one with us, our dying flesh devour  
And turn to air, seeming to set us free.

Yet freedom's span is short, and air is soon enchained  
In leafy labyrinths wherein life's fetters once again are forged.  
Bonds such as once bound us now bind anew  
The unfolding leaves, destined – like us – to fall.

**III**

OCTOBER

The aspen leaves glow golden

In the cooling air

As leaves of oak,

Incarnadined by natural alchemy,

Flame in the paling sky,

The wind rises as night falls

And the birds gather,

Restless for the south.

**IV**

AN AGNOSTIC'S REDEMPTION

In the end is the beginning. The pattern of life dissolves,

Atoms and molecules go their separate ways

As they have done since first the earth began

And we, perforce, must share their journeying.

Breath fleeting on the pinions of the wind,

Tears flowing to the saltness of the sea,

Blood pulsing to the rhythm of the tides,

Flesh kindling anew the flame of life.

So to take part in all the earth's renewing

Sufficient heaven should be for anyone.