Outside the Gates of Eden: The Travelling Figure in the Works of Walter de la Mare

Carol Murphy

Submitted in fulfilment of the requirements of the Masters of Letters
School of Critical Studies, College of Arts, University of Glasgow

April 2023

Declaration

I declare that this thesis has been composed solely by myself and has not been submitted in any previous application for a degree in whole or in part. Unless stated otherwise by reference or acknowledgement, the work presented is entirely my own.

It does not exceed the prescribed word limit and conforms to the Fourth Edition (2024) of the MHRA Style Guide.[1]

[1] MHRA Style Guide, A *Handbook for Authors, Editors, and Writers of Theses*, ed. by Chloe Pavers and others, 4th edn, (Modern Humanities Research Association, 2024).

Abstract

My thesis is about the extraordinary author and poet Walter de la Mare. In it, I seek to draw attention to his singular and mostly neglected talent. The thesis concentrates on an important aspect of his work, that of the travelling figure. Through this medium, I endeavour to illuminate the manifold aspects of his work, which symbiotically produce a holistic and coherent whole. It is necessary to distinguish de la Mare's place in English literature and to read his prose and poetry as a whole, as one accentuates and drives the other. Through the traveller, we become aware of the author's utilization of the 'quest' form in literature. De la Mare uses this form to raise concerns of a metaphysical nature, asking existential questions about, among other things, the value of human life, its significance and the possible destination of the traveller who travels through life, dream and the human mind while passing many signposts which the author has set up in his work as guidelines for the reader who instinctively shares these concerns.

The thesis also undertakes to show the significant influences on de la Mare, his sphere of influence and his critical place in English literature. The author wrote through the reigns of three monarchs, yet despite this longevity, his work always had a fresh appeal while retaining his distinctive style. I have employed a close critical interpretation of this style as this is necessary for a poet so interested in the technique of poetry. As de la Mare left no autobiography or memoirs, the thesis employs many quotes that help establish a personal and lucid expression of his writing.

Therefore, the travelling figure represents de la Mare's literary journey through his oeuvre as well as the metaphorical journey of his characters. Through the traveller, we find the author's ambiguity, his ambivalence, and the other side of his literature – pure enchantment. The traveller emphasizes the need to discover more about this undervalued and unique writer.

Table of Contents

Introduction

In this thesis, I explore the complicated but discernible recurring motif of the travelling figure in Walter de la Mare's writing and how it impacts the whole of his work. It is not always easy to connect the two, but it is worthy of further exploration because his recurring and persistent travelling characters and narrators indicate an obsession with the metaphorical journey of man. These travellers may be on external journeys, but these are always indicative of an inward journey – and the two merge in his work. Hence, the journey and the traveller are an inescapable motif.

The travelling figure is not always an obvious concept, but journeys are the foundation of de la Mare's exploration of the existentialist questions of man's condition and place in the universe. He is also concerned with man's destination as he follows his characters, although de la Mare seldom portrays any final ending. Indeed, he avoids endings and eschews the finality and destruction of the mystery that endings create.

De la Mare varies his portrayal of the traveller, but they are always relatable to the reader as they possess human qualities of confusion, changeability and sometimes transformation. His travellers, though recognizable, are not easily categorized, although de la Mare captures nuances of those involved and renders them memorable. Varied as his travelling figures are, their constant presence gives his work coherence. The last stanza of de la Mare's famous poem 'The Traveller' exemplifies his obsession with the travelling figure:

> Sweet is that earth, though sorrow and woe it have,
> Though parched, at length, the milk within its breast;
> And then the night-tide of the all-welcoming grave
> For those who weary, and a respite crave:
> Inn at the cross roads, and the traveller's rest.[2]

This figure may go by horse or hearse, on foot or horseback or may board some form of wheeled transport, but he is a constant and lingering presence in de la Mare's work. Sometimes, the traveller boards his transport willingly as the sailor does in 'Kismet',[3] described in my first

[2] Walter de la Mare, 'The Traveller', in *The Complete Poems* (Faber & Faber, 1969), p. 516.
[3] de la Mare, 'Kismet', in *The Complete Poems* p. 403.

chapter, who eagerly accepts a lift from the mysterious driver of a cart. Sometimes fate provides the transport, such as the cart in which the sailor is being conveyed, which is also carrying the coffin for his wife's dead body, or the vehicle that brought death to the driver and conductor in the short story 'What Dreams May Come'.[4] Traveller, transport, and destination are key to de la Mare's vision and are suggestively but skilfully woven into the fabric of his entire oeuvre.

In this thesis, I explore how the author frequently observes, features, and follows the traveller figure to metaphorically depict man's journey through life towards an otherworldly goal – often the re-entry to lost Eden or some other form of heavenly home. The figure itself is crucial to the writer's reflection on man's destiny. Through the travelling individual, he describes physical and metaphorical journeys that his travellers undertake and which stand for man's punishing journey through life. This concern is of significance to de la Mare's readers as it explores how man lives in his world, both mentally and physically, and how he experiences it. It is, in fact, an intrinsic part of the de la Mare legacy.

To facilitate this exploration, I have employed three chapters. The first is split into sections, each covering a short story or poem of de la Mare's demonstrating a facet of how he views his many travellers: the different characters, personalities, and situations of travel. One of the most important things that these journeying figures reveal is the various destinations they seek, including the lost Eden.

Chapter Two reflects on the loss of Eden and the aspiration to find and thus regain it. This is demonstrated by the short story explored in the chapter, 'The Creatures', in which the protagonist discovers a skewed vision of Eden that has adapted to modern man.[5] It depicts a version of Eden coarser in nature than the once more beautiful Eden, intimating its loss but also the possibility of a new Eden waiting for man. I elaborate on this theme throughout the chapter.

Moreover, the lure of Eden is mooted throughout de la Mare's texts, and it is a haunting image. In 'The Creatures', the narrator described the destination as 'that unforeseen nowhere for which the heart, the fantasy aches'.[6] The story reflects on a version of Eden that epitomizes de la Mare's conflicting views on the subject, veering between illuminating descriptions of its beauty

[4] Walter de la Mare, 'What Dreams May Come', in *Short Stories 1927–1956* (dlm, 2001), p. 207.
[5] Walter de la Mare, de la Mare, 'The Creatures', in *The Riddle: And Other Stories* (Selwyn & Blount, 1923).
[6] Ibid., p. 276.

and a doubting approach to its feasibility as a potential paradise. Its importance, however, in man's spiritual quest is never in doubt, and I have endeavoured to show this facet of his work in Chapter Two. Eden is seen not as a reincarnation but as a place that has always existed, though now deserted – like de la Mare's old houses – and still worthy of consideration for spiritual and modern reoccupation.

In Chapter Three, de la Mare's unique literary quality is demonstrated as he tests the idea of being consigned to a startling, modern, secular hell instead of obtaining Eden. In the short story 'The Three Friends', this fate is dreamt of by Eaves, the protagonist of the narrative.[7] It chimes with the destiny dreamt of by Eaves, wherein he lives out hell on Earth but an Earth bereft of the world's goodness and meaning. It is the antithesis of what de la Mare's travellers seek and is a study of a stultifying existence perpetuated in a non-demonic but appalling hell, nullifying the author's sometimes visionary picture of a triumphal return to the heavenly home or the snatching of victory from defeat. This is man defeated who, unlike Lawford in de la Mare's novel *The Return,*[8] has not been able to divest himself of his materialism and the mental encumbrances that life has placed upon him. The chapter briefly focuses on other forms of hell present in de la Mare's work but primarily seeks to establish how the author felt about the fate Eaves' dreamt of and how hellish it was in its conception and design.

Throughout these three chapters – which comprise the main body of my thesis – and the short stories and poems examined therein, I aim to show clearly how the traveller figure has influenced de la Mare's work since its first inception and has not ceased to be a part of his explorations into man's psyche. Luce Bonnerot said of de la Mare that his spiritual adventuring set him on an endless quest.[9] De la Mare's work follows Valerie Shaw's short story description with the words, 'Unique', 'single' and 'wrought'.[10] These words continue to be fundamental terms in discussions of the short story. 'Wrought' is a keyword when perusing de la Mare's work as he displays assiduous craftsmanship, where every word counts, and he fulfils Henry James's criterion of 'the beauty of wrought things'.[11]

---

[7] de la Mare, 'The Three Friends', in *Short Stories 1895–1926*, p. 94.
[8] Walter de la Mare, *The Return* (John Murray, 1910).
[9] Luce Bonnerot, *L'oeuvre de Walter de la Mare*: Une Aventure Spirituelle: Thèse Pour Le Doctrat Ès Lettres. Didier (1969), pp. 290–295.
[10] Valerie Shaw, *The Short Story: A Critical Introduction* (Longman, 1983), p. 9.
[11] Henry James, *The Lesson of The Master: The Death of The Lion: The Next Time and Other Tales* (Macmillan, 1922), p. 219.

Nevertheless, de la Mare counterbalances conscious craftsmanship with the gifts of improvisation and imagination, shown in his unique form of indirect writing. This is demonstrated by his characters' lack of straightforward speech and action, which is often seen in their dialogue when they speak in broken sentences or fail to finish a sentence: frequently, his characters and narrators mutter to themselves.

The concept of the traveller figure in de la Mare's works is a constant theme used by the author since the beginning of his writings. It can be discerned clearly throughout his prose and poetry, as this thesis aims to demonstrate. His travellers take several forms: in the short story 'The Creatures', the protagonist is certainly a pilgrim, but de la Mare's journeying figures include the wayfarer, sojourner, wanderer and, significantly, the exile.

In increasingly more metaphorical forms, de la Mare's travellers can be shown to be travelling through the mind of man, a chancy and dangerous place, mentally journeying through the barren landscape – a concept that unites the choice of short story and poetry in this thesis. The traveller imagery works on two levels: the actual physical landscape through which the ordinary traveller passes on his journey and its inextricable binding with de la Mare's dreamlike vision. The traveller here is often dispirited, highlighted by the scenery, as he experiences the usual circumstances of an earthly journey: hunger, thirst, fatigue, and encounters with nature. As Fred Botting says of landscapes in de la Mare's work, *The Gothic*, 'Landscapes stress isolation and wilderness, evoking vulnerability, exposure and insecurity.'[12]

On another level, the traveller can represent the spirit of man journeying towards his heavenly home. This parallels de la Mare's own spiritual quest, of which Luce Bonnerot was aware when she said that de la Mare was 'a spiritual adventurer conducting a ceaseless quest for an answer to the enigma of human destiny and the mystery of the world, constantly crossing the frontier between the visible and the invisible'.[13] Although de la Mare voiced the idea of good endings in his work, he did not, in fact, find any endings satisfactory and was troubled by them unless they ended in dream or imagination.

[12] Fred Botting, *Gothic* (Routledge, 2014), p. 4.
[13] Bonnerot, *L'oeuvre de Walter de la Mare*, pp. 290–295.

While de la Mare's work came to be saturated with travelling imagery, it is possible to trace the beginnings of this important theme chronologically in his work and this introduction. 'Kismet' was his first published short story in 1895, and the poem 'The Pilgrim' appeared in 1902 in *Songs of Childhood*.[14] This was his first published collection of poems, although it was published under the pseudonym Walter Ramal.[15] In 'The Pilgrim', the traveller figure is an old man, bowed down by life and attempting to reach home, only to be beset by malevolent creatures, in the manner of John Bunyan's *Pilgrim's Progress*.[16] In de la Mare's poem, 'From hill to hill a wondrous Bow',[17] a rainbow is representative of the poet's familiar motif of light penetrating darkness, helping to ward off the malevolent creatures of the poem. The pilgrim is saved, and finally, his home comes into sight.[18] This can be compared to the later poem, 'The Traveller', which was praised by John Betjeman as 'de la Mare's loveliest and strangest poem'.[19] It features a solitary figure on a dangerous and trying journey who finally comes to the 'Inn at the cross roads and the traveller's rest…'.[20]

His first novel, *Henry Brocken,* is a strange tale – a hybrid.[21] De la Mare described it to Henry Newbolt as 'criticism in narrative form'.[22] He uses this literary device successfully in a later short story titled 'A Revenant', about Edgar Allan Poe, originally written as a lecture.[23] *Henry Brocken* was an unusual concept, a trope which became familiar – that of the horse and rider. In this narrative, there are no symbolic uses of the characters. However, they are used to introduce many of de la Mare's favourite characters from literature that Henry encounters during his travels. On his travels, he meets characters as diverse as Jane Eyre, Lemuel Gulliver, La Belle Dame sans Merci, and The Sleeping Beauty. They are a vehicle for the many quotations and references to the author's eclectic reading past.

This first novel and its unique format serve to demonstrate the author's love of literature in all its variations, along with his own great erudition, which permeates all of his writing, even his anthologies and reviews. Although an early piece, it is still an important milestone in the canon

[14] Walter de la Mare, and Estella Canziani, 'The Pilgrim', in *Songs of Childhood* (Longmans, 1923).
[15] Walter Ramal, *Songs of Childhood* (Longmans, 1902).
[16] John Bunyan and Margaret A. Gilliland, *Bunyan's Pilgrim's Progress* (E.P. Dutton, 1921).
[17] de la Mare, 'The Pilgrim', *The Complete Poems*, p. 26.
[18] Ibid.
[19] John Betjeman, *Daily Herald*,1 December 1946.
[20] de la Mare, 'The Traveller', *The Complete Poems*, p. 516.
[21] Walter de la Mare, *Henry Brocken* (John Murray, 1904).
[22] Theresa Whistler, *Imagination of the Heart* (Duckworth, 1993), p.109.
[23] de la Mare, 'A Revenant', in *Short Stories 1927–1956*, p. 190.

of his work as it demonstrates the nascent qualities and motifs that were present and were to become a constant in his writing. It is part of my methodology to show how, from the earliest beginnings, the traveller figure was a concern of the author and was destined to be revealed, expressed, and developed through all his later work.

Forrest Reid, a critic, author and friend of de la Mare, considered *Henry Brocken* to be experimental. He positions it in 'a place rather less than halfway between the early experimental prose and the tales that are to follow it'.[24] He observes, correctly, that the prevailing mood is reverie, and that the languid mood is demonstrative of de la Mare's youth and immaturity. It is certainly unlike his other novels, but when Reid wrote his critical work, de la Mare was halfway through his life, and his best work was ahead of him.

A year before de la Mare wrote *Henry Brocken,* he was already writing in a similar creative vein when he wrote a series of poems based on characters from Shakespeare's works. Whistler described this as 'oblique literary criticism'.[25] This impulse sprang to life again in *Henry Brocken,* where the same sense of personal reverie is seen. De la Mare created a character called Reverie who encounters in the story John Bunyan's 'Christian', the traveller, a forerunner of de la Mare's own travelling and adventuring figures. De la Mare also wrote two poems called 'Reverie': one from *Songs of Childhood* (1902)[26] and the other from Poems (1906).[27] The former features a character called Sophia on her horse, a familiar sight, where horse and rider canter contentedly along, both plunged in reverie. The latter poem is about a young child's daydreams. These are both recognizable de la Mare elements.

Another familiar concept in *Henry Brocken* is that of the corpulent landlady. She heads a protracted line of such landladies in de la Mare's short stories who turn up with the familiarity of old friends.

Henry Brocken was of significant importance to de la Mare as it substantially affected his career. It raised interest in this new author, and a lengthy and approving review appeared in

[24] Forrest Reid, *Walter de la Mare, A Critical Study* (Faber & Faber, 1929), p. 55.
[25] Whistler, *Imagination of the Heart*, p. 100.
[26] de la Mare, 'Reverie', in *The Complete Poems*, p. 11.
[27] Walter de la Mare, 'Reverie', in *Poems* (John Murray, 1906).

The Times Literary Supplement.[28] This caused the editor, Bruce Richmond, to learn more about de la Mare's past, and this early interest on Richmond's part was influential in furthering de la Mare's career. Richmond retained an interest in *Henry Brocken* for 'its critical insight especially'[29] and gave the young author opportunities to write reviews. These were, of course, financially beneficial, but Richmond is alleged to have felt guilty that writing reviews could suppress de la Mare's obvious emerging and creative gifts. *Henry Brocken*, therefore, is an important work despite its strangeness and contains much of what de la Mare became increasingly involved with, for example, the travelling figure in all its subsequent and myriad manifestations.

A novel for children was published next. The *Three Mulla-Mulgars* was a quest story incorporating the well-known and traditional theme of the mythical journey.[30] It was later retitled *The Three Royal Monkeys*. In this story, the travellers were three monkeys journeying towards their mystical, spiritual home of Tishnar, which was also the home of their uncle, Assassimon. They encountered many setbacks on the way, just like their human counterparts in de la Mare's works. This was a symbolic tale where the hero, Nod, accompanied his two brothers on the quest for the long-lost Tishnar. In the story, de la Mare once again writes about the presence generated by absence, which is expressed through the longing for their homeland. Tishnar is also a helpful spirit who helps Nod on his journey. The absence of Tishnar at times is only temporary, unlike the absence of God in 'The Vats', who has stored up redemption for humans and then abandoned them.[31]

In this novel, de la Mare also returns to a favourite theme – the contrast between animals and humankind. In *The Return*, the protagonist, Lawford, compares men to monkeys, implying that despite post-Darwinian thought, man retains simian traits that compare unfavourably to monkeys.

De la Mare's next and third novel was for adults, *The Return* – a fitting title for a tale with more than one type of return. Here, Lawford becomes embroiled in a metempsychosis situation when the spirit of a Huguenot suicide invades his mind and soul. This takes Lawford on a

[28] Percy Lubbock, 'Henry Brocken', *The Times Literary Supplement*, 8 April 1904 (117), p. 109.
[29] Whistler, *Imagination of the Heart*, p. 142.
[30] Walter de la Mare, *The Three Mulla-Mulgars* (Duckworth, 1910).
[31] de la Mare, 'The Vats', in *The Riddle: And Other Stories*, p. 295.

journey where he struggles to find himself and free himself of the constraints of materialism, which imprison him in his hollow, meaningless, middle-class life. The journey motif is less obvious than in the author's other stories and poems, where the protagonist journeys by some form of transport. Nonetheless, it is in keeping with the ever-present travel and traveller theme. The end of the novel is typical of de la Mare's non-endings. Although the frightening figure of the revenant has been overthrown, the reader is not afforded any comforting or final redemptive outcome for Lawford's spirit in the next world. This strengthens the idea of de la Mare's fear of definitive endings, which is present in so much of his work.

As for de la Mare's poems on this theme, there are many, including early ones such as 'The Journey'[32] or his famous poem 'The Listeners', both of which appeared in the collection *The Listeners* in 1912.[33] 'The Journey' features an old pilgrim who is bowed down by life, physically degenerate but still seeking the light of home. Stanza thirteen in the original edition (although later omitted) speaks of the poet's thoughts on the nature of the eternal pilgrim quest. 'His eyes were dazed, and hopeless of the white road | which tread all pilgrims must.'[34]

'The Listeners' introduces a Traveller, with a conspicuous capital T, once again on horseback, who knocks on the door of a lonely house full of phantom listeners who do not answer the traveller's questions. 'But only a host of phantom listeners | that dwelt in the old house then.'[35] The poem also introduces another favourite and significant motif of the poet, that of the old, deserted house that is repeatedly found in his work, representing a once-loved, now abandoned place of residence and content, reminiscent of a lost Eden and with as many reverberating memories of former happiness. Like the house visited by the traveller in 'The Listeners', these deserted habitats throw doubt on man's place in the world (a crucial element in the questing or traveller's tale).

This solitary state is repeated in many of de la Mare's poems, such as 'The Empty House' where 'No voice ever answers me,| Only vacancy'.[36] Vacancy is a much-used word in de la Mare's lexicon, signifying empty space and the lack of response encountered by many of his

[32] de la Mare, 'The Journey', in *The Complete Poems*, p. 128.
[33] Walter de la Mare, *The Listeners, and Other Poems* (H. Holt and Company, 1912).
[34] de la Mare, 'The Journey', in *The Complete Poems*, p. 128.
[35] Ibid., p. 126.
[36] de la Mare, 'The Ghost', in *The Complete Poems*, p. 196.

travellers who persistently seek answers to unanswerable questions. The idea of vacancy reappears in the poem 'The Ghost'.[37] Similarly, as does the voice (or lack of voice) element in 'The Empty House': 'A face peered. All the grey night | In chaos of vacancy shone.'[38]

The poet experiments with phantom returns, similar to the returning entity in the poem 'All Hallowe'en'.[39] The tragedy of these ghosts returning to a life that no longer has a place for them is also explored. Travellers they may be, but these are travellers visiting a now alien world and impressing upon the witnesses of their return only horror and despair. No one knows to what mysterious call the ghost in 'All Hallowe'en' has responded, but human need and vanity have recalled the spectre in 'The Ghost', longing to see what lies beyond while at the same time refusing to accept that anything not approximating human life can have any true meaning. Summoning these ghosts has led to an unreal and frightening communion between haunter and haunted, where the misery, inconsolableness, and horror hover in the air like another phantom. These are journeys that should never have been made. They are, though, a good illustration for my methodology as they portray the many different facets of de la Mare's travellers and travel, suggesting that even in death, there may be no ending.

A sense of solitude, which can be a dangerous, destructive element, is found throughout the poet's work. It is another constant theme. The goals sought by the travellers may take different metaphorical forms, such as the waters of life in the short story 'The Vats' or the light of home, Eden, or paradise, all interchangeable in de la Mare's writing, but all playing on the reader's idea of a final goal.

The above chronological outline of de la Mare's vision emphasizes the importance he placed on the traveller in his work, and to this end, I have shown that this is present both in his prose and poetry and even, as will be seen, in his anthological works. I have placed more emphasis, however, on the short story because that literary form is eminently suited to de la Mare's pursuit of the traveller and his fate. De la Mare employed the short story to transpose many of his visions, and it was the principal means by which he entered the world of publishing. He started writing at a time, in the last two decades of the nineteenth century, when the novel was less in

[37] de la Mare, 'The Empty House', in *The Complete Poems*, p. 195.
[38] Walter de la Mare, *Poems 1901–1918* (Constable & Co, 1920).
[39] de la Mare, 'All Hallowe'en', *The Complete Poems*, p. 539.

demand in the publishing industry and the short story as a literary form was coming to the fore, popularized by the rise of the magazine market for time-poor or busy commuters.

De la Mare began to publish in magazines in 1895, taking full advantage of the expanding market while writing for a variety of magazines, including ladies' magazines. This included the 'The Ladies Realm', where he was published in 1895.[40] Like Poe before him, he was aware of the monetary gains to be made by magazine publishing. His persistence paid off, and his first full-length front-page article was published. It was a review of the work of Edgar Allan Poe and evolved from a lecture de la Mare had given on the writer.

Poe was a profound influence on the younger de la Mare, who found the initiation into his world 'shattering'.[41] The author found reviewing uncongenial, although he possessed a gift for it and was much sought after as a reviewer in many periodicals and publications. Nonetheless, it was an opportunity to hone his creative skills. The more contacts he made in the world of publishing, the better it furthered his career and embellished his art of short story writing.

The magazine story of 'Kismet' was finally collected in the volume *The Connoisseur and Other Stories* in 1926, with several alterations made by de la Mare in his manuscript copy of the work.[42] 'The Three Friends' was first published in the *Westminster Gazette* in 1913, [43] although it was not collected until 1933, in his first-ever collection of short stories, *The Riddle and other Stories.*[44] While it is true that 'Kismet' was deliberately aimed low at readers of the *Pall Mall Gazette* and launched de la Mare into print, it nonetheless installed a crucial expression of those embryonic themes and motifs that would become synonymous with the writer.[45] De la Mare had been authoring short stories for many years, and had his prose proved, at the outset, as popular as his poetry became, many thematic and literary similarities would have emerged. In many respects, Kenneth Hopkins' view is upheld in that de la Mare's work has to be read 'all of a piece'.[46] Chesterton, too, remarked that 'we can find the springs of much of his poetry in is his prose'.[47]

---

[40] Walter de la Mare, 'The Question', *The Lady's Realm*, XXV (1908), p. 106.
[41] Whistler, *Imagination of the Heart*, p.151.
[42] Walter de la Mare, *The Connoisseur: And Other Stories* (W. Collins Sons & Co. Ltd., 1926).
[43] Walter de la Mare, 'The Three Friends' *The Westminster Gazette*, 17 April 1913, p. 3.
[44] Walter de la Mare, *The Riddle: And Other Stories* (Selwyn & Blount, 1923).
[45] Walter de la Mare, 'Kismet', *Pall Mall Gazette*, 6 September 1902, p. 8.
[46] Kenneth Hopkins, *Walter de la Mare* (Longman, 1952), p. 10.
[47] G. K. Chesterton, 'Walter de la Mare' *Fortnightly Review*, 132 (1932), pp. 47–53.

De la Mare continued to use the traveller figure as a thread, which stitched together many of his short stories. Although the term 'short story' is self-explanatory, it has its origins in primitive storytelling, fables, fairy tales and other traditional forms. It continues to unfold as a narrative – adopting the brevity implied by the word 'short'. Another key factor about the short story is that it was written down with the intention of being read, so the text is all-important. Other forms of tales were meant to be listened to – *Aesop's Fables* is an early example.[48] Although de la Mare calls upon the fable, the fairy story and the folk tale, he leaves the oral tradition behind with his enigmatic endings. However, in the nineteenth century, all forms of short literature were drawn from oral tradition.

According to Valerie Shaw, the short story is 'a highly self-conscious form, the short story can celebrate spontaneity and the instinctual, or dramatize a moment of revelation which brings a character to full consciousness for the first time in his life'.[49] This moment of self-revelation and epiphany is manifested in the characters of the short stories I selected for examination. There are characters as varied as a young girl trying to escape the clutches of death, another young girl ready to embrace it, and a sailor who finally, just before his death, suddenly has a moment of complete understanding and 'He saw all things as he stared.'[50] The moment of self-realization can carry more impact in the brevity of the short story than in the 'broad acres'[51] of the novel, and de la Mare took full advantage of this. Self-realization was popularized by James Joyce in *Stephen Hero,* 1944, by his protagonist Stephen Hero, who describes it as 'a sudden spiritual manifestation, whether in the vulgarity of speech or gesture or in a memorable phase of the mind itself'.[52] In *The Cambridge Introduction to the Short Story in English*, Adrian Hunter quotes the South African author Nadine Gordimer:

> Short story writers see by the light of the flash; theirs is the art of the only thing one can be sure of – the present moment. Ideally, they have learned to do without explanation of what went before and what happens beyond.[53]

---

[48] Aesop, *Aesop's fables* (Harper Collins, 2012).
[49] Shaw, *The Short Story: A Critical Introduction,* p. 8.
[50] de la Mare, 'Kismet', in *Short Stories 1895–1926,* p. 407.
[51] Walter de la Mare, *Private View* (Faber & Faber, 1953), p. 7.
[52] James Joyce, *Stephen Hero* (Cape, 1950), p. 188.
[53] Adrian Hunter, *The Cambridge Introduction to the Short Story in English* (Cambridge University Press, 2007), p. 2.

This pertains particularly to the travellers who, although on a lifetime journey, are caught in *medias res* at the most pertinent and impactful part of the story, which forms an extension of previous events that will be developed in later action. Such a concept works for the author, for whom beginnings are more important than endings.

Furthermore, the brevity of the short story frees de la Mare to concentrate on the distinct aspects of all his wayfarers in his short fiction. We are not told what they individually finally discover, and this corresponds to de la Mare's tendency to avoid definite endings, making his work the opposite of what Chesterton said about short stories in general, that 'when the story is ended, the people are ended'.[54] Chesterton also said, 'We have no instinct of anything ultimate and enduring beyond the episode.'[55] However, this is not true of de la Mare's characters, who, he implies, will have a life beyond the text. Although de la Mare works within the constraints of short fiction, the brevity of it, for example, enables him to transcend it in his unique way, as brevity implies control.

Another use de la Mare made within the parameters of the short story was to explore his technique of indirection and ambiguity, creating a lack of straightforward progress in speech, action, or endings. Valerie Shaw said that de la Mare's 'compressed, oblique expressing of inner states and moments of retrospection imply a metaphysical perspective which illumines the metaphoric structure of each story'.[56] These qualities of ambiguity are also mentioned by Adrian Hunter when he discusses short story writers, in general, especially later Victorian ones and onwards. 'Out went traditional methods of plotting and characterization, and in came a new roster of narrative concepts; implication, ambiguity, suggestion, dilation.'[57] De la Mare's skill in ambiguity and suggestion applied to his travellers no less than his static, half-mad characters such as Miss Duveen and Seaton's aunt. Part of the attraction for de la Mare of the short story was that it enabled him to evaluate the idea of how humanity is drawn to the lure of the unknown.

[54] Shaw, *The Short Story: A Critical Introduction,* p. 17.
[55] Ibid.
[56] Ibid., p. 202.
[57] Hunter, *The Cambridge Introduction to the Short Story in English,* p. 7.

This lure has tainted many of his characters, such as the ghastly old woman in 'Seaton's Aunt'.[58] The character is not like other house and possession-orientated characters such as Mr Blumen in *The Connoisseur* or Mr Asprey in 'The House'[59] who cherish possessions and comfortable houses. Nor is she like the lonely, misunderstood woman, Miss Duveen,[60] or the deluded Miss Curtis in 'The Picnic',[61] whose form of madness is to believe that a man she sees every morning through a window could be in love with her, despite him being blind and impervious to her existence, which is a metaphor for her entire life. Seaton's aunt uses her house as the place where she carries out her unspeakable activities. None of her crepuscular movements are described; they are merely hinted at, although at one point, Seaton and his friend Withers, the narrator, discover that she had left her bed in the night. The reader is left in no doubt, however, that her activities are of a vile nature.

Physically, the aunt is a large woman. Her huge appetite faintly disgusts Withers, although he does not realize that this appetite parallels other nefarious appetites. A frightening omniscience accompanies her disgusting omnivorousness. 'I tell you Withers, she sees everything. And what she doesn't see she knows without.'[62] De la Mare suggests, in this narrative, the Faustian in literature, where the protagonist is granted certain powers in return for selling their soul: 'It's — because she's in league with the Devil.'[63] The aunt's terrifying presence in the old, rambling house makes her the opposite of many of the writer's travellers because she is static – imprisoned in her house. She is waylaid, caught in the cage of her unhealthy desires. The aunt is sidelined in many respects, unlike most of de la Mare's fictive travellers who, although flawed, are part of a forward-surging, questing cohort making their way towards some other better destination, perhaps Eden.

Moreover, Seaton's aunt is in a state of stasis, like other characters. She is in the grip of madness or obsession because of her unhealthy desires and proclivities. Like Mr Kempe[64] and Mr Bloom,[65] she is surrounded by phantoms and ghosts, trapped in her house, caught like Seaton's pets – the slimy tadpoles he keeps in the stagnant pond. Like them, these characters

[58] de la Mare, 'Seaton's Aunt', in *Short Stories 1895–1926,* p. 55.
[59] de la Mare, 'The House', in *Short Stories 1927–1956,* p. 278.
[60] de la Mare, 'Miss Duveen', in *Short Stories 1895–1926,* p. 40.
[61] de la Mare, 'The Picnic', in *Short Stories 1927–1956,* p. 178.
[62] de la Mare, 'Seaton's Aunt', in *Short Stories 1895–1926,* p. 60.
[63] Ibid.
[64] de la Mare, 'Mr Kempe', in *Short Stories 1895–1926,* p. 215.
[65] de la Mare, 'A Recluse', in *Short Stories 1927–1956,* p. 3.

have no sense of direction but continue swimming round and round in search of a haven or home.

In 'The Traveller', the hero of which is de la Mare's ultimate traveller, the protagonist, like the knight in 'Song of Finis',[66] rides up to the edge of the abyss. However, the traveller is fearful because, unlike the reckless knight, he does this with an awareness of 'a whispering menace which chills brain and blood'.[67] Nevertheless, neither the knight nor the traveller could resist the call of the unknown. This call of the unknown is also featured in Chapter One of 'The Bird of Travel'.[68] In this short story, two members of the ill-fated family, Hamilton and Paul, who had formerly listened to the call of the legendary Bird of Travel, lay buried in unmarked graves on foreign shores as a result.

The poem 'The Traveller' provides further evidence of a unity in man's desire to penetrate the unknown, to find answers to hitherto unanswered questions:

> The hushed and visionary host of those
> Who, like himself, had faced life's long duress,
> Its pangs and horrors, anguish, hardship, woes,
> Their one incentive ever on to press.[69]

This persistent 'pressing on', this obsession to travel despite dangers, setbacks, and indifference, drives de la Mare to follow his travellers endlessly. In the subsequent chapter, beginning with the short story 'Kismet', I aim to demonstrate how de la Mare achieves this intimacy with the fictive travelling figure. My intention is to do this by employing diverse personae to illustrate how the different characters, even spectral beings, move through life or beyond it. Despite these differences, I also aim to demonstrate a commonality among his characters in that they become recognizably Delamarean. Visualizing life as a long, difficult journey is a readily familiar literary convention and an old one. However, de la Mare uses it in a unique way, following his travellers on sometimes outlandish, sometimes poignant, often

[66] de la Mare, 'Song of Finis', in *The Complete Poems*, p. 188.
[67] Ibid.
[68] Walter de la Mare, *The Riddle: And Other Stories* (Selwyn & Blount, 1923), p. 142.
[69] de la Mare, 'The Traveller', in *The Complete Poems*, p. 511.

disturbing, and sometimes otherworldly journeys but always with their humanity or their otherness portrayed in their actions, revelations and, crucially, their dreams or imaginations.

In this introduction and throughout the body of the thesis, I intend to show how de la Mare was regarded by his fellow writers and subsequently admired. Moreover, how he increasingly influenced writers and critics in our own time.

Several recent publications have highlighted an emerging and steady interest in de la Mare's writing. Three of the most important ones are William Wootten's work on the poetry of de la Mare, entitled *Reading Walter de la Mare,* where he selects and annotates a selection of the poetry.[70] Wootten also contributed to *Walter de la Mare: Critical Appraisals,* edited by Yiu Kajita, Angela Leighton and A.J. Nickerson.[71] The third significant publication comes from Angela Leighton, *Hearing Things: The Work of Sound in Literature.*[72]

In a chapter from *Critical Appraisals,* entitled, 'The Critical Reception of Walter de la Mare and the Legacy of I.A. Richards',[73] Wootten writes about how de la Mare's critical reputation once lay under the shadow of an initial negative criticism by I.A. Richards in the publication *Science and Poetry.*[74] Richards commented on the difficulty poetry had in accommodating 'the transference from the Magical View of the world to the scientific'.[75] Richards based his observations mainly on studies of Thomas Hardy, William Yeats, and de la Mare. The latter comes in for a great deal of criticism of the magical elements in his work, concentrating mainly on two poems, 'The Pigs and the Charcoal Burners' and 'John Mouldy' where 'the distinction between knowledge and feeling has not yet dawned'.[76] However, Wootten maintains, 'yet the magic elements in de la Mare very rarely assert ultimate truth or falsity, but tend to reflect the psychology of those perceiving them.'[77] In his book on reading de la Mare's poetry, Wootten describes how Richards, fifty years later, apologized for his criticism of the writer's work and

[70] Walter de la Mare, *Reading Walter de la Mare*, ed by William Wootten (Faber & Faber, 2020).
[71] Yui Kajita, Angela Leighton and A. J. Nickerson, eds. *Walter de la Mare: Critical Appraisals*, 1st edn (Liverpool University Press, 2023).
[72] Angela Leighton, *Hearing Things: The Work of Sound in Literature* (The Belknap Press of Harvard University Press, 2018).
[73] William Wootten, 'The Critical Reception of Walter de la Mare and the Legacy of I.A. Richards' in Kajita, *Walter de la Mare: Critical Appraisals* (Liverpool University Press, 2022), pp. 229–246.
[74] I. A Richards, *Science and Poetry* (K. Paul, Trench, Trubner & Co. Ltd, 1926).
[75] Kajita, *Walter de la Mare: Critical Appraisal,* p. 231.
[76] Ibid., p. 231.
[77] Ibid., p. 232.

now found his poetry 'haunting-not would-be, but as living presences embodying what the poems are doing'.[78]

In their work, Kajita, Leighton and Nickerson cite other writers who have praised de la Mare, such as Hardy, Edward Thomas, T.S. Eliot, Ezra Pound and Virginia Woolf. They observe that it is salutatory to recall how many writers, both in de la Mare's own time – and after – have extolled his work and been influenced by it. In the chapter entitled 'Corresponding Listeners: Walter de la Mare and Robert Frost', Catherine Charlwood repeats Robert Frost's comment that de la Mare was 'the best of the best'.[79] Edward Thomas was a friend of de la Mare – although later estranged from each other – who praised him fulsomely and was an enthusiastic reviewer of the writer's work. Thomas was also a traveller, seizing every opportunity to leave London for the countryside. While he recognized de la Mare's love of the countryside, he also saw that his friend was determined to remain based in London, where he could make more money.

In Thomas' work, there were often 'men a little like de la Mare, dreamers and romantics who either long to escape their London office, or have managed to do so, or share their time between office work in London and farm work in summer'.[80] Going from one world to another, as de la Mare did physically and mentally, with the consequent disorientation and unreliability, was an intrinsic part of de la Mare's work. Thomas recognized that de la Mare was 'a poet of the English countryside, but also a poet of dreams, both sleep and reverie'.[81]

Another admirer of de la Mare who underwent a change of opinion was T. S. Eliot. Originally, Eliot had lumped de la Mare with the other Georgian poets whom Eliot disliked. Years later, in a letter to Richard de la Mare, he predicted that 'de la Mare will remain *the* poet of a whole generation'.[82] Eliot came to value the older poet's work when he recognized that they were equally exploring poetic meaning. Nickerson said, 'Poetic language, they thought, might offer intimations of a world beyond our own.'[83]

---

[78] Wootten, *Reading Walter de la Mare*, p. 1.
[79] Catherine Charlwood, 'Corresponding Listeners: Walter de la Mare and Robert Frost' in Kajita, *Walter de la Mare: Critical Appraisals*, p. 43.
[80] Kajita, *Walter de la Mare: Critical Appraisals*, p. 83.
[81] Ibid.
[82] Ibid., p. 118.
[83] Ibid.

De la Mare's genius for anthologizing was also recognized. W. H. Auden, himself a distinguished anthologizer, readily admitted to being inspired by *Come Hither*.[84] Auden began his career in anthologies with *The Poet's Tongue*, co-edited by John Garrett, a fellow schoolmaster.[85] It was a selection aimed at schools, in which de la Mare's 'Song of the Mad Prince' is featured. [86]

Auden also published a selection of de la Mare's poetry in 1963 in *A Choice of De la Mare's Verse*.[87] According to Seamus Perry in the chapter 'O where are you going?': Walter de la Mare and W. H. Auden', in *Critical Appraisals*,[88] Auden's introduction showed that 'something in de la Mare spoke to him very keenly and stirred up some abiding concerns in his later literary thinking'.[89] The many contemporaries of this writer who admired him were represented in the *Tribute to Walter de la Mare : on his seventy-fifth Birthday in 1948* with contributions from Graham Greene, John Masefield, then Poet Laureate, Siegfried Sassoon and other contemporary writers. [90]

He was also praised by later writers such as Dylan Thomas, William Golding, and Richard Adams, among others. Richard Adams was, in his lifetime, a member of The Walter de la Mare Society. He chose a line from a de la Mare poem for the epigraph of his famous novel *Watership Down*, about the journeyings of a colony of rabbits in the English countryside. This was 'Master Rabbit I saw' from the poem 'Master Rabbit'.[91] The word 'saw' has significance here because it indicates Adam's recognition of how de la Mare 'saw' animals for their importance in the world. This influenced his subsequent treatment of them in his work, where they play an important part in highlighting the nature of humanity as well as animals with whom we share the Earth – and once shared Eden with.

---

[84] Walter de la Mare, *Come Hither* (Constable and Co, 1945).
[85] W. H. Auden and John Garrett, *The Poet's Tongue: An Anthology* (G. Bell & Sons, 1935).
[86] Ibid., p. 184.
[87] Walter de la Mare, *A Choice of De La Mare's Verse*, ed by W. H. Auden (Faber and Faber, 1963).
[88] Seamus Perry, 'O where are you going?': Walter de la Mare and W. H. Auden' in Kajita *Walter de la Mare: Critical Appraisals*, p. 146.
[89] Ibid.
[90] T. S Eliot and Edmund Blunden, *Tribute to Walter De La Mare: On His Seventy-Fifth Birthday* (Faber and Faber, 1948).
[91] de la Mare, 'Master Rabbit', in *The Complete Poems*, p. 809.

As well as the epigraph, Adams also used lines from other de la Mare poems for some of the chapter headings in the novel. Chapter 28 was headed by lines from 'The Pilgrim' where the poet's lyrics 'in sight of home'[92] align the journeying rabbits with de la Mare's own travelling figures searching for a home. Chapter 20 has lines from 'Dame Hickory'. 'Dame Hickory, Dame Hickory | Here's a wolf at your door'.[93] These lines, which come from a children's poem, illustrate the sometimes-frightening nature of these poems.

I have chosen a selection of de la Mare's short stories and poetry because, throughout the canon of his work, one derived inspiration from the other and many strange characters were created who seem at times to blend into one another. I begin with his first published work, 'Kismet', about a sailor, a traveller who makes his living from his travels and shows from the outset the numerous ways the travellers traverse their allotted road.

[92] Ibid., p. 26.
[93] Ibid., p. 16.

Chapter One: The Traveller's Bourne

Kismet

'De la Mare' is an old Norman name. The family were of Huguenot stock, and their diaspora possibly contributed to de la Mare's idea of man being on a journey or quest for another world. Just as the Huguenots left their native lands to seek safety elsewhere, de la Mare's emerging travellers sought a better, higher existence in the afterlife. However, what form that other world would take was cloaked in ambiguity and conflicting visions. De la Mare was much influenced by people and scenes in his personal life, and they made their way into his work, often in the form of family names.

'Kismet' was Walter de la Mare's first-ever published work, a short story published in *The Sketch* in 1895 under the pseudonym Walter Ramal, an echo of de la Mare.[94] The protagonist of this story is a sailor, a lifelong traveller. From the outset, it generates the idea of man's physical and metaphorical journey through life, often seen by de la Mare as an exile from his former home of Eden.

In this poem, the sailor, home on leave and on the road, is offered a lift by a lone driver of a horse and cart, who is travelling to the same village where the sailor is bound. Although weary and nearing the end of what must have been a long journey, the sailor is full of anticipatory happiness at the thought of being reunited with his wife, and he was, at first, grateful for the driver's offer of a lift which will shorten his journey.

The story within 'Kismet' marks an appropriate start to a chapter of my thesis concerned with the figure of the traveller and exile in de la Mare's work. I aim to show how the journeyings of his itinerant characters parallel his belief that man is an exile from his first perfect place – Eden. This story is about journeys – the physical journey of a living human being and, later, the conveyance of a human corpse, which is a precursor of many journeys, many travellers, and many deaths in the body of his work. The traveller stalks de la Mare's writing, and it is an

---

[94] Walter Ramal, 'Kismet', *The Sketch*, 7 August 1895, p.16.

important and sustained motif. His stories and poems can encompass the dangers of travel, the solitariness or the enforced companionship of fellow travellers or passengers, the generating of uneasy thoughts, the encroachment of nature and the uncertainty of what lies at the journey's end. 'Kismet' comprises some of these characteristic traits of de la Mare's work, perhaps only in nascent form but with the promise of the development and maturation of what became an obsession in his work.

In this noticeably short, simply written story lie many complex ideas and associations. In 'Kismet', the living and the dead are conveyed in the same vehicle, a cart. There is a sinister echo of this conveyance in a later story, 'The Wharf', where, in a nightmare vision, a cart is seen carrying the detritus of human souls.[95] 'The souls, the souls, of men. The *souls, the souls of men!*'.[96] This quote comes from a part of the story where the female protagonist, in the middle of a frightening dream, sees the souls of human beings being shovelled out of carts by uncaring, sinister figures and carted off like refuse. Somehow, the woman senses she is in the grip of a dream and disbelieves and abhors the idea that this could be the fate of human souls. The mode of conveyance of these souls is the same as in 'Kismet', which reappears throughout de la Mare's writings. Unbeknown to the sailor, the cart in his story is the intended vehicle for his wife's dead body and soul.

De la Mare mentions carts, or similar conveyances, in other works, usually representing detritus or death. In the story of the same name, Mr Kempe, the main character, escapes from the clutches of the mad recluse he is visiting by jumping from a window onto a pile of refuse, a sinister echo of the ghastly contents of the cart in 'The Wharf'. The silence surrounding this heap of refuse is mirrored in the silent disposal of the dead souls in 'The Wharf', in which the same refuse reappears as a heap of 'stable mook'[97] seen by the protagonist on the farm where she is staying to recuperate. On this occasion, the heap of dung has a positive effect on the woman as she realizes it is a sign of renewal and a fitting place to home the wildflowers that grow on it. Earlier in the story, the detritus seen was a dreadful physical portrayal of the spiritual end of man's hopes of salvation. There is also a sombre warning of this in de la Mare's

[95] de la Mare, 'The Wharf', in *Short Stories 1895–1926,* p. 362.
[96] Ibid., p. 367.
[97] de la Mare, 'The Wharf', in in *Short Stories 1895–1926,* p. 259.

poem ‘Please to Remember’. ‘Aye all that I am made of | Only trash is’[98] constructs a horrible reminder that in death, man will revert to what he was made from – dust. This is the complete antithesis of any happy and joyous return to Eden.

Similarly, in the short story, ‘All Hallows’, the narrator is on a type of pilgrimage, determined to visit an old and crumbling, sea-surrounded cathedral, unaware of the demonic presences within it, which he subsequently learns about from the old verger.[99] However, after a harrowing journey across seven hills and before he reaches his destination, he encounters what has become a familiar trope of de la Mare: the dust cart. This dreadful image haunts de la Mare’s narratives and some of his poems, conjuring the disturbing thought that it is the same cart in all the texts – a ghostly and gothic return. As I shall reveal in later chapters, everything can and does return in de la Mare.

Changes in mood and disturbing signs proliferate in the text when it is discovered that the driver, despite his occupation or perhaps because of it, is afraid of the dark. Unknown to the sailor, the driver bids him to sit on the covered casket, which will soon house his dead wife’s body. At the same time, their surroundings assume a gradual eeriness; the weather seems colder than it really is, and the atmosphere becomes darker. Then, the name of the village to which the sailor is returning is revealed – Barrowmere. The name is repeated four times, drawing attention to its meaning. Barrow is based on an Old Norse word, referring to the pre-Christian burial mounds or tumuli, which covered the dead and were a presage to the death of the seaman’s wife.

These tumuli are also referred to in the works of Thomas Hardy, an author whom de la Mare much admired. Hardy and de la Mare shared haunted places and houses in their work, and on the page, they met in these secret places. There was mutual admiration between the two, and both were obsessed with writing about death, though in distinct ways. Hardy’s writing was of a morbid cast, full of post-Christian pessimism and did not cover the idea of an afterlife in the way de la Mare did.

---

[98] de la Mare, ‘Please to Remember, in *The Complete Poems*, p. 835.
[99] de la Mare, ‘All Hallows’, in *The Connoisseur*, p. 337.

Hardy sought a rationale for believing in an afterlife but could not justify it. He believed in predestination but that no man could know or change his fate and was, in fact, the plaything of some superior, indifferent force. He called this the 'Immanent Will',[100] a blind force that determines the fate of all humans, even the privileged classes. On the other hand, De la Mare wrote of the divine Abandoner, a more religious concept that implies God did exist. Nonetheless, they shared the view that man had to face the world alone with no divine guidance. Like de la Mare, Hardy had lost his early faith in Christianity, fostered initially with an Anglican upbringing and, again, like de la Mare, his faith never returned, although de la Mare was never an agnostic.

Hardy could not understand how a divine and merciful God could allow the terrible suffering he saw around him. He was one of the earliest to praise the work of Charles Darwin and turned to the publication of *Origin of Species* with its theory of evolution as an alternative observation on religion and man's view on life.[101] As a result of his pessimism, Hardy tended to write about the darker side of humanity, although his work was elegiac, and he praised the dead for being dead.

De la Mare likewise wrote about death, but he also explored, through his characters, an afterlife, testing different scenarios where his characters could return from the dead. Ghosts abound in his writings and are just one way he explores the concept of an afterlife. It was a tenuous, though persistent, link to the afterlife in his work. If Hardy aspired to eternity at all, it was in the faint hope that on his death, he would live on in the thoughts and memories of friends and fellow human beings. He expresses this wistful wish throughout his poem 'Afterwards'.[102] De la Mare writes of this hope, too, but goes further in his explorations of the supernatural.

There is also haunting in Hardy's writings, but he is haunted by memories, voices, scents, and a sense of deep regret. When Hardy writes of such things, it is not a ghost he sees, unlike de la Mare's spectres and revenants. In 'The Haunter', Hardy writes of Emma, his dead wife, 'Never

[100] Thomas Hardy, *The Dynasts* (The Macmillan Company, 1904), p. 315.
[101] Charles Darwin and W. R. Thompson, *The Origin of Species* (J.M. Dent & Sons, 1928).
[102] Thomas Hardy, *Moments of Vision and Miscellaneous Verses* (Macmillan, 1917), p. 255.

he sees my faithful phantom, Though he speaks thereto.'[103] 'Come, let me view you then',[104] Hardy pleads in 'The Voice' in what Claire Tomalin calls the 'finest and strangest celebration of the dead in English poetry'.[105] De la Mare's similar poem, 'The Ghost', is also beautiful and full of longing, though there are physical manifestations of 'a hope-wearied hand'.[106]

The two writers also share the realization that sounds are important in evoking atmosphere, and that ghostly sounds suggest a world out of place and out of time. In this world of sound, the two authors conversed, although there was one telling difference. In Hardy's work, there is a keen sense of the historical, and the past is important to him. However, in de la Mare, there is no historical background; the sense of the numinous is represented as timeless. They are alike, though, when they both constantly consider the great riddle of life. De la Mare draws attention to it in a review of Hardy's lyrics when he comments that he is 'too imaginative a philosopher to venture a final answer to the great riddle'.[107]

Hardy has his travellers too, wayfarers mostly who meet at crossroads. De la Mare acknowledges these travellers in his poem honouring the author, called 'Thomas Hardy'.[108] In it, de la Mare says, 'And there peered from his eyes, as I listened, a concourse of women and men | Whom his words had made living, long suffering – they flocked to remembrance again.'[109] De la Mare saw in Hardy's work what Chandran and others saw in his – a line of characters, women and men, who are met with and stay in the reader's memory. His travellers appear in many different guises. Many are exiles, but this exile from a former higher place points to the possibility of a return to such a place. This is the quest de la Mare's travellers are set on. He, like Hardy, 'asks and asks',[110] and his obsession with this quest begins in 'Kismet'.

In this first story and in subsequent narratives, de la Mare uses a range of personae or masks to deliver the stories, but there is always, for the reader, a feeling that these characters have been

---

[103] Thomas Hardy, 'The Haunter' *Satires of Circumstance: Lyrics and Reveries with Miscellaneous Pieces* (Macmillan and Co, 1919), p. 107.
[104] Ibid., p. 109.
[105] Claire Tomalin, *Thomas Hardy: The Time-torn Man* (Penguin, 2007), p. xx.
[106] de la Mare, 'The Ghost', in *The Complete Poems*, p. 196.
[107] Walter de la Mare, *Private View* (Faber & Faber, 1953), p. 97.
[108] de la Mare, 'Thomas Hardy', in *The Complete Poems*, p. 388.
[109] Ibid.
[110] de la Mare, *Private View*, p. 97.

met with before, of them stretching behind one another like a protracted line of mirrors, each reflecting the other. Chandran calls this phenomenon 'An apparition of one text glimpsed in another and a reader's customary nod upon its recognition'.[111] Chandran suggests that these textual comings and goings afford the reader a double helping of food for thought. In de la Mare's case, the poet's own reading and study, eclectic and voracious, is reflected in and informs his writing for the benefit of the reader, who is then privileged with glimpses into the author's memories – textual and sometimes personal. Memories and ghosts of memories pervade his texts: some literary, notably in the anthologies, and some personal but faint, like Robinson Crusoe's ink, which he watered down to make it last.

Such moments are common in the Delamarean world, and there is an uneasy feeling of repetition and doubling – the perplexing feeling that many of the characters encountered are the same. One does not have to read too far into de la Mare to discover the vast corpus of his work, fiction, poetry, anthologies, magazine articles and reviews to become aware of the shadow that follows the reader at his shoulder: the shadow of former characters, places, faces, sounds, ideas which have over the years become compounded into his texts.

In the same year as 'Kismet', he published another short story in a similar vein about travellers and the vagaries of fate. 'The Hangman Luck' is about a travelling, disreputable tramp: another early example of a protracted line of strange and sinister travellers, from the garrulous to the guileful.[112] This traveller had committed the brutal murder of an old woman and, subsequently, though presently unknown to both, encountered the old woman's son in a local tavern. He is surprised by the initial friendliness of both the landlord and the son and even more so by the kindly invitation of the latter to accompany him home for refreshments and to meet his much-loved, much-missed mother. Here, there is a noticeable resemblance to 'Kismet' in that, in each case, one of the two men is anticipating a reunion with a longed-for woman who is already dead. As in 'Kismet', a driver and cart materialize in the story. In 'The Hangman Luck', the cart appears while the two men are still in the tavern. It comes in the form of a wagon driven by an old man – a foretoken of the death yet to be so horribly discovered.

---

[111] Narayana Chandran, 'Phantoms of the Mind: T.S. Eliot's to Walter de la Mare', *Papers on Language and Literature*, 33.2 (1997), p. 213.
[112] de la Mare, 'The Hangman Luck', in *Short Stories 1895–1926*, p. 152.

During their journey to the maternal home of the son, the pair neared a cornfield where the tramp had hidden the body of the old mother. The murderer realizes this, and at the same time, it dawns on him who his benefactor really is and the inevitable consequences of his crime. Like the title of 'Kismet', the story's title, 'The Hangman Luck' has significance. It refers to an old superstition that possessing a piece of hangman's rope would bring good luck. In this case, however, the luck the tramp wished for earlier in the tavern – 'to the hangman. Luck!'[113] – would be returned to him in the form of a hangman's rope around his neck. It is another early story about dead bodies and travellers, worlds apart in temperament, who are travelling together. Fate and luck, hopes and fears, good and bad intentions, and inevitably, premature death are the twin themes of these stories. As in 'Kismet', the symbol of the cart unites the four travellers in both stories as they all move towards their destination. In both stories, there is a devastating domestic death and subsequent upheaval, leading to the end of mortal hopes. The horse also appears as a harbinger of doom. The author's literary intentions were already turning to the fate of the traveller on life's metaphorical journey in these two early and closely authored stories, which were to become a familiar feature in the vast corpus of de la Mare's work.

The outcast figure of the murderer is reflected in the solitary, enigmatic figure of the cart driver in 'Kismet', whose outlandish life as a coffin carrier sets him apart from other, happier, more normal beings. In both cases, the initially cheerful and friendly characters of the sailor and the son offer friendship but are frustrated by the dour and surly behaviour of the other person. In 'The Hangman Luck', the murderer, upon receiving the friendly attentions of the son and, initially, of the landlord, is nonetheless displeased, which is demonstrated in the line, 'The reception to my toast in some unaccountable fashion displeased me greatly.'[114] In 'Kismet', the mood changes too when the driver's newly found elation soon dissipates, affecting his fellow traveller's mood as he too sinks into gloom.

'By degrees he grew morose and sulky. He blamed the traveller for accepting his hospitable offer.'[115] The end of this brief bonhomie paralleling the brevity of life's pleasures soon has an

[113] Ibid., p. 408.
[114] Ibid.
[115] Ibid., p. 404.

adverse effect on the seaman's former sense of happiness and anticipation. There are unknown fears abroad in the text, 'midnight loiterers', [116] and the sailor soon feels a creeping sense of unease:

> Maybe it was the intense silence, maybe the lonely hour of the night, that oppressed the spirits; but there slowly crept over the traveller, who until now had been in so genial a humour, a stern sobriety, a vague presage of impending disaster, an unreasonable mistrust of his former jollity, so that he sat dumb and perplexed on his seat in the cart, watching the sharp-drawn shadows of the trees upon the white road flit silently by.[117]

The story is undergoing a change of tone, shown by the shifting moods of the two travellers, accompanied by the description of the inhospitable surroundings. De la Mare often uses descriptions of nature to arouse feelings of unease and, in this story, to suggest a sense of bleakness: 'A very slight fall of snow and a sharp frost had clothed the trees and hedges in a shimmering glory of sparkling white.'[118] De la Mare uses words like 'glory' and 'shimmering' in contrast to words like 'fall' and 'frost' to denote the light and darkness that speckle this story. It also indicates the vagaries of the characters in the story and signifies how fate can sometimes cast its shadow before it. In these early examples of his literary inclinations, he already displays a concern with the travelling figure.

De la Mare also often utilizes sound to achieve certain effects, as he does in the rest of the above quote. 'Not a sound was in the air save the buzz of the cart's wheels, the steady beat of the hoofs and an occasional shuddering snort from the mare.'[119] The sounds of travel itself are important in the story and presage forthcoming journeys in his writing. There is the turning of the wheels in the narrative and, later, the carriage wheels in 'What Dreams May Come'. There is the steady beat of the horse's hoofs, which precedes the many appearances of horses in his stories and poems, and, at the same time, the constant beat of the hoofs mimics the beating of the human heart. Skilful use of alliteration – shuddering snort – and a subtle suggestion of dread

[116] Ibid.
[117] Ibid., p. 405.
[118] Ibid., p. 404.
[119] Ibid.

with the use of the same word, ‘shuddering’, is shown. He uses it, too, in an onomatopoeic sense, along with ‘buzz’ to demonstrate how the traveller’s journey has taken a turn for the worse. Even before he hears the howling of the dog as he approaches his village, he has reverted to his basic instinct of restless travelling and a longing for the sea, far from the countryside. ‘Bitterly he cursed the land; he vowed he would carry his wife away to the sea and never touch England again.’[120] There is irony in these hasty words, for the last time the sailor does touch England’s soil is when he hits the ground after his deadly fall. The sounds of the dog are also a forerunner of the little dog, which features in a later poem, ‘All Hallowe’en’. In terror, it witnesses the ghastly return of its master from beyond the grave. De la Mare utilizes multiple themes and motifs that run through all his work and constantly return – discerned in embryonic form in ‘Kismet’.

Many of de la Mare’s narratives and poems are circular in style because of his ‘returns’. In ‘Kismet’, the cart’s first appearance signifies hope and relief, as the footsore sailor is offered the chance of a lift to his village, thus hastening the longed-for reunion with his wife. The second appearance of the cart is in vastly different circumstances and indicates the approach of the sailor’s fate. It presages the death of the sailor’s wife and brings to fruition the lingering fears which have begun to dog him. He had earlier abandoned the cart, but it had not abandoned him. It waits at his very door. At this point in the narrative, it is becoming clearer why the author chose the title ‘Kismet’ for this short story. Kismet is an Arabic word meaning ‘portion’ or ‘lot’ and is often used in literature as a signifier for the fate that befalls a person. Fate controls what happens to a person, and in this story, it also raises the question of whether the mariner deserved the horrible fate that befell him. It invites speculation as to whether his death was an accident or whether he, realizing the portentous loss of his wife and his future, let go of the branch of the tree to which he was clinging.

Ultimately, he had no control over his destiny, although he had made several attempts to outwit fate. He had left the safety and convenience of the cart and made his rash vow that he would never return to England. He also decided to avoid his own front door and climb the tree instead. Nevertheless, he is helpless against kismet. It has overtaken him as surely as the cart overtook him on the road.

---

[120] de la Mare, ‘Kismet’, in *Short Stories 1895–1926*, p. 405.

The sailor's fate can be guessed at when, near the end of the tale, he lies prostrate along the branches of the tree, overlooking his bedroom and the sorrowful scene therein. He saw the end of his life's travels and hopes, the passing of his life's meaning. 'He saw all things as he stared.'[121] This may imply unsolicited knowledge, an end-of-life experience, just as, in a later story, 'What Dreams May Come', Emmeline has a near-death experience. There is also a subtle reference to Eden in the manner of the mariner's death, falling from a tree in pursuit of knowledge, just as humanity fell from grace after Eve, then Adam, the ultimate exiles, ate the fruit from the Tree of Knowledge.

In fact, dispossession is a strong element in the narrative; the sailor, who starts out in happy anticipation of awaiting pleasures, is gradually stripped of everything he has or looks forward to. The wife's mother is dispossessed of her daughter, and the wife loses her life. Loss, such as that described in 'Kismet', is often a metaphor for the loss of Eden, as is seen in narratives subsequent to this first one. This loss is a concern of the author's many travellers. It is a crucial element in his literature. In Genesis 2:7, the Creation story, Adam and Eve leave the garden together, in disgrace but with mutually assured support. De la Mare's veiled references may point to the sailor and his wife travelling together, after death, to some other Eden. That may be his true fate, or it may be the eternal loss of Eden. As usual, de la Mare only hints at different possibilities and offers no explanation.

This story, in its succinctness, incorporates crowded images, a utilization of nature when nature accompanies the action or subtly works on the emotions of the characters, the contrast between man's simple earthly desires: 'The shelter of his house', 'The kiss of the loved woman'[122] and the overwhelming forces of death and destiny. It moves swiftly from expectation to encounter, from hope to uncertainty, from desire to death, and from death to another life. Its most significant achievement, however, is that his treatment of a universal theme, which he developed to an accomplished degree, flows out irrepressibly across the canon of the author's work. It is the burgeoning of an extraordinary talent concerned with the mental and spiritual

[121] Ibid., p. 407.
[122] Ibid., p. 405.

journey of man in the shape of the traveller, travelling down many roads and tracks, arriving at many crossroads, and in dream and imagination.

The next story to be explored is 'What Dreams May Come', from the 1936 collection *The Wind Blows Over*, the last collection of a good deal of short stories published in the 1920s and 1930s.[123] Once again, the travelling figure is found and followed in these collections by various narrators who are themselves travellers and often meet on public transport, as in this story, which begins in a carriage. From Emmeline, the young protagonist, is one of many journeying figures in this collection, to Lettie, another young girl who is aboard an ocean liner bound for New York with 'over a thousand miles to go'[124] to Miss Miller, where the reader encounters yet another cart, this time 'a three wheeled handcart'.[125] The man pushing the handcart was picking up dead leaves and placing them in it – another veiled reference to the dreadful cargo of the cart in 'The Wharf'. It is also a metaphor for Miss Miller's pointless existence.

The following story begins in an ill-fated carriage and, within it, a serious accident resulting in the deaths of the driver and conductor, but not of Emmeline, who wins her way back to the land of the living through the medium of a journey undertaken in an uneasy dream. As I will show in the following story and in many others of this author, a myriad of travels take place; there are many beginnings and middles but no definite endings with de la Mare, who avoided endings which were too final to be part of life's great mystery.

What Dreams May Come

Given Walter de la Mare's acclaimed erudition and immense reading, it is intriguing – but in no way surprising – that this short story is named after a quote from Shakespeare's play *Hamlet* when Hamlet thinks he is alone and reflects on sleep, dream, and death:

> To die, to sleep –
> To sleep, perchance to dream – ay, there's the rub,
> For in that sleep of death what dreams may come,

[123] de la Mare, 'What Dreams May Come', in *Short Stories 1927–1956*, p. 207.
[124] Ibid., p. 216.
[125] Ibid., p. 268.

When we have shuffled off this mortal coil,
Must give us pause.[126]

'What Dreams May Come' incorporates the constant theme of the traveller in its many manifestations and scenarios. It speaks of death as a journey. However, in this case, the protagonist, Emmeline, is determined not to die and begins the difficult, dreamlike journey back to life.

De la Mare's preoccupation with death appears with characteristic frequency and never more so than in this narrative, where he explores what it might be like to die. In his stories and poems about death, he often uses the metaphor of the carriage or coach to signify the enclosed space of the coffin. In this case, the coach in which Emmeline is travelling has been severely damaged in an accident, and the driver and conductor are dead or dying. As she wakes, she does not remember what happened before the accident. 'Where had she come from? Where was she going to? Her mind was in a terrifying confusion.'[127] Emmeline instinctively knows that she must leave the coach or join the driver and conductor on their final journey. She steps down from it, and as she does, the coach immediately takes off. Subconsciously, she has been alerted to the idea of impending death.

Vaguely, she is half aware that someone has been on the journey with her – her fiancé – but her memories are muddled, although, at one point in the story, she realizes that she must also save him from the grasp of death. While confused and frightened at the idea of encroaching danger, her courage and self-sufficiency evolve. De la Mare's children and young people are often self-sufficient. In this narrative, Emmeline bears a literary resemblance to another young girl, alone in the strange underground world of *Alice in Wonderland*. De la Mare draws attention to this later in the story when Emmeline visits the old house and is greeted by the funereal servant at the door. 'He might have come out of one of the *Alice's!*'.[128] This reference to Lewis Carroll's famous work is not a random one: it relates to the realm of dream in which Emmeline finds herself where – like Alice – her dream has a nightmarish quality. Although

[126] William Shakespeare, *Hamlet* IV.i.63–67 in *The Riverside Shakespeare,* ed. by G Blackmore Evans (Houghton Mifflin,1974) p. 1160.
[127] de la Mare, 'What Dreams May Come', in *Short Stories 1895–1926*, p. 208.
[128] Ibid., p. 210.

Alice meets many characters, animals, and humans on her dream journey, she is essentially alone, like Emmeline. De la Mare admired Carroll and shared with him an intense fascination with the world of dreams. Many of de la Mare's characters, too, moved – dreamlike – through strange worlds.

In a diary entry on 9 February 1856, Carroll wrote:

> Query: when we are dreaming and, as often happens, have a dim consciousness of the fact, and try to wake do we not say and do things where in waking life would be insane? May we not then sometimes define insanity as an inability to distinguish which is the waking and which the sleeping life? We often dream without the least suspicion of unreality' Sleep hath its own world' and it is as often as lifelike as the other.[129]

On this occasion, Carroll compares the disordered world of dreams with insanity, and it points to de la Mare's many characters who, in dreamlike states, display aberrant or eccentric behaviour. In 'What Dreams May Come', Emmeline moves through a dreamlike world, peopled by strange characters. De la Mare and Carroll took full advantage of the limitless possibilities of the dream setting. Lewis Carroll, the dreamer, invested his entire heart and soul into writing the two 'Alices' and never wrote anything like them again, although Alice continued to haunt Carroll 'phantomwise', 'moving under skies | never seen by waking eyes'.[130]

De la Mare, however, spread his dreams across his work as a coherent whole, expressing it at length in a vast anthology, *Behold, This Dreamer!* although it always remained an integral part of all his work, novels, short stories, poetry, anthology, and criticism.[131] In this anthology, he painstakingly gathered many diverse writers on dreams and dreamers. The sheer amount and variety therein parallel the number of de la Mare's characters and narrators who dream and imagine or wonder if they have dreamt or imagined.

---

[129] Derek Hudson, *Lewis Carroll* (Constable,1976), p. 90.
[130] Lewis Carroll, 'A Boat Beneath a Sunny Sky', *The Annotated Alice,* ed. by Martin Gardner (Penguin, 1970), p. 345.
[131] Walter de la Mare, *Behold, This Dreamer: Of Reverie, Night, Sleep, Dream, Love-Dreams, Nightmare, Death, The Unconscious, The Imagination, Divination, The Artist, and Kindred Subjects* (Faber & Faber, 1939).

Many of de la Mare's narrators and personae enter into their experiences or locations through some form of portal as Alice falls down the rabbit hole. These are often front doors, entrances to public transport or waiting places, shop doorways and gardens. There is a bewildering plethora of people accessing these portals to a dreamlike experience. Mr Kempe, the eponymous hero of the short story, the headmaster in 'A Recluse'[132] and the bookshop visitor in 'The Green Room'[133] all make ingress and egress through portals before their remerging senses begin to reveal the nature of their dreamlike former experiences or travels. Dreams are only one type of travel for de la Mare, but they are an extremely significant one as the dream travellers move through the writer's text.

Through both narratives, both authors, de la Mare and Carroll, pushed the boundaries of space, time, and human identity. In de la Mare's narrative, there is an emphasis on Emmeline's identity, just as Alice has a crisis of identity where she is mistaken for other characters, such as Mary Anne, the White Rabbit's housemaid. The Caterpillar asks her, 'Who are *you?*' and she answers, 'I hardly know, sir, just at present.'[134]

Identity can be lost or obscured in dreams, and Emmeline, too, is reminded of her human status and expresses a wish to escape her own. While Alice, after her awakening, runs off and takes no further responsibility for her dream, Emmeline awakens to a world where she has social and moral responsibilities, such as her anxiety for her fiancé and her immediate future.

As well as dreaming dreams, de la Mare was preoccupied with waking and with the liminal state in between. Emmeline wakes from her dream but soon falls asleep again, symbolic of the final sleep, the death dream. In many of de la Mare's accounts of travellers they have company, sometimes human, sometimes animal, often unwanted, whereas Emmeline has no one and is alone on her frightening journey. In the poem 'Song of Finis' and the long poem 'The Traveller', the itinerant figures have their faithful horses while many other travellers have the

[132] de la Mare, 'A Recluse', *Short Stories 1927–1956*, p. 3.
[133] Ibid., p. 124.
[134] Lewis Carroll, *Alice's Adventures in Wonderland and Through the Looking Glass* (Methuen, 1978), p. 32.

company of fellow passengers on public conveyances. All Emmeline has is her strength of character in what becomes a strange and fearful voyage of the spirit.

Having escaped the coach on its relentless journey, she is about to enter yet another enclosed space, that of the old house, often a portal to death in de la Mare. He enforces the idea of her being enclosed by his description of the tree-lined avenue leading up to the house. 'A dense avenue of evergreen trees-Ilex? Holly? Yew? lay beyond the iron bars, a cave of impenetrable darkness.'[135] The fact that the young girl cannot distinguish between these trees-ilex and holly are the same plant demonstrates her confused, dreamlike state. De la Mare frequently mentions these trees, which are often found growing in old country churchyards, drawing attention again to de la Mare's fixation on graveyards and, indeed, tombstones. The graveyard was the destination of many of his characters, but his emphasis on it in this story serves to draw attention to the fact that, despite Emmeline's consternation, her goal is to escape her fate.

Emmeline enters the house with trepidation and finds that nearly all of it is made of stone – like the furniture of a graveyard, 'frigid lifeless echoing stone'.[136] There are no grammatical pauses in this phrase: its purpose is to reinforce the horror of the girl's surroundings and to hasten the inevitability of her entrance into the unwelcoming but inevitable enclosure. Although houses are sometimes seen as a place of safety and security, in de la Mare, they are just as often the habitation of death or at least of the unknown. The author adds weight to this theme with his reference to Cheops: 'It was as if a pyramid had engulfed her.'[137] Cheops was an Egyptian pharaoh credited with commissioning the building of The Great Pyramid at Giza, the burial place of kings. The word 'engulfed' has frightening connotations, given Emmeline's parlous state.

This idea of the house as a place of death appears in other short stories such as 'The House',[138] where the house's owner, Mr Asprey, is taking stock, ready, it seems, to face death as he leaves the house one last time. This is illustrated with the line, 'Well, the one thing certain was that

[135] de la Mare, 'A Recluse', in *Short Stories 1927–1956,* p. 209.
[136] de la Mare, 'What Dreams May Come', in *Short Stories 1895–1926,* p. 211.
[137] Ibid.
[138] de la Mare, 'The House', in *The Complete Poems*, p. 291.

he had been given notice to quit.'[139] Just as the damaged coach had hastened on to its inevitable end, so the house peremptorily evicts Mr Asprey. 'There sounded a tiny click in the supreme silence. He turned his head. Too late, again! – the door was shut.'[140]

Mr Asprey's house had betrayed him. The inevitable had happened, and he had been shut out of the safety of the house and met death, whereas Emmeline is about to encounter death upon entering a house. It is as if a pre-planned destiny awaits her: 'The hinges made no sound at all as she pushed the gate open. It was as if they had been carefully oiled for her coming.'[141] Emmeline was about to embark, with her entry to the house, on an unknown future, but journeys once embarked on in de la Mare must be pursued to the end, no matter what that end may be.

The reason for the story's title begins to reveal itself. For example, in the play, Hamlet is on the point of leaving life, contemplating that death is preferable to his present condition. Likewise, Emmeline is exhausted at this point of the narrative, and she too is tempted to give in, to cease her struggles and succumb to a peaceful nothingness. However, her very human lust for life intervenes and 'She turned instinctively towards the light of the candles'.[142] Showing illumination in darkness is a favourite leitmotif of de la Mare. Here, it shows that light is beginning to break through Emmeline's darkness. At this point, she sees the portrait of the Master of the House – a likeness of a skull – and recognizes it as a portrait of Yorick. Just like de la Mare himself, she may have been brought up on and admired Shakespeare. She gazes at this portrait in thrall, recognizing familiarity and comfort in it. De la Mare is intimating here that there is comfort to be found in the peace pertaining to human remains, for they are at peace, and who knows what mysteries they reflect about their afterlife state – what unplumbable depths. He also reminds us that the human mind, represented here by the skull, is surely immortal and will persist: 'And the vacant orbits gazed back at her, tonguelessly declaring their inexhaustible resources.'[143]

[139] Ibid., p. 289.
[140] Ibid.
[141] Ibid., p. 209.
[142] Ibid., p. 212.
[143] Ibid.

However, de la Mare does not permit Emmeline to dwell on these ideas for long. She is determined on life, not on death and its potential possibilities. She then sees a figure lying under a sheet. This is the moment when the destination of her journey will be decided. Emmeline realizes what she must do to deflect the course that she is on – she must lift the sheet. This, with its gothic hints of lifting the veil, also connects to the lifting of the sheet in the short story 'Kismet'. In that de la Mare story, the lifting of the sheet revealed death, although here, it means her return to life. The act of lifting the sheet is Emmeline's final act of courage, especially as the inference is that the figure lying under the sheet is that of her fiancé, who had been with her when the coach was wrecked. At the start of the story, we are told that she had been 'smiling at another reflection beside it in this very glass!'.[144] Yet Emmeline transitions to a world where she cannot understand how she has come to be alone in such a nightmare world despite subconsciously knowing that her fiancé is nearby and that lifting the sheet is crucial to his very life.

However, since she has mustered the essential courage to regard what lies beneath the sheet, the dream of death is dissolved: 'And beneath it she knew there lay concealed what she dared not look at, and yet what also she knew with her whole soul now depended upon her.'[145] The last, lingering images of death and decay are dispelled, as the scent of decay, 'that detestable, that odious other sweetness',[146] is replaced by the fragrance of jonquils. Jonquils, or daffodils, are a sign of the return to life of spring. Emmeline's courage and steadfastness are reminiscent of that displayed by Alice, in Wonderland. De la Mare is aware of the courage shown by the human child in Carroll's stories, and he acknowledges it in his book, *Lewis Carroll*, with her 'dignity, her matter-of-factness, her conscientiousness, her courage (even in the most outlandish of circumstances) never to submit or yield'.[147]

There is a keen sense of human identity, of individuality in this narrative, and de la Mare imbues many of his travellers with this quality: 'You will always have *someone* with you,

[144] de la Mare, 'What Dreams May Come', in *Short Stories 1895–1926*, p. 207.
[145] Ibid., p. 211.
[146] Ibid., p. 213.
[147] Walter de la Mare, *Lewis Carroll* (Faber and Faber, 1932) p. 54.

surely, so long as you have yourself, a self, she meant, still in some degree triumphant however dreadfully cowed at – well at *this* kind of experience.'[148]

Along with his ever-present images of death, in this story, de la Mare also reveals a parallel image of the other significant journey undertaken by all humankind – birth itself. There are similarities in the imagery of the text the author imagines, touching on the idea of life's circular journey.[149] Images of birth are suggested in the lexical choice, for example, 'she descended from the coach',[150] clutching a piece of paper which becomes precious to her. This is representative of Emmeline's own unique identity. The story begins with her emerging from sleep, not knowing where she was or what had happened to her, 'Her body gently swaying and rocking in passive obedience to the almost soundless motion of the coach',[151] which is a persuasive suggestion of the womb. This image is reinforced in the narrative with the words, 'The cumbrous vehicle swayed stolidly on, its hidden engine throbbing hardly more audibly than if it were within her own breast.'[152] These concrete images of birth, life and death serve as a reminder of the road the traveller must take, predestined to die and in life, to a certain extent, predictable, but after death, sheathed in mystery

The similarities exposed between birth and death show that life is a journey from beginning to end, and although the young girl has escaped into life on this occasion, death will come for her eventually. Meanwhile, de la Mare is advocating that life is worth having and that human pursuits and desires are a vital part of that life. When Emmeline awakens, she finds that the odious scent has disappeared and resolved into the 'delicious fragrance'[153] of jonquils, which are by her bedside. This beautiful sight – and an appreciation of the presence of nature she now feels – is as much an affirmation of life as a rejection of death. Emmeline has also become aware of the sapphire stones on her engagement ring and slowly remembers she has a fiancé. She has overcome a long, frightening journey and is looking forward to the next part, with all its implications of marriage and the generation of new life.

---

[148] de la Mare, 'What Dreams May Come', in *Short Stories 1895–1926*, p. 209.
[149] Ibid.
[150] Ibid., p. 209.
[151] Ibid., p. 207.
[152] Ibid., p. 208.
[153] Ibid., p. 214.

There are two worlds in this story. De la Mare himself veered between two worlds: that of reality and that of dreams. As Anne Bentick expresses, 'The dichotomy between the two worlds in which we exist, and the idea that we live in close harmony with another, more sensitive, imaginative "inner companion", is of paramount importance in de la Mare's work.'[154] The two worlds converge in this dreamlike tale; the story begins in the sleep of near-death and ends in the ordinary, human sleep of weariness, though in between, there is a gulf, which de la Mare makes bridgeable through the ancient, primaeval state of dream. Dream is how Emmeline accesses her desire to achieve life; dream is what makes it possible for her to travel an impassable and impossible route. At the same time, she is on a voyage of self-discovery, 'Be it for better or worse | Thou art thy universe'.[155]

The intrusion of real life in the form of the bandage on Emmeline's head, the nurse's blue eyes, and the presence of the doctor contrast with that other world she has journeyed through. Although it seems she will be happy, the author reminds us that she naturally falls asleep again after recognizing and acknowledging the attributes of life all around her: 'And with that, Emmeline had already escaped from actuality again, had fallen asleep.'[156] What she will make of her life going forward will be lived, surely, inevitably, after that experience, in the light of both reality and dreams. This brush with death ended in a hospital bed, but where she may wake up when death finally claims her is uncertain. In 'Self to Self', de la Mare talks of this uncertainty:

> If thou wake never – well:
> But if perchance thou find
> Light, that brief gloom behind,
> Thou'lt have wherewith to tell
> If thou'rt in heaven or hell.[157]

Emmeline will be able to manipulate the course of her life to a certain extent, and although kismet will eventually intervene, her life will be precious to her. De la Mare shows empathy

---

[154] Anne Bentick, *Romantic Imagery in the Works of Walter de la Mare* (Edwin Mellen Press, 2001), p. 42.
[155] de la Mare, 'Self to Self', in *The Complete Poems*, p. 298.
[156] de la Mare, 'What Dreams May Come', in *Short Stories 1895–1926*, p. 214.
[157] de la Mare, 'Self to Self', in *The Complete Poems*, p. 298.

with the everyday concerns of man through Emmeline's awakening and her immediate affirmation of all that was important to her in the life she had fought so courageously to attain and the difficult journey she underwent to accomplish this. The journey, through dream, into life, won from near-death, is the ostensible subject of the narrative, yet it also encapsulates de la Mare's constant theme of the traveller in its many ramifications and scenarios. It speaks of all kinds of journeys made on Earth and sometimes beyond; there are many possibilities in de la Mare.

The above short story was published in 1908 and is another early example of de la Mare's writing on the theme of the traveller. It is the second earliest text discussed in this chapter on the traveller or exile in the works of Walter de la Mare. The most recent one I shall explore was published in 1950, shortly before his death, and is entitled 'The Bird of Travel'. What this sequence serves to demonstrate is that the motif of the traveller was a persistent one throughout the literary life of de la Mare since his first published work, the short story 'Kismet', in 1895. This was a long life and a long time to follow the traveller on his search for the lost Eden.

De la Mare's characters range widely and sometimes wildly, but the tenacity with which the author pursues them is remarkable. His travellers are diverse, and their persistence and longing for their destiny are significant.

The Bird of Travel

In 'Bird of Travel', the setting is a garden, another of de la Mare's recurrent themes and a metaphor for the garden of Eden, the traveller's earnest desire. The two characters, the young girl and boy, meet in the garden at the beginning and at the conclusion of the story when the girl, on both occasions, seems to disappear from view: 'I looked back […] she was gone.'[158] The prevalent sense of stillness in the house and garden of the story is offset by the troubling idea of pointless travel, personified by a bird that represents the allure of this type of travel. Early in the story, one of the handful of narrators describes the story as 'rather pointless',[159] which foretokens a tale that at first appears to be going nowhere but is about the disparity

[158] de la Mare, 'Bird of Travel', in *The Riddle: And Other Stories*, p. 156.
[159] Ibid., p.142.

between spiritual seekers like Elizabeth and other, more worldly fellow beings or even bold adventures like the knight in 'Song of Finis'.

The heroine of the story, Elizabeth, is a young woman who lives in an old house – a recognized leitmotif of this author – called 'The Wood'. She has come home to her house to die. Elizabeth has travelled a little, but her heart has always longed to return to her beloved house and its solitude. A distant cousin, a young boy who has heard tales of a legendary bird that haunts the grounds of Elizabeth's house, longs to visit her and see the legendary bird. The two cousins met once when they were both young, in the house's garden, although the young boy, who is also the chief narrator, does not enter the house or hear or see the bird. Years later, as young adults, they meet again, but not before the narrator has explored the house without Elizabeth's permission and her presence. After this exploration, he continues into the woods, where he finally hears and sees the bird of travel.

When the two young cousins meet, the girl reveals that she is dying of a terminal illness and has come home to die in peace in her home. She is not afraid of death; indeed, she welcomes it for the answers it may bring. She also reveals something about her expectation of death and how she longs to embrace it, leaving the young man perplexed at her thoughts and with his own 'queer contrary thoughts'.[160]

In this short story, de la Mare explores the idea of travelling itself and how it can, quite often, affect the characters in a story in diverse ways. More importantly, and at the same time, he also explores the idea that death, although the end of the physical journey, may be a portal to the habitation of a different world, to unforeseen knowledge. Elizabeth states that she hopes to gain this knowledge when her fast-approaching death occurs. 'Forgive such nonsense; but it is that incessant expectation – *incessant;* boxes packed and corded, as it were, the door ajar. It is *that* I hunger for – for then.'[161] De la Mare is fond of this description of man's physical body as a packed-up trunk. In *The Return,* one of the characters, Herbert, says of the physicality of man, 'What are we human beings after all? Clay in the hands of the potter. Our bodies are merely an

[160] Ibid., p. 156.
[161] Ibid., p. 151.

inheritance, packed tight and corded up.'[162] This is a reminder that the outward body is only the package which houses the soul. Births and deaths, deaths and births are a reference to the circular route taken by the eternal traveller, a glimpse of which is shown in 'What Dreams May Come' when Emmeline faces her eventual demise, even as she gains life.

Despite this solemn theme, the story has a fairy-tale atmosphere, heightened by the name of Elizabeth's house, The Wood, with its suggestion of the sleeping beauty, the surrounding trees and thicket, and the 'dark thorn'[163] of de la Mare's poem 'The Ghost'. 'Seven-league Boots' is also mentioned, another allusion to fairy tale and how such tales invariably involve long, adventurous journeys of a questing nature, where the homecoming is all-important as it is in 'The Bird of Travel'.

Elizabeth has travelled in her life – been away from her home – but it has never become an obsession with her. After hearing and heeding the siren call of the bird of travel, two of her great uncles, Hamilton and Paul, became inveterate travellers. Subsequently, one lies unburied in South America, and the other drowned. None of these itinerant relatives had a proper, conventional interment. Elizabeth equates the living of a normal life, having a peaceful death and a conventional burial with her hopes for eternity. Her uncles' fates are inextricably bound up in her mind with their wanderlust. The bird stirs the imagination of all who hear it and causes them to wander far from home. There is a parallel here with the loss of Eden as Adam and Eve listened to the serpent's insidious and seductive voice. Elizabeth, however, has no desire to listen to the call of the bird.

The young boy has travelled too, although not very successfully. His younger untravelled self and his older travelled one appear to be 'two selves rather crudely severed'.[164] This contrasts strongly with Elizabeth's forthcoming and, hopefully, seamless demise. Although these two relatives meet again, there is not much associative description of the intervening years. This is deliberate on de la Mare's part as he wants the reader to focus on their separate journeys and to reflect on where journeys can take us even if they, as they often do, take us back home.

---

[162] de la Mare, *The Return*, p. 136.
[163] de la Mare, 'The Ghost', in *The Complete Poems*, p. 196.
[164] de la Mare, *The Return*, p. 81.

Talking to her cousin about her family's penchant for travel and neglect of their ancestral home, Elizabeth reveals, '[S]o far as my own family is concerned, I am the last […] after all these years – all those births and deaths, and births again – there is not one of us left in this world here except me.'[165] This shows she is, unlike them, firmly rooted in her home. The word 'here' is a telling one as it speaks of the displacement and dispossession of her ancestors, depriving them of any benign influence or a lasting legacy. She is the only one to fully appreciate her beloved house, as the following quote demonstrates, 'I cannot tell you – this place is rooted in my heart. It *is* me. Here, only, I seem to catch at the meaning of being alive at all'.[166]

This story is also about houses. It opens with, 'We had been talking of houses'.[167] Houses take on different meanings in de la Mare's writings. In the story 'What Dreams May Come', the house is a sinister one. Sometimes, the houses are haunted; undoubtedly, the presence of the portraits of Elizabeth's dead uncles gives a spectral atmosphere to her house, as if it is haunted by the ghosts of her forbears who travelled but did not return to it in body. Elizabeth's strange appearances and disappearances have an ethereal and ghostly quality, giving rise to the feeling that she herself may be a ghost returning to haunt her former home. If she is, in fact, a haunting, then this usurps the idea of her seamless demise and eternal rest.

However, the inferred haunting may be the state she sought in death – to be reunited with her true love – her home. De la Mare reinforces the idea of her spectrality, using words such as 'the strange rapt face', 'she did not stir', and 'all perfectly still things'.[168]

Stranger still is the implication that Elizabeth has the power, even in death, to arrange the poignant and unearthly meeting between her and her distant kinsman, then to disappear suddenly and inexplicably: 'And then – I turned on my heel, and when, no longer a shy awkward, silly boy, I looked back as of old and for the last time; again it was in vain. She was gone.'[169] The unanswered question of the text is 'gone where?' but the author raises the hope

[165] de la Mare, 'Bird of Travel', in *The Riddle: And Other Stories,* p. 150.
[166] Ibid.
[167] Ibid., p. 141.
[168] Ibid., p. 156.
[169] Ibid.

that Elizabeth has found the eternal peace she craves in the house she loves. Perhaps like another of de la Mare's singular female characters, Alice, in his short story 'The Looking-Glass', she has come to realize 'The Spirit is *me:* I haunt this place!'.[170]

Houses in de la Mare's writing are constantly haunted by former inhabitants. Katherine Mansfield realized – as did de la Mare – that it is difficult to escape from the clutches of places and the hold they have. She remarked to Ida Baker, her friend and confidante, 'How hard it is to escape from places. However carefully one goes they hold you – you leave little bits of yourself fluttering on the fences – little rags and shreds of your very life.'[171] 'Little rags and shreds' also recalls the short story 'The Creatures' where a scrap of blue fabric belonging to Femina Creature is framed on the wall like a portrait and highlights the ghostly vestiges of the woman's life in the house even though she is buried in the outlying village.

However, there is no certainty in the narrative as demonstrated by the reaction to the tale by the assembled audience, who regard it as a story without an ending and disparage the chief narrator because he is a poet, 'something of a versifier'[172] and therefore unreliable. At the same time, the young boy narrator of the poem, the poet, is now an old man, 'a quaint old creature'.[173] Both these aspects question the veracity of what is, of itself, a strange tale.

In this short story, the author touches on many of his prevalent literary themes: the dream world, the spectral world, the world of feeling and imagination and, importantly, the text reflects on what may be the final fate of the ubiquitous but ever hopeful traveller.

De la Mare's many stories featuring houses are accompanied by many poems on the same theme. In 'The Vacant Farmhouse', he writes, 'Dark empty barns; a shed; abandoned byres | A weedy stack-yard whence all life is fled.'[174] Other poems and stories have old, deserted houses in a romantic setting. In 'The House', 'briar and bryony ramble there'.[175] These old houses can

---

[170] de la Mare, 'The Looking-Glass', in *The Riddle: And Other Stories*, p. 65.
[171] Letter to Ida Constance Baker, 7 March 1922, *Edinburgh Letters,* I, p. 122. in Kajita, *Walter de la Mare: Critical Appraisals,* p. 96.
[172] de la Mare, 'Bird of Travel', in *The Riddle: And Other Stories,* p.142.
[173] Ibid.
[174] de la Mare, 'The Vacant Farmhouse', in *The Complete Poems*, p. 540.
[175] de la Mare, 'The House', in *The Complete Poems* p. 426.

often only be reached through deeply wooded copses, such as in Elizabeth's house. Her house is also old and was temporarily deserted, but she has never forgotten it. It stayed alive in her memory as the place she would finally go to for comfort and solace.

At one point in the story, de la Mare conveys that lying in this house is a copy of the sheet music for Gounod's 'How Beautiful upon the Mountains'. The composer wrote this piece of music based on a saying of the prophet Isaiah: 'How Beautiful upon the mountains are the feet of him that bringeth good tidings, that publisheth peace.'[176] It pertains to the vaunted return of the Jews from captivity and makes a subtle comment on Elizabeth's return home. The narrator asks her, 'But what is this coming back?' to which she replies, 'Oh but you don't understand. It is here now. And then, shall I not, see? Shall I not know?'.[177] De la Mare often has journeys and houses or homes inextricably entwined. Most journeys, however long, usually begin at one's front door and often end up there too. That is the nature of the quest story.

De la Mare successfully connects the two in 'The Bird of Travel'. The house, and the wood, with its deeply thicketed surroundings and legendary bird, are crucial. Some of Elizabeth's ill-fated relatives would never see the ancestral home again, whereas she will fulfil her dream and more by coming home. The door ajar was, for them, a door to the wider world; for Elizabeth, it was the portal to another world. She explains to the narrator, 'We are wayfaring men one and all and *my* journey will be better than dreams.'[178] Elizabeth needs the familiar surroundings to imbue her with the courage to face her last journey, and she may know the peace denied to her travel-ridden ancestors.

The narrative represents the liminal, the threshold of two worlds. Elizabeth goes forward into space, if not boldly like the knight in 'Song of Finis', then bravely, seeking answers to her metaphysical questions. 'What is space but all I am? What is time but the all I was and shall be?'.[179] As de la Mare entered old age, science was revealing fresh mysteries of the cosmos which would have fascinated him. In 'The Bird of Travel', de la Mare tries, as he often does, to make sense of an uncaring, unimaginable cosmos by demonstrating that we are part of it in

[176] Isaiah 52:7
[177] de la Mare, 'Bird of Travel', in *The Riddle: And Other Stories,* p. 154.
[178] Ibid., p. 153.
[179] Ibid., p. 155.

life and will be, as Elizabeth hopes, part of it in death. Angela Leighton describes this tale as 'a story within a story'.[180] She theorizes it is a possible 'prose rehearsal'[181] for 'The Listeners' with its deserted house and the sense of unseen listeners and unanswered questions.

The afterworld, which Elizabeth anticipates, holds many encounters and secrets. In the following poem, 'All Hallowe'en', de la Mare explores the mysterious question of revenants and returning spirits from this realm. The word 'revenant' is from the French 'revenir', 'to come back' and is set, appropriately, at Halloween, where there has long been a tradition of returning spirits. A revenant is an animated corpse that returns to haunt the living and is part of many diverse cultures and a well-known gothic convention. In this poem, de la Mare fuses fear of the unknown with human sympathy for such fallen creatures. The influence of the supernatural, or the preternatural, is present in much of his work and features strongly in the following poem.

All Hallowe'en

This short poem is of another kind of journey, the imagined journey back from the dead. It uses the literary medium of an unknown narrator, who, in turn, uses another medium, that of a little dog, to reveal the ghostly return of the dog's master. Throughout the poem, the poet controls the action and atmosphere by skilfully utilizing two personae. One is human, and one more unusual: an animal but soon-to-be feature of much of his work with the idea of bestiality. This device lends an air of distancing and remoteness to the poem, highlighted by the words 'It was not with delight' and 'it was not for delight'.[182] These words also express fear and negativity.

The human narrator's sense of hearing, alerted by the barking of the dog, is superseded by the animal's intense sense of fear, culminating in the words 'bark', 'shrill' and later the suggestive word 'yelped'. The dog is the more fully realized of the two personae, and this introduces and sustains the idea of fear until the human persona begins to soften towards the spirit. Meanwhile, at the start of the poem, they both work in tandem to produce fear of the supernatural and a sense of the sinister. We have no access to the spirit or knowledge of what it feels as it is only

[180] Leighton, *Hearing Things: The Work of Sound in Literature*, p. 139.
[181] Ibid., p. 140.
[182] de la Mare, 'All Hallowe'en', in *Short Stories 1927–1956*, p. 539.

viewed from these two perspectives. It remains an essence, a phantom presence, one of de la Mare's hungry ghosts.

A. L. Megroz says in his work on de la Mare, 'We are persuaded best to see the ghosts by the writer who is careful to show them to us through the mental window of the haunted person.'[183] De la Mare, in this poem, dilutes the appearance of the ghost, further bypassing it through the eyes of the narrator into the eyes of an animal. This gives rise to one of de la Mare's peculiar ghostly presences, where the ghost is neither semi-physical nor the product of man's complex imagination but is more elusive until it finally dissolves into the surrounding countryside. Bentick remarks, 'He does not believe in the semi-physical ghost, but rather in a more spiritual ghostly world which, because of the complexity of man and his mental and emotional existence, he feels must exist.'[184] De la Mare skilfully transfers the sight, the seeing of the ghost, to the eyes and mind of a dog, which, as far as we know, has not the psychological complexity of a man and, therefore, sees the ghostly presence for what it is. Through the dog, we see its fearsomeness; through the human narrator, we are made aware of its piteous state.

The human persona retains an air of sardonicism throughout the poem, emphasizing the humanness of that persona, and it colours the end of the poem when pity for the spectre begins to creep in. Using a dog for the second persona is a clever device as the sense of fear is strong in animals and, in a dog, easily aroused. The dog symbolizes the fear of the unknown for both man and beast and points to the disturbing entry of the supernatural. The dog's fears are expressed through the words 'fear', 'fury', and 'fright'. Their alliterative usage demonstrates a frightened animal poised for fight or flight, which is also an instinctive human response in the face of fear. This usage contrasts with the soft sibilant sounds suggested by the spirit, 'the softness, the swiftness, the waft of the sprite',[185] which also implies a terrible swift, unwanted ingress.

Many of de la Mare's revenants are swift: Sabathier, the Huguenot revenant in the novel *The Return,* the sudden, shocking knocking on the door in 'The Ghost', the sudden materializing of

[183] R. L Megroz, *Five Novelist Poets of Today* (Joiner & Steele, 1933), p. 173.
[184] Bentick, *Romantic Imagery in the Works of Walter de la Mare*, pp. 149–150.
[185] de la Mare, 'All Hallowe'en', in *The Complete Poems*, p. 539.

the spirit in 'The Green Room'.[186] 'All Hallowe'en' is no different and has an air of rapid movement and heightening fear. This rapidity culminates just as swiftly in line eleven, when the poem begins to adopt a slower pace, as befits the fate of the ghost, which we now learn is doomed to wander. Evil and changed – the ghost of the master may be – but we are asked to pity it for its cruel fate.

There is also a pronounced sense of movement throughout the text, indicating that there is no rest for the revenant, who is described at one point as a 'sprite' with the suggestion of sprightliness and quick movement. Perhaps the spirit will not be seen after Halloween, blending into the surrounding landscape – haunting it. Its power fades as Halloween wanes into daylight, the time for mortals. The title 'All Hallowe'en' is an intriguing one as the poet uses the old, forgotten form of Halloween to suggest ancient mysteries.

In the poem 'Haunted', there is the same sense of diminishing power with the words, 'A changing glory round thy head | but fade with all; and thou must come | hating thy journey, homeless, home.'[187] In the closing line of 'All Hallowe'en' the 'poor soul' is described as 'hieing' off home. The unusual word 'hieing' means to hasten, but in the context of the poem, it creates the impression of a wounded animal hieing off home. The words 'poor soul' are also significant in the poem because they draw attention to All Souls Day, the day after All Hallows Day, and contrast the blessed state of saints in heaven to the helpless souls waiting for redemption in Purgatory.

The two personae also parallel the unknown world of the supernatural. The 'unnatural' is a place frequently visited by the poet in other works of dark, empty spaces, serious moonlight, and eerie silence, often only broken by the sounds of wild creatures. Into these strange, unnatural silences, the supernatural slips easily. These two worlds are, in turn, overarched by the natural world, by scenes of nature, never far from de la Mare's descriptions and present in the poem, for example, 'vague murk of night' gives way to 'daybreak on earth – '.[188] Although

[186] de la Mare, 'Green Room', in *Short Stories 1927-1956*, p.124.
[187] de la Mare, 'The Haunted', in *The Complete Poems*, p. 131.
[188] de la Mare, 'All Hallowe'en', in *The Complete Poems*, p. 539.

the dog is the more fully realized persona, the most tangible, the two are united, at first, in antipathy towards the master's spirit.

However, pity for the spirit leaches into the latter part of the poem, enabled by the human persona. This creates a suggestive thin veil between the human world and the world of spirits, seen by animals but only intuited by humans. Such indirectness, even remoteness, increases the sense of horror, as the only sound to break the silence is the frightened barking of the dog, first at night, then at the break of dawn. De la Mare sets the poem at Halloween and uses the myth of that occasion to raise the idea of restless souls sometimes returning to their former habitation or places they have known in life, coming in the dead of night, and departing at dawn. This is a literary tradition of the old ballads, particularly the old Scottish ballads, which de la Mare loved and drew on in this poem, combining it with collective human superstition.

In the silent house where the spirit returns, the poet arouses the disturbing idea of sheer animal fear and the question of what happened here. The dog instinctively knows that this revenant is not his missed and once-loved master:

> It was not with delight
> That I heard in the dark
> And the silence of night
> The little dog bark.[189]

The word 'delight' is an incongruous one in this setting, and its appearance in the first line sets an ironic tone that pervades the whole poem. The irony stems from the idea that the faithful hound, reminiscent of the pet dog in 'Kismet', is rewarded for its faithful watchfulness, with horror, a sort of gothic Greyfriars Bobby:

> It was not for delight
> That his master had come
> That so shrill rang his bark;
> And at dawn, cold with rain,

[189] Ibid., p. 539.

That he yelped yet again.[190]

The word ‘delight’ is used again sardonically, though its use is ambiguous here regarding the master. Not only was the dog not delighted, but there is the sense that the master’s intentions were malevolent, and he was far from delighted at seeing the dog. This is the ultimate event: the journey back from the grave and the taboo of the touch of the dead. In Jewish orthodoxy, the touch of the dead means defilement, and in other cultures, the idea of a return from the dead is unspeakable. There is, therefore, the idea of the dog being defiled in some way, juxtaposed with the naming of the dog as ‘little’, increasing the sense of the dog’s terror and helplessness.

One of the most frightening aspects of this poem about a return from the grave is the idea of what the revenant brings with him – possibly illicit knowledge denied to living beings who have not made the journey to death and certainly not to beyond death. De la Mare would have certainly read the story *The Monkey’s Paw,* by W.W. Jacobs,[191] in which the deceased son of an old couple is prevented from returning from the dead, at the behest of his mother, by the action of the old man, his father. In that story, we are left with the horrific idea of what the son would have looked or acted like after being in and beyond the grave. There is the uneasy idea of illicit knowledge.

Knowing and not knowing is of the utmost significance in de la Mare’s writing. Angela Leighton comments on this in her book, saying, ‘The importance of knowing and the scary but wondering disadvantage of not knowing at all.’[192] The revenant in the poem is not unknown to the dog; indeed, it is the knowing on the dog’s part that is important because it recognizes its master but knows that it has changed. The ghost itself is unknowable.

Leighton also draws attention to de la Mare’s poem ‘Under the Rose’, subtitled *The Song of the Wanderer*, the title of which recalls knowledge gained; ‘sub rosa’ – illicitly.[193] The human mind cannot comprehend the genesis of this spirit, but the animal in the poem realizes the evil involved. In ‘All Hallowe’en’, we are only given hints of what the dead master brought back

[190] Ibid., p. 569.
[191] W.W. Jacobs, ‘The Monkey’s Paw’, in *The Lady of the Barge* (Harper & Brothers, 1906).
[192] Leighton, *Hearing Things: The Work of Sound in Literature*, p. 30.
[193] de la Mare, ‘Under the Rose’, in *The Complete Poems*, p. 450.

with him and hints of what happened to the little pet dog. We know only with certainty that this journey should never have been made.

De la Mare did not turn away from these questioning thoughts but embraced, in his fascination with the afterlife, all sorts of possibilities. His journeys into the unknown were made and explored by travellers poised on the brink. In 'All Hallowe'en', the horror is there, but no ghost or reanimated corpse is described. It is entirely characteristic of de la Mare, who valued writers like Poe but did not share the author's gruesome literary descriptions. The spirit may or may not be from hell, but its appearance at Halloween certainly hints at that possibility.

De la Mare had varying ideas of what hell might be like, from *Dante's Inferno*[194] to the vastly different idea of what hell was in the tale 'The Three Friends', where it was an everlasting monotony: 'All just the same. For ever, and ever, and ever.'[195] In 'All Hallowe'en', it is seen as something evil, for in de la Mare's writing, revenants are seldom welcome. In the poem 'Banquo',[196] the returning spirit is questioned, 'What dost thou here far from thy native place?'.[197] The same question could be asked of the master in 'All Hallowe'en' – were there anyone to ask it. In 'Banquo', there is a sense that the spirit is now so far removed from what it means to be human that it must be abhorred.

The journey of the revenant was pursued by de la Mare in many of his works, as his love of the gothic was an avid one. While some of his spirits, like the two poems both named 'The Ghost', were a reflection of sorrow – and even its passing – for the absence of the loved, departed spirits, de la Mare evinces only evil and regret in 'All Hallowe'en'. The American literary critic Edward Wagenknecht remarked that returning spirits, by their very nature, were resentful of their lot and out for revenge.[198] This disturbing idea parallels the equally disturbing idea of domestic horror. The 'domestic' is emphasized in the poem with words like 'home', 'lodgement' and 'love', and the pet dog is a visible reminder of domesticity. This gives the

[194] Alighieri Dante and Musurus Pasha, *Dante's Inferno* (Williams and Norgate, 1882).
[195] de la Mare, 'The Three Friends', in *Short Stories 1895–1926*, p. 97.
[196] de la Mare, 'Banquo', in *The Complete Poems*, p. 54.
[197] Ibid.
[198] Edward Wagenknecht, 'Walter De la Mare', *Etudes anglaises*, 26.3 (1973), 290.

poem its uneasy quality: the fact that the spirit has invaded familiar domestic spaces. The dog is ready to welcome its master but becomes frightened at the master's transformation.

As de la Mare began his writing career in magazines and periodicals, he would have been aware of the popularity of the ghost story. He was influenced by Henry James, whose story *The Turn of The Screw* cast doubts on whether the 'apparitions' the governess saw were real as they could have been the product of her disturbed mind. There are, however, no such doubts in this poem as the spectre is not the projection of any character's imagination, and the setting of 'All Hallowe'en' is a deliberate attempt to create a realistic landscape for the ghost.

The first part of the poem dwells on negative emotions, such as fear and doubt, while in the second half, more positive aspects, such as sympathy for the spirit, emerge:

> Doomed to roam
> Through the gloom,
> As the vague murk of night
> Gave cold, grudging birth
> To daybreak, on earth-
> Wanning hillside and grove,
> Once his lodgement and love:
> And now, poor soul,
> Hieing off home.[199]

The words 'gloom and murk' suggest something shadowy, some entity attempting to hide, something untrustworthy and slippery, such as the spirit in this poem.

The master's spirit was doomed to wander, 'wanning hillside and grove', an echo of the ghost of Emma in Hardy's *The Voice*, reduced to 'wan wistlessness'.[200] The words 'grove' and 'grave' in the same poem emphasize that the spirit has no real home as he has gone from the grave to the haunting of groves. The idea of the grave held a peculiar fascination for de la Mare,

[199] de la Mare, 'All Hallowe'en', in *The Complete Poems*, p. 539.
[200] Thomas Hardy, *Poems 1840–1928*, ed. by Tom Paulin (Faber and Faber, 2016) p. 62.

and he explores several aspects of it in his work. There is the lasting peace of the grave, which de la Mare invokes in many poems, and there is, as in 'All Hallowe'en', the sense that the grave may not be the typically perceived peaceful destination it could be for man. This is denoted when the spirit enters a new phase after its initial visitation to the dog. Awakened, it cannot return to whence it came but cannot regain its home, 'its lodgement and love',[201] so it passes on to obscurity, wandering the earth, perhaps never seen again by any eyes – animal or human.

The terrors of the night, abroad as de la Mare imagined at Halloween, are reluctant to relinquish their powers to the encroaching day, which is a time for mortals. Nonetheless, de la Mare's revenant is leaving his erstwhile home again, which was 'Once his lodgement and love | And now, poor soul | Hieing off home'. The word 'hieing' displays the intense sense of the other in this poem. The question arises as to where home is now. It is no longer the home he once loved and shared with his pet, who is lost to him now as eternally as lost Eden. He has become another one of de la Mare's exiles caught in a restless otherworld journey.

In the following poem, 'The Railway Junction', published in *The Fleeting* in 1933, de la Mare enters a well-travelled and represented world – the world of railways and railway travel.[202] Many stories, and in this case a poem, take place in railway carriages or railway surroundings for their atmospheric effect. The world of the railway carriage or waiting room is an enclosed world, enclosing a myriad of characters; the space itself is suggestive of the journey towards death. John Atkins, writer and playwright, suggests that de la Mare is obsessed with death, and any enclosed space reminded him of the grave.[203] The poem itself is simply written, almost colloquial in tone, but that belies the premise of the inevitable journey towards death, which is the premise of the poem.

The Railway Junction

> Railways became to de la Mare what ships were to Conrad or country roads to Hardy: symbols of man's fate, his mortal transit, thrown among strangers. He spent a great deal of time throughout his professional life in gaunt waiting

[201] de la Mare, 'All Hallowe'en', in *The Complete Poems*, p. 539.
[202] Walter de la Mare, *The Fleeting: And Other Poems* (Constable, 1933).
[203] John Atkins, *Walter de la Mare: An Exploration* (C. & J. Temple, 1972).

> rooms and deserted country halts. The curve of vanishing rails – uneasy, expectant, open to the unknown, symbols of hiatus and oppression – were natural breeding grounds for his inventive moods.[204]

Theresa Whistler raises the above quote, and the interesting fact that Naomi Royde-Smith (his platonic lover) often made fun of de la Mare's love of railways as an indication of how, although a more modern setting, the railway carriage was as much a symbol of the questing journey as the horse and rider. Many of de la Mare's works take place in railway carriages, sidings, or railway stations. While the railway carriage denotes the enclosed space and some of de la Mare's most startling encounters, the railway track suggests a rail or road vanishing over the horizon, away and out of sight. From this and similar analogies in his writing, we can discern the deeper, metaphysical, and psychological meanings of life's travels and travails. De la Mare's travellers were, even if accompanied, often solitaries. In 'The Railway Junction', the narrator sits alone on a station bench after the 'throng' of passengers have departed on a previous train.

The poem opens on a sombre note of 'tunnelled gloom' and 'darkening hills',[205] and as it unfurls, it becomes clear that this is an allegory of human life. De la Mare managed to convey this underlying meaning despite the simple diction and form of the poem. The last two lines of the poem, 'Wheels onward into darkening hills | And one towards distant seas', assume importance in the light of the first stanza, which is, at first sight, almost identical but has small, subtle and significant changes. In the first stanza, the enjambment of lines two to three enables the meaning inevitably to run on from one line to another, but with the further impression that the train is changing smoothly from tunnel to track, thus allowing the poem to transition from present to past and into the future.

Stanzas two to three are suggestive of peace and may represent de la Mare's voice of sadness at the aloneness of man, juxtaposed with the sense of tranquillity that being alone can bring. James Reeves calls this a suggestive poem.[206] The subsequent moment of reflection in the poem

---

[204] Whistler, *Imagination of the Heart*, p. 353.
[205] de la Mare, 'The Railway Junction', in *The Complete Poems*, p. 295.
[206] James Reeves, *Understanding Poetry* (Heinemann, 1965), p. 54.

seems to indicate that being alone shows man's capacity for such reflection, which sets him apart from the other creatures accompanying him on his journey through life: 'In peace awhile, I sit alone.'[207] A thrush singing is the only other sound; the author often uses birds to describe the idea of silence being broken. However, here, the soft song of the bird contrasts with the sound of the bird in 'Bird of Travel', with its siren song of faraway lands. The narrator, who had earlier been among a crowd of passengers who left before him, giving him a temporary and welcome respite, is now ready to take his place on the journey he must continue. He says, 'Though soon, at the appointed hour, | I shall myself be gone.'[208] These words introduce a note of fatalism to the text; though lacking in fear, there is a sense of quiet acceptance. Entering the railway carriage can be a sign of death in de la Mare's work, and it is in this poem, as much as the old trunk is in the short story 'The Riddle' or the casket in 'Kismet'.

Stanzas four to six contrast with the preceding verses, creating a more definite sense of movement and bustle, suggesting a busy railway station, albeit a small country one. There is a brief but lively description of the traveller's fellow passengers: a male and female motley collection taking a different route from himself. He describes a varying group from a newly married man, the groom, no doubt dressed in his wedding finery, to the cleric in black, an intermediary between the groom and the 'widow', whose son symbolizes new life. The sailor reappears from 'Kismet', a symbol of eternal journeys and the 'gaunt gamekeeper with his gun',[209] a symbol of violent death. 'That fair one, too, discreetly veiled'[210] underlines another favourite trope of the poet's: the unobtainable She and of Eve. The element of the veil denotes mystery and the thin covering between one world and the next, heightening the mysterious atmosphere of the poem. The poem encompasses life, encounters, and departures, thinly drawn itinerant figures, yet immensely representative of human disparity.

There is another, even stranger, description of fellow passengers in 'Lichen', where six unusual travellers include a child and even a baby.[211] This description and the one in 'The Railway Junction' are extremely odd and suggestive of the bizarre train journey in the chapter 'Looking

[207] de la Mare, 'The Railway Junction', in *The Complete Poems*, p. 295.
[208] de la Mare, 'The Railway Junction', in *The Complete Poems*, p. 295.
[209] Ibid.
[210] Ibid.
[211] de la Mare, 'Lichen', *Short Stories 1895–1926*, p. 167.

Glass Insects' in *Alice Through the Looking Glass.*[212] 'It was a very queer carriage – full of passengers altogether.'[213] In the short story 'Crewe',[214] the action begins in a station waiting room, with the traveller, having been subjected to the 'dreadful apartment'[215] with other passengers, finding himself on his own. Everyone else has left on the 'down' train, leaving him to wait on the 'up'.[216] Such a description is symbolic of the destination of humankind, whether they are consigned to hell or paradise.

People are grouped together in life, on journeys, and in de la Mare's poetry and stories, in modes of public transportation. Their solitariness and uniqueness are enhanced in the words of this poem, with 'I nothing know why thus we met'.[217] Society is necessary for humankind, but in the end, each person carries their hopes, fears, and desires. In 'The Bird of Travel', Elizabeth says, 'And now […] goodbye for this life. Yours that way, mine this.'[218] She says this as the evening grows late, 'And what shall I remember, except – | The evening growing late'.[219] So, the day lengthens into the night for these passengers, and they undertake their separate journeys to the hills or the sea.

As stated earlier, the last stanza reflects the first but with subtle differences. The words 'from here' in the first stanza change to 'that here', demonstrating that a hiatus has been reached. The journey has achieved a crucial stage; the past has become the present. It is useful to remind ourselves of the poem's title and what it means. 'The Railway Junction' could just as successfully be titled 'The Railway Track', but de la Mare is drawing attention to the changes and stages made on a journey through life and how events can alter decisions.

The word 'one' is missing in lines two and twenty-seven, causing an interruption to the rhythm and creating a pause. This physical hiatus in the text indicates that a choice must be made. Line twenty-seven is also an inversion of line three, reinforcing the idea that life is not the same for

---

[212] Lewis Carroll, *Alice Through the Looking-Glass* (Splendour books, 1959).
[213] *New Oxford Book of English Verse 1250–1950*, ed. by Helen Gardener (Oxford University Press, 1972), p. 219.
[214] de la Mare, 'Crewe', in *Short Stories 1895–1926*, p. 53.
[215] Ibid.
[216] Ibid.
[217] de la Mare, 'The Railway Junction', in *The Complete Poems*, p. 296.
[218] de la Mare, 'Bird of Travel', in *The Riddle: And Other Stories*, p. 155.
[219] de la Mare, 'The Railway Junction', in *The Complete Poems,* p. 295.

every traveller, although the outcome may be. Interestingly, the poem ends with a question mark. In the beginning, the destination seems clear; there are two choices – the hills or the sea. The question mark at the end, therefore, clouds this certainty. Life's progress has eroded life's certainties. Considering de la Mare's penchant for dwelling on the human condition, it seems likely that this poem has the eroding nature of life's certainties in mind, with its tunnels, forked tracks, hills and seas. A quote from the short story 'The Creatures' exemplifies how the physical act of railway travelling in de la Mare's writing further underlies the meaning of fellow 'journeyers' on life's tracks and how their interaction is necessary to each other. 'It's a queer experience, railway travelling […] One is cast into a passing privacy with a fellow stranger and then is gone.'[220]

Song of Finis

Published in 1914, 'Song of Finis' marked the end of de la Mare's literary formative years. It was part of a collection called *Peacock Pie.*[221] This collection received favourable criticism from I. A. Richards, who had formerly castigated de la Mare's work. He found in *Peacock Pie* 'perfection'.[222] Although written for children and likely to appeal to them for its fairy-tale atmosphere, the poem 'Song of Finis' carries a deeper resonance. It continues the constant theme of the traveller with a favourite trope of the horse and rider. It also concerns endings and fear of endings, and the poem fittingly became the final one in the collection. For this reason, it is also the last de Mare literary piece that I feature in this section of my thesis. This is relevant as the knight epitomizes both sides of the sometimes-contradictory nature of de la Mare's views on his travellers, their journeys and destinations. The knight, as a bold adventurer, represents victory in failure, but there is a duality in his character, for at the same time, he is a waif or outcast because of his solitariness.

As in 'Kismet', this poem teeters on the brink of the abyss with areas of contradiction and tension, as I shall demonstrate in the following two chapters where de la Mare represents the afterlife both as a vaunted return to Eden or the opposite of frightening visions of punishment and annihilation. Even when de la Mare suggests a certain destination – as he does in 'The

[220] de la Mare, 'The Creatures', in *The Riddle: And Other Stories*, p. 275.
[221] de la Mare *Peacock Pie: A Book of Rhymes* (Constable and Company, 1926).
[222] I. A Richards, 'Reconsideration: Walter de la Mare' *The New Republic*, 174.5 (1976), p. 31.

Creatures', which is a view of Eden, and in 'The Three Friends', a vision of hell – he takes the reader only halfway along the route. 'Song of Finis' is heavily influenced by the balladic and the Victorian fairy-tale poem, in the manner of Christina Rossetti, whom de la Mare admired and often quoted. It is about a knight of the fairy-tale genre who has come to the end of his travels and worldly perils. Like Elizabeth in 'The Bird of Travel', he too is anxious to leave mortal life, to travel even further on and hopefully find answers. However, unlike Elizabeth, he is old, and life has worn him down. The dual aspect of the poem is reflected in the contrasting layout, rhythm, and lexical choice of the two stanzas that make up this short poem.

It begins 'At the edge of All the Ages | a Knight sat on his steed'.[223] Like Emmeline in 'What Dreams May Come', the knight travels through a barren wasteland setting, although the knight has his horse as a companion. The wasteland setting is reminiscent of Eliot's 'rock, stone and sandy road'[224] and parallels 'The Waste Land' in themes of decay and degeneration, partly through the caducity of the knight and partly through the barrenness through which both characters move.

The effect is furthered by the words 'At the Edge of all the Ages' as if 'All the Ages' were an actual inhospitable place, and the knight is the last of his kind. 'Edge' is also a keyword in the text as it points to the liminality of the knight, poised between life and death, two worlds and dream and reality. De la Mare had published a volume of poems called *On the Edge*,[225] which was an appropriate choice of title as many of his characters are located there. In the 'Song of Finis', in relation to the knight, 'edge' assumes significance, appearing early on to establish the knight's state of mind and his state of existence. The capitalization of 'All', 'Ages' and 'Knight' achieves the effect of displacing and singling out the knight from the rest of humanity: he is, in fact, socially othered, which adds to the sense of alienation that pervades the whole poem. Moreover, the archaic terms 'sate' and 'steed' increase the sense of strangeness while simultaneously adding to the fairy-tale atmosphere.

[223] de la Mare, 'Song of Finis', in *The Complete Poems*, p. 188.
[224] T. S. Eliot, *The Waste Land* (Boni and Liveright, 1922), p. 40.
[225] Walter de la Mare, *On the Edge – Short Stories* (Faber & Faber, 1932).

This singling out of the main character in de la Mare's writing is often repeated, for example, in the chapter where Eaves, the protagonist of 'The Three Friends', despite his companions, is alienated and shares a sense of human resentment at his fate. Sometimes, de la Mare's travellers are accompanied by companions, human or otherwise; sometimes, they are alone but considered important characters on a questing journey. Although the only human in the 'Song of Finis', the knight does not share Eaves' fear because a long and courageous life has prepared him for his fate.

'His armour red and thin with rust | His soul from sorrow freed'[226] is hugely significant in the poem, specifically the word 'rust' at the end of line three – its presence signifies physical and mental degeneration. This is seen in another poem from *Peacock Pie*, 'The Song of the Mad Prince',[227] where rust primarily denotes mental degeneration, for example, 'rust to the harrow',[228] which parallels the deleterious effect of rust on the knight's armour and body. Rust is a gradual process; rust never sleeps. It is an attack on metal and, in this case, on the mettle of the knight, too. Life has worn down the man inside the armour. Oxidization, the process of rust, can damage metal and, in the human body, can destroy cells.

In the de la Mare poem 'The House', a rusty gate is chained and padlocked, symbolizing death and equating to an accretion of years, causing decay of the body. In the poem 'Home', he speaks of 'life's long cankering rust'.[229] In his book *Reading Walter de la Mare*, William Wootten mentions the poem 'Goodbye' and compares it with its picture of rust, 'Echoes and after images of a world thinned to its final vestiges.'[230] He names the poem as the counterpart of 'Song of Finis'.

In 'Song of Finis', the word 'red' and its placement before 'rust' is significant in the poem. Used as a literary device, it does two things: it suggests blood, which supports life, and the shedding of blood, which is as deleterious to the body as rust is to the knight's armour. It also provides a shocking contrast to the traditional idea of the knight in shining armour. The notion

[226] de la Mare, 'Song of Finis', in *The Complete Poems*, p. 188.
[227] de la Mare, 'The Song of the Mad Prince', in *The Complete Poems*, p. 187.
[228] Ibid.
[229] de la Mare, 'Home', in *The Complete Poems*, p. 133.
[230] Wootten, *Reading Walter de la Mare*, p. 178.

of corrosion is felt in de la Mare's other works, but in 'Song of Finis', it is mitigated by the knight's soul having been freed from his body. His long journey has placed him in a venerable position of peace despite his caducity, thus emboldening him to face one final challenge:

> And he lifted up his visor.
> From a face of skin and bone
> And his horse turned head and whinnied
> As the twain stood there alone.[231]

As we have seen, the horse is an important symbol in de la Mare's work, appearing in stories and poems in different guises. It can be a symbol of death as it was while pulling the cart in 'Kismet' or a horse of ivory ridden by the pale rider in 'The Horseman'.[232] It can also signify friendship and loyalty, as did the mare Rosinante in *Henry Brocken,* de la Mare's first novel.

In the long poem 'The Traveller', it was the traveller's only and faithful companion, accompanying him up to his death and outliving him: unlike the knight's horse in 'Song of Finis', it did not go with him into the unknown. The horse may also be the traveller's inner companion, representing his soul and a long-suffering combatant. This view was expressed by Vita Sackville-West, a writer who greatly admired de la Mare. Sackville-West wrote a lecture on de la Mare and participated in a tribute to the writer. 'If the Traveller is the eternal pilgrim, the eternal adventurer then are we justified in regarding his companion as the soul which abandons him only in the hour of death.'[233] Of the traveller figure, she says, 'the restless adventurer.'[234] Sackville-West conflates the travelling adventurer with the horse as a spiritual companion,[235] suggesting it is a crucial point when considering de la Mare's many manifestations of the horse and his abiding interest in the traveller figure.[236]

---

[231] de la Mare, 'Song of Finis', in *The Complete Poems*, p. 188.
[232] de la Mare, 'The Horseman', in *The Complete Poems*, p. 137.
[233] Vita Sackville-West, 'Walter de la Mare and The Traveller: Wharton Lecture on English Poetry' *Proceedings of the British Academy*, 39, (1953), pp. 23–26.
[234] Ibid.
[235] Ibid.
[236] Walter de la Mare, *Animal Stories chosen, arranged and in some parts rewritten by Walter de la Mare* (Faber and Faber, 1939), p. xlviii.

The sounds that horses make are readily evoked in de la Mare's work and play an important part in creating an otherworldly atmosphere when horses are heard:

> It's that clippety-clop of horses, trotting, cantering, galloping, reporting human activity to the ear. The rhythm of horses' hoofs has run like a commentary beside human life through much of history-bringing news to the ear, expressing urgencies and routines, haste, purpose, or promise.[237]

Although quite different, the sound of horses' hooves and the sound of wheeled transport form a background of noise to the progress of the traveller, keeping them moving in time to the sounds they hear, echoing the inevitability of their journey. This reliance on and skilful use of sounds in de la Mare also encompasses the hard-to-hear sounds not readily assimilated by the human ear. Virginia Woolf described him as the 'poet of hush and silence' and maintained 'we are still listening long after the words are done',[238] which, of course, flouts the idea expressed elsewhere in this thesis by Chesterton, who said that the end of a de la Mare story signified the end of the characters. In fact, the use of sound and silence in de la Mare's work ensures the reader continues to listen for more. It is one of the things that sets his poetry apart from many of his contemporaries. His poems have a life of their own in which the reader continues to listen for something just out of their grasp, like the searching hand at the door in the poem 'The Ghost'.

Leighton continues her idea that horse and rider are at one and that the sound the horse makes on its journey echoes the intentions and innermost thoughts of the rider:

> Those rhythms ring the changes of the earth's surface: sharp and clipped on the asphalt, blunt and thuddy on grass or mud. Heard at one remove, mysterious yet interpretable, these rhythms disclose all the stops and swerves of a rider's intentions and directions.[239]

---

[237] Leighton, *Hearing Things: The Work of Sound in Literature*, p. 97.
[238] Ibid.
[239] Ibid.

The sound of hoofbeats works alongside the sounds of wheeled transport, such as the railway train, to create a continual sense of movement and momentum. De la Mare's travellers are always moving forward.

It is important to remember that the horse figure appears in de la Mare's first-ever published work, 'Kismet', and then became a constant throughout his long literary career, demonstrating its significance in his work relating to travel and travellers. The horse in the 'Song of Finis' is almost humanized; it turns and whinnies as if it were in conversation with the knight and was aware of their mutual destiny. They are both alone, on the brink of eternity and the archaic term 'twain' emphasizes this. The word 'his' appears five times in the first stanza, giving a sense of affirmation. The knight is still alive at this point, and although he still exists, he is worn out, his identity and humanity still somewhat intact. The sense of affirmation, however, and the descriptive tone of the first stanza metamorphose in stanza two:

> No bird above that steep of time
> Sang of a livelong quest
> No wind breathed,
> Rest.[240]

In the quiet world that the knight leaves behind, where not even a bird sings, or wind breathes, there is no acknowledgement of his sudden departure. In nature, man can come and go. The silent world of his present may be mirrored by a vast and utter silence in his future.

The word 'rest' at the end of the above quote can be understood as a noun, the state of resting or it can equally be seen as an imperative verb, a command to rest. Any rest taken, however, is necessarily brief as the new, restless spirit of the knight dictates that he moves swiftly on to his last act on Earth. Using the colon after the single word 'rest' is also important for several interconnecting effects. The colon draws attention to the word 'rest' standing alone, but the poet chooses the colon in place of the period because the latter would suggest a stopping, an end, while the colon separates the resting interval. The idea of precipitation quickly follows and constitutes the essential meaning of the poem, the teetering on the brink of the abyss and

[240] de la Mare, 'Song of Finis', in *The Complete Poems*, p. 188.

the final plunge into space. The knight is summoning the last vestiges of his courage, fortitude, and optimism, calling on his reserves in the face of previous apathy and charging boldly into the unknown.

'In the vacuum of outer space, there is no sound at all and no possibility of sound. In that anacoustic zone the ear meets its severest challenge of silence.'[241] This quote from Angela Leighton's work on sound in literature highlights another, perhaps final, challenge for the knight who has already left behind an encroaching silence. It also emphasizes, perhaps complements, the profound silence facing him. The knight has known sounds and voices in his lifetime but has less use for them as his fate approaches. Similar to the knight, sound is also a traveller, 'For the sound we hear is already *in medias res*, a passenger through time.'[242]

De la Mare's use of sound and its absence is a vital part of his oeuvre. Angela Leighton acknowledges this by referencing de la Mare's poetry and prose throughout her work, taking us in the general direction of his recognition of the ghostliness suggested by sound and the presence of silence. Leighton questions that if actual sound is itself a transient passenger, invisible and always to be interpreted by the ear, how much more acute is the strange interpretability of sound in the written word, the ghost effects of which are built into its workings.[243] In the de la Mare poem 'The Ghost,' sound is used in the absence of sight as the ghost is invisible but felt strongly through the use of sound, significantly by the sudden and startling use of knocking.

Similarly, his poem 'Some One' begins with 'Some one came knocking | at my wee, small door;'[244] the scene is set for the mysterious visitor who is invisible but heard. To knock is to seek ingress from outside, perhaps outside one of de la Mare's mysterious, seemingly empty houses. In 'The Ghost', the spirit goes further, with 'In gloom groped a hope-wearied hand'.[245] The word 'groped' suggests a physical presence, but the ghost gropes in vain. It is still, therefore, on the outside, which, Leighton suggests, may be the proper place for all poetry

[241] Leighton, *Hearing Things: The Work of Sound in Literature*, p. 3.
[242] Ibid., p. 5.
[243] Ibid.
[244] de la Mare, 'Some One', in *The Complete Poems*, p. 140.
[245] de la Mare, 'The Ghost', in *The Complete Poems*, p. 196.

listeners. The poem's point is to open and listen, not in order to discover what is out there, which is easily verified by the eye, but to keep us at the door, as if, despite the evidence, that was the place for poetry readers.[246] Virginia Woolf's accurate view of de la Mare as 'the poet of hush and silence, of the deserted house'[247] sets de la Mare's poetry apart from other writers – the continuous sense of listening in. As Angela Leighton says, 'He is the poet who thus keeps us listening to listening, as if to the silent printed page of the literary text which only listens back.'[248]

In 'Song of Finis', the encroaching silence makes the transition between the encroaching silence of the world the knight occupies and the utter silence into which his courageous but foolish challenge will take him.

De la Mare incorporates actual sounds in his writing as well as telling silences. One of the ways he does this is by using animal noises, particularly birdsong. These linger in the aural imagination as we hear the snuffling of pigs foraging or the sweet sound of nightingales. As well as these listenable sounds, de la Mare is conscious of the unheard but present sound of plants. 'Had we ears delicate enough we should detect the roaring rilling flood of sap and chlorophyll.'[249] I have already described how other writers find an echo in de la Mare, and this device can be recognized in his use of sound, as Leighton suggests. 'And finally, there is the undercurrent murmur of other texts at work, whether in quotation or allusion, or just in the chance similarities of the language itself.'[250] How much more is this true of de la Mare's work, where everything returns.

The theme of conflict and embattlement is strongly suggested in the 'Song of Finis', although there is a sense that the knight's conflicts are all but over, and he is facing the ultimate battle. There is a literary echo of this idea in Lewis Carroll's 'White Knight',[251] who, after his defeat by the Red Knight, comments, 'What does it matter where my body happens to be? My mind

[246] Leighton, *Hearing Things: The Work of Sound in Literature*, p. 32.
[247] Ibid., p. 119.
[248] Ibid., p. 157.
[249] Ibid., p. 23
[250] Ibid., p. 25.
[251] Lewis Carroll, *Alice's Adventures in Wonderland*, p. 187.

goes on working just the same.'[252] The idea of recklessness, even foolishness, in Carroll's chapter and de la Mare's poem is countered by the notion of the two similar characters being yet victorious in defeat. The White Knight moves on to more battles and to his fate, while de la Mare's knight seizes his last chance at demonstrating courage and defiance.

De la Mare's poem 'Defeat' elaborates on the fallen hero theme.[253] It describes a fallen combatant, who could easily be seen as a knight, his 'He lay, sharp-boned beneath his skin, half-nude'.[254] This figure, however, can be imagined as having achieved a kind of victory. 'Shall he for witness the Invisible's sight | That mockless victory that defeat may be'.[255]

The type of traveller represented in the poem 'Song of Finis' by the knight is the adventurer and the follower of quests, like the adventurer of de la Mare's famous poem 'The Traveller' – the venturer, dreamer and seer. This describes the raison d'etre of this writer and poet's many travelling, questing figures; they are a literary descendant of the traditional knight at arms who rides through life, righting wrongs and displaying courage and adventurousness. In the 'Songs of Finis', the poet has succeeded in combining a flavour of medievalism and its associated romance with the then-current thoughts of the boundlessness and the fathomlessness of space. The traveller may face many different endings, from death's apparent defeat to a more mystical victory, sometimes seen in de la Mare's work:

> Lone for an end!', cried knight to steed.
> Loosed an eager rein –
> Charged with his challenge into Space
> And quiet did quiet remain.[256]

'Space' is capitalized in a comparable way to 'edge of all the Ages' for a different reason. 'At the edge of All the Ages' was visualized as an actual place. In contrast, the capitalization of 'Space' suggests the opposite – an unknowable vastness that may swallow up horse and rider.

---

[252] Gardener, *New Oxford Book of English Verse*, p. 304.
[253] de la Mare, 'Defeat', in *The Complete Poems*, p. 368.
[254] Ibid., p. 369.
[255] Ibid.
[256] de la Mare, 'Song of Finis', in *The Complete Poems*, p. 188.

At this endpoint, the title of the poem itself assumes significance. The Latin phrase for the very end of the known world was *finis terrae*, and both the knight and the poem have reached this stage. In the wilderness scenario of the poem, it is easy to picture the bleakness of the edge of the world. The destination is unfathomable and enigmatic, and even frightening questions are raised but not answered. Will humankind, represented by the knight, have anything left of himself when he makes the final leap? The speculative poet does not say. Perhaps man leaves nothing behind and faces only nothingness in a future shaped and moulded by Space. This is yet another potential destination for the writer's travellers whom he pursues persistently, and it is the most mysterious destination yet.

As in his adult poetry, the poem confronts many of the poet's unanswered questions, particularly about the unseen. The universe the knight leaps into may be only one of many, and this thought recalls de la Mare's famous poem 'The Listeners', where the traveller may be encountering *a* universe and not *the* universe. Yet again, nothing is resolved in this poem, and de la Mare's fear of the knowability of endings permeates his work.

'Song of Finis' is an appropriate poem to explore as the last part of this chapter, not only because it is the last poem in *Peacock Pie* but because the knight embodies both sides of the sometimes-contradictory nature of de la Mare's views of his travellers. The knight is a bold adventurer who is also, in his appearance and solitude, another type of traveller seen in the author's work – that of the waif and outcast. Like the knight, the poet's work teeters on the brink of areas of contradiction and tension, as I shall endeavour to show in the following chapters where de la Mare represents the afterlife both as a heavenly, though skewed return to Eden in his short story 'The Creatures' while contemplating the opposite view – visions of perplexing and frightening ideas of punishment and annihilation.

Chapter Two: Green Eden's Gate

The Creatures

The following lines from the first stanza of the poem 'The Exile' demonstrate how, at times, the poet was anxious to show the poignancy and significance of the loss of Eden to man. Many of his travellers, as exiles, felt a great longing for what had once been their pre-lapsarian home:

> I am that Adam who, with Snake for guest,
> Hid anguished eyes upon Eve's piteous breast.
> I am that Adam who, with broken wings,
> Fled from the Seraph's brazen trumpetings.
> Betrayed and fugitive, I still must roam
> A world where sin, and beauty, whisper of Home.[257]

In Chapter Two, I will show how this longing was personified in the protagonist of the short story 'The Creatures', who discovers a disconcerting and even disturbing Edenic place, with a devolved and changed Eden at the heart of it.[258] I shall demonstrate how the syncretic beliefs of the author influenced his vision of the traveller's final destination. This results in a highly personal vision of Eden, partly Biblical in atmosphere and description yet reflecting the syncretic beliefs that influenced this vision. The disturbing view of an Edenic place in de la Mare's short story 'The Creatures' echoes his conflicting religious and metaphysical views. These can sometimes border on the sacrilegious, as I shall illustrate in 'The Creatures', but it was a lack of any reinforcement of the Christian beliefs he learned early in his life that he never fully abandoned.

Like de la Mare, Arthur Machen and Algernon Blackwood, his contemporaries, also had religious childhoods and were difficult to pin down regarding their religious affiliations. De la Mare did not have a clerical upbringing like Machen, whose father was a minister. However,

---

[257] de la Mare, 'The Exile', in *The Complete Poems*, p. 201.
[258] de la Mare, 'The Creatures', in *The Riddle: And Other Stories*, p. 273.

he had a solid Church of England training, an ancestral Huguenot background and was a pupil chorister at St Paul's Cathedral in London. Theresa Whistler, his biographer, remarks on the effect this must have had on a young, impressionable boy. In fact, the hectoring over-assertiveness of the preaching he encountered there engendered in him a lifelong hatred of dogma.

There were many preachers during the young de la Mare's time as a chorister, but physical measures were left to the headmaster, Dr Barff, who frequently administered the birch. Nevertheless, despite the hectoring, de la Mare felt, in those days, a personal faith fostered by the ecclesiastical surroundings and the pomp and ceremony of the choir. In his early life, he was sincere in his embryonic beliefs, but these deserted the mature de la Mare. 'He would look back later with a passionate sense of deprivation to the trust in divine loving-kindness and the poignant sense of grace that he had felt as a chorister.'[259] This loss of faith could be paralleled with the sense of loss of Eden, which permeated much of his work and was never resolved. In a letter to his future wife, Elfie, he gave rein to the anguish his loss of religious faith caused him, where he wrote, 'Will it never come, the peace, the whole Godlove that is in me, is it always to be hopeless cold dark, a dream that knows no waking a dream that is always a dream.'[260] The lack of punctuation and the whole rambling nature of the letter only emphasizes his anguish.

His love and admiration for faith's mysteries never deserted him; he loved mystery for its own sake, for the fillip it gave to his already fertile imagination, causing him to reflect on subjects beyond his mental grasp. The numinous loomed large in his literary imagination as he keenly felt a divine presence, especially when contemplating The Creation. However, he could not transpose it into orthodox or firm religious beliefs. Therefore, a deeply ingrained religious framework was tempered by a probing imagination that sought the spiritual and the numinous as opposed to embracing any form of dogma. As such, he became an author who lacked the dogmatic certainties of a recognized religion, which he transposed to a bewildering array of fictional characters.

[259] Whistler, *Imagination of the Heart*, p. 34.
[260] Ibid., p. 62.

The Reverend John Pridmore, reprising in *The Walter de la Mare Society Magazine* an article he had formerly written for *The Church Times*, stated, 'He distrusted the dogmatic and systematic precisely because it drained the spiritual of its mystery.'[261] In a journal article, John Coates quotes Joe Griffiths, the editor of *The Walter de la Mare Society Magazine*, who said, 'In the cases of Arthur Machen and Algernon Blackwood, there is an analogous movement evident in the supernatural fiction away from the dogmatic and assertive narrative and towards the numinous.'[262] De la Mare would eschew anything that did not enhance the mysterious. Instead, he never explained mysteries in the way that religion and science can do. In his anthology *Love*, he quotes the French philosopher Théodule-Armand Ribot, 'Every feeling', states Ribot 'loses strength in the measure that it becomes intellectual'.[263] This is reminiscent of Keats, who wrote in 'Lamia', 'Do not all charms fly | At the mere touch of cold philosophy.'[264]

It is difficult to discern whether de la Mare had sound philosophical reasons for his reluctance to incorporate any explanation in his work, particularly in his endings or lack thereof. In 'The Connoisseur', the protagonist says at one point, in his conversation with St Dunstan, 'There are many philosophies, and one may listen to all of them without being persuaded to accept any.'[265] This quote parallels de la Mare's lack of a basic sustained philosophy for his work. Many philosophies could easily apply to de la Mare's lack of a sustained philosophical basis for his work. However, his lack of philosophical certitude and religious security meant he had a chequered view of the shape of the afterlife. This gave his work the quality of visionary flame, flickering into life-like candles (another favourite motif), lighting the often-awful darkness of the empty vastness he wrote about.

De la Mare had a deep reverence for the Bible, born of daily listening to readings of it by his mother. Yet the Bible – read over a lifetime – fired his literary imagination more than his religious beliefs; a reluctance to commit to any proof of the existence of God tempered his

[261] Rev. John Pridmore, 'Is there Anybody There? The Child's Experience of the Other and the Beyond in the Poems and Stories of Walter de la Mare', *Walter de la Mare Society Magazine*, 12, 2009. p. 16.
[262] Joe Griffiths, 'Walter de la Mare's Quest', *The Walter de la Mare Society Magazine*, 1, 1998. http://www.walterdelamare.co.uk/28.html access date 31 March 2023.
[263] Walter de la Mare, *Love* (Faber & Faber, 1943).
[264] John Keats, *Lamia, Isabella, The Eve of St. Agnes, and Other Poems* (Taylor and Hessey, 1820), p. 41.
[265] de la Mare, 'The Connoisseur', in *Short Stories 1895–1926*, p. 264.

work. 'The Scribe'[266] is an example of his deep love for the things of Creation, although he cannot reconcile the author of these wonders with any entity he can relate to. 'Thou, Lord, and I' with the separation by commas of Thou and I only highlights his sense of apartness.[267] He also published a book of *Stories from the Bible* in 1929.[268] Although certain passages within it provide instances of beautiful description, such as the Garden of Eden, the essence of the Bible is lost. De la Mare fails to replace the brevity of the Bible with his inimitable style, hampered by an ingrained reverence for it. He authored the book to re-engage with prose after being steeped in poetry for a few years and because he wanted to interest children in the Old Testament. However, the outcome lacked boldness and resulted in a middle-of-the-road literary production suggestive of his tentative, troubled views on religion.

Voracious reading on his part, from an astonishing array of literary and sacred sources, led to an eclectic and syncretic religious viewpoint apparent in all de la Mare's works. He tries to combine images, concepts, and attitudes from these sources. Since he was at heart a spiritual seeker, his stories and poems were not a nostalgic, harking back to the past as some critics suggest. Joe Griffiths stated that 'the trappings of de la Mare's stories and poems are not a misleading, nostalgic attempt to recreate the past'.[269] This was true even of his writings on Eden, where he often wrote poignantly about its loss or with chequered optimism about a return to it.

Spiritual concerns drove de la Mare's writings, including those about spiritual dangers. When writing about the uncanny, this spiritual element was an intrinsic and important part of his work, differentiating him from contemporaries like Machen or Blackwood. He was interested in writing about things that could not be explained away by ordinary reasoning, unlike Machen's brand of pantheism or Blackwood's treatment of pagan topics. He navigated an enigmatic way of confronting problems of advanced industrial modernity, the worship of strange gods, representative of the materialistic and the utilitarian that, for example, the pilgrim narrator in the short story tries to escape. Griffiths indicates that de la Mare's 'travellers,

[266] de la Mare, 'The Scribe', in *The Complete Poems*, p. 217.
[267] Ibid.
[268] Walter de la Mare, *Stories from the Bible* (Faber & Faber, 1929).
[269] Griffiths, 'Walter de la Mare's Quest', *The Walter de la Mare Society Magazine*, 1998, originally published in the *Fairacres Chronicle*, 1997 http://www.walterdelamare.co.uk/28.html, [accessed 23 February 2024].

seekers and pilgrims force the attentive reader to look behind the present century's deification of materialistic and utilitarian values'.[270] In his writing, this led to the appearance of many travellers, exiles and questing figures who denied the certainty of established religion that the author avoids while still striving and endeavouring to articulate moments of visionary insight and heightened consciousness.

In this chapter, I also seek to analyse the symbolism of an idealized Eden, its significance to de la Mare and how the loss of this symbolic paradise affected his traveller's sense of happiness and peace. In his works, de la Mare frequently alludes to Eden, although Anne Bentick tells us that he often merges this concept with allusions to heaven and the light of home. He visualizes, she maintains, the concept of a pre-Edenic state, heaven, where there is a 'pre-Edenic peace'[271] or 'a high quietness'.[272]

The pre-Edenic was as important to de la Mare as the Edenic because in referring to the pre-Edenic, he was able to compare it unfavourably with Eden. Pre-Eden, or heaven, was made for angelic beings but was not fit for human beings, who were a hybrid of non-heavenly creatures in possession of a soul. Eden, however, was specially created for man, so it assumed a beauty and specialness of its own, which de la Mare was anxious to show. The consequent loss of it, therefore, was a grievous loss because man had turned his back on a precious God-given gift. Bentick describes the pre-Edenic place in de la Mare's literature as perfect but rather cold and unfeeling compared to Eden, where man and animal lived in utter harmony.

In de la Mare's work, heaven and Eden are not chronologically separated; the customary sequence is that Eden was lost to man, but heaven was obtainable to him later for the deserving and the redeemed. However, as Bentick points out, heaven and Eden are not always fully separable in the author's work, who undertook a lifelong search for a sign that Eden would be restored to man in some form and that there would be a place of, at last, comparable happiness and peace to go to. The author invested in his travellers and what they might discover because

[270] Ibid.
[271] Bentick, *Romantic Imagery in the Works of Walter de la Mare*, p. 236.
[272] Ibid.

he could not find an answer in conventional religion. The orthodoxies attached to religion were a deterrent to his religious beliefs and literary imagination, which baulked at dogma.

De la Mare was interested in The Creation while remaining dubious about the creator, which meant nature was of singular importance to him. Whistler remarks that for de la Mare, nature and the countryside were 'the stuff of vision; the object of pilgrimage, the type of paradise'.[273] This longing is personified in the pilgrim narrator of 'The Creatures' who abandons city life for the remote countryside: 'Beauty – even earthly beauty – becomes only a promise or a memory, the symbol of a remote reality.'[274] This quote from Whistler on de la Mare shows that while believing in lovely Earth as a sort of paradise, the author is aware that earthly beauty is a memory of something else, the true paradise that was lost.

De la Mare's writings are ambiguous, making it impossible to know exactly what he seeks. However, the author was clear that man was a searcher and often sought an Edenic place that would be restored to him. The author invested in his travellers because he could not find an answer in conventional religion. Lack of early satisfactory answers had closed off this route for de la Mare, and the orthodoxies of followed religions were not for him – his literary imagination baulked at dogma. Whistler's words show us that de la Mare believed life had ultimate significance. She writes, 'Unshakeable conviction in absolute value made the enigma of life worth questioning and questioning endlessly.'[275] The symbolic loss of Eden permeated the author's work and became an obsession for him.

John Le Vay suggests there is – in the Delamarean cosmos – an Edenic pre-existent place corresponding to Blake's Beulah and Spenser's Garden of Adonis, and it is where we sing our songs of enchantment'.[276] The eastern aspect of this place refers to the exotic in his descriptions of Eden. It contrasts the Western location of his travellers and exiles with a faraway, often non-existent Orient, pointing to this paradisal place's peculiar state. The words 'sing our songs of

[273] Whistler, *Imagination of the Heart*, p. 17.
[274] Ibid.
[275] Ibid., p. 319.
[276] John Peter Le Vay, *The Delamarean Otherworld* (York University, 1984). Available from ProQuest Dissertations & Theses Global; ProQuest One Literature. (193959701). Retrieved from https://www.proquest.com/dissertations-theses/delamarean-otherworld/docview/193959701/se-2

enchantment',[277] as quoted by Le Vay, are different to de la Mare's 'Song of Enchantment'[278] but nonetheless reflect the fairness of Eden. Le Vay goes on to suggest that de la Mare makes keen use of Blake's and Spenser's vision, along with references to Cathay and Araby, both increasingly poetic terms for exotic places, across his poetry and prose, but, more importantly for him, all are conflated with heaven and paradise, sometimes all imagined as one place, but ultimately, a distant refuge.

In 'The Creatures', there is a conflicting and complex vision of the enclave the narrator finds and thinks of as a sort of paradise. The description is quasi-biblical, but it portrays a highly wrought and personal vision of Eden – a highly personal re-imagining of Eden on his part. His narrator refers to it as his 'particular paradise, a faraway country' with a 'fleeting resemblance to the country of dream'.[279] He is drawn to it by sounds, 'the musical sound of what seemed like the twangling of a harp',[280] although he finds no evidence of any such celestial instrument. He admits he has seemed to have crossed a 'viewless border'.[281] He reflects, 'I was come back to the borders of Eden, bowed and outwearied, gazing from out of dream back to dream.'[282] There is a garden, but it is a perplexing mixture of beauty and bestiality, comfort and coarseness. It is, in fact, in parts, an unnerving and shocking vision of paradise.

In the narrative, the pilgrim stumbles across a farmhouse and garden, peopled by an old couple and a pair of young siblings. He spends time in the family's home and, as a result, becomes changed by this encounter, an encounter which puzzles and even frightens him but, at the same time, makes him feel welcome. He even wonders if he has been in a hypnogogic state or has experienced a hallucination. Leaving the curious family and the strange surroundings, he sleeps, wakes, and sleeps again before entering an inn and learning, in an awakened sense of despondency, that the creatures he met are real. Their surname is, in fact, Creature, and they are well-known in the vicinity and have a puzzling reputation. The strange cognomen of the garden's inhabitants is significant given the Edenic context. It refers to the origin of man alone

[277] Ibid.
[278] de la Mare, 'Song of Enchantment', in *The Complete Poems*, p. 186.
[279] de la Mare, 'The Creatures', in *The Riddle: And Other Stories*, p. 276.
[280] Ibid., p. 153.
[281] Ibid.
[282] Ibid., p. 156.

– separate from the angels, who already had their home in heaven. Man, therefore, was destined to dwell on Earth in a physical place called Eden.

The word 'creature' includes any living thing apart from plants and alludes to the companions of man, the animals created to inhabit Eden, and Adam and Eve. The reader is introduced to the creatures surrounded by birds – a potent and poetic symbol of nature. In addition, the word can also stand for the strange or seldom seen. This poem also suggests that the beings encountered in the story are unreal-seeming or not real at all but the product of the narrator's mind. He hears of the strange genesis of the family and of a woman who was once part of the family but is now dead and referred to as 'from the sea'.[283] He searches for her grave and discovers from it that she is called Femina Creature.

The story of 'The Creatures' is told by a passenger on a train to a fellow passenger – the first narrator – who was the original, solitary occupant of the carriage. The second narrator is another one of the various kinds of his travelling figures – that of the pilgrim. The word 'pilgrim' comes from the Latin word *peregration*: one who has come from afar to visit a certain place, usually a holy place. Pilgrims do not need to journey to a specific place but may wander the world, relying on providence to support their travels and find a destination. The narrator is a pilgrim because he issues forth from his home, seeking something he is unsure of and finding meaning in the garden he visits. He comes into the train and proves to be garrulous and unstable, displaying great emotional intensity. He tells the reluctant first narrator his discovery, years earlier, of a strange enclave he found and thought of as Eden. He is as determined to tell his tale as the ancient Mariner was in Coleridge's poem.[284] This is directly referred to in the text, with 'Never was wedding guest more desperately at the mercy of ancient mariner'.[285]

De la Mare often writes about persistent pestering and garrulous narrators and passengers who abjure their fellow passengers to listen, sometimes against their will. It is a literary convention that engages the reader immediately as they sense that the frenzied behaviour of many of these characters is a precursor to a strange and perhaps apocryphal but alluring tale. Frequently, the

[283] Ibid., p. 158.
[284] Samuel Taylor Coleridge, *The Ancient Mariner* (London & Co, 1905).
[285] de la Mare, 'The Creatures', in *The Riddle: And Other Stories,* p. 277.

narrator and the listener are distinctively dissimilar, with their conflicting personalities heightening the story, providing a sense of duality, and doubling.

In 'The Creatures', the two passengers meet in an ordinary train on an ordinary journey – a world away from the pilgrims revealed Eden. The author is writing here in the style of later writers such as Arthur Machen, who saw the fantastic and the fearful underlining the familiar, ordinary world. The ordinary train journey opens out to an unfamiliar and unaccountable world. The two travellers are revealed in an embedded text, which allows for multiple modes of interpretation.

The content in the short story 'The Creatures' is an intriguing mix of Biblical, mythological, and bestial. At one point at the start of his tale, the narrator says, 'What restless monkeys men are.'[286] Bestial context is shown in several ways in the narratives and used to illustrate a contrast between man and animals, man and angels. The ugly appearance of the two siblings in the text, highlighted by the phrase 'animal and angel'[287], is an example of this. It is further emphasized with the words 'they were ungainly, their features peculiarly irregular, as if two races from the ends of the Earth had in them intermingled their blood and strangeness, as if, rather animal and angel had connived in their creation'.[288] They are bestialized by their appearance and speech.

The story's setting is also a farmhouse, suggestive of animal occupancy. The two old people are discovered among a crowd of diverse varieties of birds and fowl. The concept is continued in the description of the landlady of the village inn who possesses a pet pig, which she is said to resemble and whose eyes 'pigged'[289] at the narrator as she spoke. There is an intelligent pig in the story 'Out of the Deep'[290], and de la Mare authored poems specifically about pigs, including 'Pigs' and 'The Pigs and the Charcoal Burners' in the collection *Bells and Grass*[291] and *Peacock Pie*, respectively. He also authored a short story entitled 'Pig'.[292] De la Mare was intrigued by animal existence and habits. 'The Pigs and the Charcoal Burners' appears to

[286] Ibid., p. 151.
[287] Ibid., p. 255.
[288] Ibid., p. 155.
[289] Ibid., p. 158.
[290] Ibid., p. 128.
[291] Walter de la Mare, *Bells and Grass* (Faber & Faber, 1941).
[292] de la Mare, 'Pigs', in *Short Stories 1927–1956*, p. 538.

contrast the slow-burning life of the charcoal burners with the immediacy of the pigs' foraging for food. It begs the question of what de la Mare made of humans compared to animals. In the children's story 'The Lord Fish',[293] the fish is superior to the man, and in his poem 'Master Rabbit', the whole colony of rabbits, delighting in the morning dew, flee at the sight of their enemy – man.[294] This is exemplified by 'The whole world darkened | A Human near!'.[295]

The bestial strongly suggests the question of atavistic anxiety, which was prevalent in the late nineteenth century. The anxieties proceeded from post-Darwinian fears about physical and moral degeneration. Society worried about throwbacks and bestialized deformity in humans. There was a perceived threat to racial purity because of the Empire and increased immigration. This was felt particularly in the cities where crime flourished and poverty impeded social regeneration. In the text of 'The Creatures', the author refers to 'that unimaginable London'.[296] The more civilized the society, the more the transgressor stood out as the feared 'other'. 'The Creatures' were certainly seen in the village as transgressors of their social mores.

As an avid reader, de la Mare would no doubt have been aware of the theories of Cesare Lombroso, whereby individuals, he believed, could display 'stigmata' or physical signs of criminality. The pseudo-science of phrenology was also practised in de la Mare's time, where the skull was examined for physical signs of personality or mental instability. The siblings in 'The Creatures' were deformed with sunken heads, a manifestation of the fears in society that such creatures could exist, in secret, hidden in such places as the siblings' garden. It is significant, too, that in this text, the reader does not know for sure whether the old couple are the parents or even the grandparents of the two children. In context, it is more likely that they are grandparents, as, later in the story, the probable mother of the children is identified as Femina Creature. The word 'Femina' is derived from the Latin for woman. It can mean a woman of any age, so Femina may or may not have been the mother of Christus and Maria, the two siblings, although the story leans towards the implication that she is their mother and the old couple are their grandparents. This makes the evocation of atavism more pronounced since the word itself derives from grandfather or ancestor.

---

[293] Walter de la Mare, 'The Lord Fish' *Collected Stories for Children* (Faber & Faber, 1947).
[294] de la Mare, 'Master Rabbit', in *The Complete Poems,* p. 809.
[295] ibid.
[296] de la Mare, 'The Creatures', in *The Riddle: And Other Stories,* p. 275.

The binaristic boundaries of gender are challenged in 'The Creatures' with the appearance of the siblings, although de la Mare accords them male and female names – Christus and Maria. These are familiar names in Christianity, but when applied to the siblings, they assume a mysterious, enigmatic, almost iconoclastic meaning. De la Mare is pushing boundaries here by indicating the presence of a sacred world alongside a secular world. To add to the ambiguity surrounding the farmhouse's inhabitants, the family is never fully defined in terms of the nuclear family, the extended family or even the reconstituted family. Therefore, societal fears of savagery and sexual promiscuity are raised when the landlady at the inn, echoing the opinion of the villagers, implies that the Creatures were living in 'sin', a sign of her – and their – conservative views. There may well have been extra-marital sexual relationships. Bestiality, which pervades the text, is also implied with a description of the landlady herself, corpulent and 'with a face comfortably resembling her own sow's'.[297] Boundaries are blurred here and throughout the text, and a threat to social classification is present.

The two figures of the siblings, if not actually divine, are meant to represent the best of man's spiritual nature despite their ugliness. De la Mare may have been referencing the 'Great Chain of Being', a pre-Darwinian theory that, for centuries, inhabited Western thought and culture. In the chain, God is all spirit and supreme. Sequentially, then comes the angels, the humans, animals, fishes, insects, trees, plants and lastly, stones. Humans are a hybrid because they are made of matter but possess souls.

Although the human and spiritual qualities of the four occupants of the garden are described, the stones in de la Mare's text are also suggestive of life. 'Great boulders shouldered up, tessellated, embossed, powdered with a thousand various mosses and lichens.'[298] The words 'shouldered', 'tessellated', and 'powdered' all suggest movement, which elicits the sublime in literature. The boulders and rocks signify loftiness and the passion of the sublime, which is communicated by the siblings and their nobility of soul. The time the narrator spends in the garden and the sense of movement generated by the idea of the rocks moving emphasize the intense emotions felt by the narrator. The sense of great loss he feels after leaving the garden

[297] Ibid., p. 287.
[298] Ibid., p. 283.

indicates that he has been affected by the sublime of those surroundings and that they have stayed with him.

Throughout the text, the garden and the surrounding remote countryside are described in a way that there is a sense of displacement. This is leavened at times by the opposite effect of a grounding or anchoring, such as the second narrator experiences in the garden. He feels a sense of homecoming, a sensation de la Mare continuously explores throughout his works. Place, as opposed to space, is allied to this feeling. In the text, the author demonstrates this with, 'And as my eye slid softly thence and upwards and along the sharp, green horizon line against the glass-clear turquoise of space, it caught the flinty glitter of a square chimney.'[299] The almost medieval, illuminatory description of the horizon is interrupted by the sudden, foursquare appearance of a chimney, a symbol of hearth and the light of home.

'Place' is harnessed by humans to fulfil a yearning to belong, to be stable, and to put a human construct on spatial surroundings. However, the sense of home, which the pilgrim feels in the garden, is short-lived. When he leaves the welcoming enclave, he feels 'lost': 'I lost again a way lost early that morning as I trudged inland at night. The dark came, warm and starry. I was dejected and exhausted beyond words.'[300] The words 'lost again' are an echo of the author's travellers and, more significantly, his exiles. The narrator is easily lost in the liminal landscape of his journey. He has been on both sides of the threshold of two worlds – sleep and dream. The author constantly uses landscape in this way.

Significantly, 'The Creatures' was written while the author was staying in Cornwall and was influenced by all that Cornwall meant to him, as its countryside fascinated him. De la Mare uses landscape to uphold the wonders of earthly beauty but also as a foil for his fears. British poet Peter Scupham describes this duality in the following quote:

> A de la Mare landscape hugs some gesture of lonely habitation and loss to itself, its ruined gardens, blank unwindowed houses and hidden observers

[299] Ibid., p. 278.
[300] Ibid., p. 286.

> always ready to probe a visitor with its flock of unanswerable questions. Its beauty is the merest icing over some present threat or past tragedy.[301]

The migration of city dwellers to the countryside exemplifies the urban gothic, as it contrasts the urban horrors of a big city with the imagined peace of a remote landscape. De la Mare's rendering of the gothic in this narrative is influenced by the gothic of the *fin de siècle*, where the approach of the end of the century engendered fears of the disestablishing of genetic or social norms. The 'unimaginable' London from which he comes is embodied in the two siblings' grotesque shapes and the binary view of the lovely but weed-infested garden. The urban intrudes into the idyllic setting of the Creatures' garden and the sublime aspect of the surrounding countryside.

Despite their innate goodness, the young Creatures are physically separated from their community and the nearby village. They are 'other' in their appearance, as figures of fear and uncongeniality are often cast out from society. The landlady and the villagers refer to the disreputable origins and social habits of the Creatures family. However, the emphasis on their strange and unconventional makeup harks back to Victorian gothic undertones of the family as a refuge and a barrier to the unconventional, where any incursion into the family unit is disturbing.

The two siblings in 'The Creatures' are described, in archaic language, as naturals or talent, suggesting that they may be intellectually as well as physically less advanced. *The Oxford English Dictionary* defines 'naturals' as 'purely natural condition, not altered or improved in any way, completely naked. Natural form or condition'.[302] This definition goes some way to describing the two siblings and the old couple and draws on the state of Adam and Eve in the garden, whose nakedness and naivety symbolized their innocence. The physiognomy of the creatures is contrasted with the beauty of their spiritual form and is exemplified in man who, despite all his flaws, is still a noble figure, living a life of ultimate significance.

---

[301] Peter Scupham, 'Walter de la Mare' *PN Review*, 25.6 (1999), 4pp. 4–46.
[302] 'In one's Naturals', in Natural, N. (1), Sense I.3.a.', *Oxford English Dictionary* (Oxford University Press, 2023), doi.org/10.1093/OED/9465559317, [accessed February 2024].

The siblings show only kindness and welcome to their visitor and demonstrate infinite patience, 'we wait, we wait'.[303] This phrase resonates throughout the narrative and refers not only to their patience but also to their permanent state of childhood and innocence. This idea is continued in the stunted growth and appearance of the trees and plants in the narrative. Through the existence and apparent optimism of these two creatures, the narrator realizes that Eden could be our destiny, but glimpses of it are possible on Earth. There is a tenacity to the author's hope that a lost Eden may await man at the end of a weary journey. The tenacity of this vision of Eden – both as a lost world and the place that has come to represent a potential future paradise waiting to be re-inhabited – is shown in the author's oeuvre, even in his anthologies.

In the anthologies, he takes the opportunity to make comparable choices to enhance his concerns and obsessions, such as the vision of Eden. One such significant anthology is *Come Hither*,[304] where he represents, in the section called 'The Garden', various writers who share his vision, such as Christina Rossetti and Ralph Hodgson. In the same anthology, he also writes at length about his idea of a symbolic Edenic place in the introduction to the anthology, which – a fictional framing story – is entitled 'The Story of this Book'.

In this fable, the boy narrator, Simon, learns from his mother of a fabled place called 'East Dene', where an ancestor once lived. 'Ancestor' is used here as a veiled reference to Adam. 'Trees and water and green pastures and the rare birds and flowers to be found there.'[305] This suggests, but does not clarify, that 'East Dene' is Eden. It remains ambiguous. East Dene could be a pseudo-anagram, or the boy could have misheard his mother and cerebrally translated her words into Eden. A further clue is provided, however, later in the text when the boy learns of a place called 'Thrae', which is an anagram of Earth, and later still, of another place called Sure Vine, which is an anagram of universe, although it has aural connotations of heaven: 'Sure Vine, as if of a family mansion and estate, very ancient and magnificent'.[306] This resonates with Le Vay's premise of a pre-Edenic place and of the blurring of boundaries of de la Mare's Eden and heaven. If Thrae is Earth (and Simon wonders if Thrae had not once lain within the

[303] de la Mare, 'The Creatures', in *The Riddle: And Other Stories*, p. 285.
[304] Walter de la Mare, *Come Hither* (Constable& Co, 1945) p. 100.
[305] Ibid., p. vii.
[306] Ibid., p. xii.

boundaries of East Dene),[307] the implication is that man once lived in peace in Eden and, further back, in heaven. Also, at the close of the story, the boy is still on his pilgrimage in search of this mysterious East Dene, on a 'journey which has not yet come to an end'.[308]

'Come Hither' is extremely personal work. Whistler tells us it is 'pervaded by his own *company,* throughout'[309] (and is one of his most decipherable concepts). It is as close as the writer gets to allegory. Whistler says, '[I]t is more specifically an allegory than anything else he wrote.'[310] 'The narrative is beautiful and sufficient in itself, and anagrammatic names fingerpost it at the other levels of meaning, without restricting the subtle range of references on many planes.'[311] If East Dene is a pseudo-anagram of Eden, it has suggestive nuances of 'East of Eden', with its connotations of the land occupied by Adam and his family after their expulsion from Eden. However, the anagrammatic guides that point to an Edenic location do not indicate a text bereft of ambiguity or not written with consummate skill on several layers of meaning. Although his choice of content from other writers' work was wide and eclectic, it was, nonetheless, always an echo of his concerns and loves.

'The Creatures' could be read as an allegory, but it is much more elusive than that and is certainly not allegorical in the sense that all the meanings are fixed. De la Mare objects to this kind of allegorical writing, and we are reminded, by Wootten, of words uttered by de la Mare against the allegorical he found in *The Waste Land.* He did not appreciate the 'precise meanings and correspondences he found in this work'.[312] In general, de la Mare shunned this type of writing because it imposed restrictions on his work.

In the story of Simon and his search for Eden, it is significant that he is a young boy, and it is an integral part of the story. In his writing, the author frequently examines the concept that children are the humans closest to heaven and are granted glimpses of it. He believes implicitly in the immortal child. However, he makes it clear that writing about childhood is different from writing about children, as the latter can lead to over-sentimentality. He observed:

---

[307] Ibid.
[308] Ibid., p. xxxviii.
[309] Whistler, *Imagination of the Heart,* p. 321.
[310] Ibid., p. 321.
[311] Ibid.
[312] Wootten, *Reading Walter de la Mare,* p. 73.

> When childhood itself rather than children is the poet's theme, and particularly the poet's own childhood, his outlook and imaginative treatment are seldom sentimental. Such poems as these are usually concerned not with any definite age in childhood, or its physical and intellectual characteristics, or even its earthly surroundings, but with a state of being.[313]

It is this state of being that concerns de la Mare, and 'its' seeing gifts he tries to portray. He says, 'To be a child, is to be an exile, and an exile haunted by fear of vanishing intimations and relics of another life and of a far happier state of being – of a lost Jerusalem, to which it is all in vain (by the waters of Babylon) to pine to return.'[314] De la Mare repeatedly returned to the idea of man being an exile, a traveller on a quest for what has been lost.

De la Mare, along with Thomas Traherne, Henry Vaughn, William Blake, and other writers about the divinity of childhood, believed that a child arrives with a pre-birth recall of its heavenly life before Earth and retains it until the transition into adult life erases it. Anne Bentick maintains that de la Mare's vision of childhood is that 'He believes that a child from the moment of birth is homesick for this Eden and that childhood is a mirror of the Golden Age; it is the peak time for imagination, the seeing eye and a radiant joy in life'.[315]

De la Mare says in the introduction that he was asked to write for Frank Kendon's autobiography of childhood, *The Small Years*:

> The spirit within returns in glimpses thither as if to a world of dream […] But the immortal child in man lives on. He lives in a chequered paradise which for want of a better word we might as well call Eden. Alas, how few of us can recapture it.[316]

---

[313] Walter de la Mare, *The Collected Tales of Walter de la Mare* (Knopf, 1922), p. xix.
[314] Ibid., p. 910.
[315] Bentick, *Romantic Imagery in the Works of Walter de la Mare*, p. 252.
[316] Frank Kendon and Walter de la Mare, *The Small Years* (The University Press, 1932), p. x.

De la Mare never abandoned this idea of children being close to his idea of an Eden or a paradisiacal place. In the poem 'To Some Most Happy Men', he reflects on this:

> To some most happy men the grace is given
> After long circuit to come back to Heaven–
> The Heaven where they in childhood used to dwell;[317]

While these lines confirm the poet's thoughts on childhood, they also suggest that he believes that glimpses of this innocent state can be seen in adulthood by a select few who are able to return to childhood wisdom. 'To Some Most Happy Men' could even be a poem about dementia in the sense that being out of one's mind could leave room for the wisdom and divinity of childhood to re-emerge. It certainly raises the idea that childhood is as close to heaven as man aspires and that in certain people, a return to childhood, which could be seen as a disease or failure, is, in fact, a blessing. It is also about the intrusion of the past upon the present. The familiar word 'circuit' reinforces this journey of man.

In 'The Creatures', the coexistence of the old couple with the two children in the garden personifies the coexistence of the child and sympathetic adult sharing childish wisdom. The garden itself in the text is heavily symbolic of numerous things, such as peace and attainment of a final goal, refuge, and redemption. It assumes great significance in the poem, as does the house. As the traveller is welcomed in to take a drink, he sees the interior of the farmhouse for the first time. The house, with all its connotations of beasts and mire, is home to doves that flutter and coo on the rooftop.

The story has Miltonic undertones in its description of the adjoining garden, where Milton, in his epic poem *Paradise Lost,*[318] departs from the perfect garden where it is described instead as 'grottesque and wilde', with 'thicket overgrown'.[319] In her work on romantic imagery in de la Mare, Anne Bentick uses the above quote from *Paradise Lost* to explore the contrast he places upon the perfect Eden or Edenic place and the reality of the siblings' garden. In his

[317] de la Mare, 'Some Most Happy Men', in *The Complete Poems*, p. 638.
[318] John Milton, *Paradise lost* (Hardwicke and Bogue, 1879).
[319] Bentick, *Romantic Imagery in the Works of Walter de la Mare*, p. 243.

description of his own Eden, the narrator speaks of 'a flowering greenery of weeds'.[320] Flowers, usually thought of as lovely, are juxtaposed with weeds, a garden's perennial nuisance. The trees, too, are stunted by the wind. This duality of the narrator's Eden also raises the concept of the ambivalent nature of man and how good and bad qualities and flaws can co-exist. However, he can still live a life of value and be deserving of a place in an Eden now changed and adapted to man's postlapsarian human character and needs.

In 'The Creatures', the two children take their visitor out to view their garden, which, in another reversal of Eden, is not looked after by Adam but by these two children. Despite being a wild, salt and wind-wasted garden, it is a sanctuary for wild birds and, by implication, for all wanderers. 'It cried "Hospital" to the wanderers of the universe'.[321] The pilgrim utters these words, which are important because they express a strange lexical choice where one might have expected 'haven'. The connections emanating from this statement lie in the idea of a hospital for the fallen or those in need of healing. The fallen echoes the fallen man in Eden, and the healing aspect furthers the inner qualities of the siblings who exude love, healing, and forgiveness. The garden is also often associated with being a safe place of enclosure and, in literature and society, as a place of healing for the mind and the body. With his wide knowledge, de la Mare would have grasped the latter idea of this aspect of the garden, which seems, even in our times, to have invaded society's consciousness.

De la Mare was also fascinated by the human body and illness. This intense interest sprang not from a morbid cast but from a mind alive to the mysteries of human life and how sometimes this human life presented physical and mental failings. His stories were full of the nightmare of madness, and many of his characters were troubled, not of sound mind, and probably insane. Examples of this can be found in characters like Mr Bloom, who had communion with ghosts or Miss Duveen, who said to her only and reluctant friend, the young boy, 'how exceedingly sad life is.'[322] In 'A Recluse', the narrator visits an old friend in hospital who is ill but leaves with alacrity because he cannot bear the signs of illness and his friend's 'saddened hungry eyes'.[323]

---

[320] de la Mare, 'The Creatures', in *The Riddle: And Other Stories,* p. 283.
[321] de la Mare, 'Miss Duveen', in *The Riddle: And Other Stories,* p. 75.
[322] Ibid., p. 43.
[323] de la Mare, 'A Recluse', in *Short Stories 1927–1956,* p. 28.

Accompanying the endless journey of the travellers by land in de la Mare's writing is the pervasive imagery of the sea. This also assumes significance in the narrative of 'The Creatures' and isolates the farmhouse family in their strange enclave. In the story, the two railway passengers see from the train 'a cold and idle sea',[324] which the narrator gazes down on and can hear. The 'remote stirrings of the sea'[325] can also be heard from within the farmhouse. The idea of the sea, allied with the allusions in 'The Ancient Mariner', is representative of life and eternity. It also symbolizes fathomlessness, mirroring the complex undertones of this entire narrative. The garden, too, is within sight of the sea, 'It sloped and narrowed towards a sea at whose dark unfoamed blue, even at this distance, my eyes dazzled'.[326] Here is another echo of Coleridge's poem, where the wood of the Hermit slopes down to the sea. These frequent references to 'The Ancient Mariner' indicate that he and the pilgrim are unsettled, restless exiles. The idea of the eternal sea, of perpetual motion, is also present. The sea in the text is symbolic of the reach of the author's imagination, providing horizons even beyond the garden. The notion of the sea is repeated later when we learn of a 'woman from the sea', who was also a mysterious woman in a 'blue gown'.[327]

At the farmhouse, there had been a scrap of blue fabric framed and hung on the wall. This allusion to a frame – a very gothic convention used as a sign of finality – belies the rest of the text, which drifts in and out of dream writing and in which the narrator drifts in and out of consciousnesses. Along with the brief sojourn in the enclosed space of the garden, the enclosing nature of the frame motif highlights a brief grounding, an anchorage. This sentence is a faint echo of Hardy's poem 'The Voice', which is suggestive of otherworldliness, faint shadows, and echoes. It recalls Hardy's dead wife Emma, who is as ethereal as her gown, spun of air, just like Femina Creature, the woman in blue.

One possible connection between the colour blue and the sea is the Blessed Virgin Mary, the Roman Catholic representation of Mary, the Star of the Sea, and the frequent depiction in art of the Virgin in blue robes. Gardens, too, are often associated with the Virgin Mary. Another

[324] de la Mare, 'The Creatures', in *The Riddle: And Other Stories*, p. 273.
[325] Ibid., p. 280.
[326] Ibid., p. 283.
[327] Ibid., p. 287.

construction in the text is the naming of the misshapen female sibling as Maria, suggesting the name of the Virgin Mary. This could be a deliberate parody on the author's part were it not for the fact that he would hold back from the definite irreverence of such a device, constrained as he was by a reverence for the Bible and by his early religious upbringing. Strangely, he had a respect for the Catholic Church, corresponded for years with a nun, Sister Frances de Chantal, and exchanged thousands of letters with R.N. Armytage-Green, a bibliophile, de la Mare collector and self-confessed papist. He was even briefly attracted to the Catholic Church, although his total refusal of dogma would never have allowed him to countenance it. Theresa Whistler notes all this in her biography of de la Mare. It is, therefore, much more likely to be a manifestation of his idiosyncratic sense of the numinous, far removed from any orthodox religious beliefs, strongly felt but preyed upon by doubts.

Complex associations of womanhood and Eden are invoked, a prominent one being the inescapable betrayal of her maker by Eve and the consequent banishment. A negative side to female beauty and allure is sometimes seen in de la Mare, but it is more usual to find him pursuing female beauty, a vision he portrays in much of his work, particularly in poetry. For instance, in the narrative, the woman is described as 'as fair as flax'.[328] This directly contrasts the description of the malformed siblings, particularly the female sibling, Maria. The vision of loveliness – incomparable and evasive – is incorporated in much of the author's poems, appearing in the 'starry face' in the poem 'The Vision'[329] and the 'Visage serene' of 'Winged Chariot'.[330] The grave of Femina Creature recalls the 'shrine' in the poem 'Mirage' and 'the strange, fabled face' in the same poem.[331] The theme of feminine beauty is a constant lure to de la Mare's travellers, wanderers and exiles and is associated with homecoming. Some lines from the poem, 'Mirage' itself, illustrate this:

> Strange, fabled face! From sterile shore to shore
> O'er plunging seas, thick-sprent with glistening brine'
> The voyagers of the world with sail and heavy oar
> Have sought thy shrine.

[328] Ibid., p. 288.
[329] de la Mare, 'The Vision', in *The Complete Poems*, p. 496.
[330] de la Mare, 'Winged Chariot', in *The Complete Poems*, p. 551.
[331] de la Mare, 'Mirage', in *The Complete Poems*, p. 810.

Beauty inexorable hath lured them on.[332]

This important poem makes connections between feminine beauty enticing the traveller or wanderer to reach his final goal where it may reside. The epigraph to the poem '*...And burned the topless towers of Ilium'* is a reference to Helen of Troy, a fabled beauty. As well as physical beauty, there are many allusions to the unattainability of such beauty, such as 'Breasts cold as mountain snow and far waves foam' in 'The Vision'.[333]

'Cold as mountain snow' suggests classical statues, such as Helen of Troy, representing idealized beauty. In the *English Journal,* Edward Davison quoted de la Mare's lines about beauty, 'Beauty hath a thousand cheating names | But none foretokens rest.'[334] Davison theorizes that the pursuit of beauty has its own inherent dangers that will only lead to a restless and futile journey. However, in 'The Vision', de la Mare says, 'Spent is this wanderer, and you call him home!'[335] which suggests that the pursuit of beauty – of the Ideal Vision – can result in the pursuer finding peace and the ultimate goal. These lines generate one of de la Mare's myriad literary resonances, and Stevenson's end-of-quest poem 'The Requiem' is echoed in the words, 'Home is the sailor, home from sea, And the hunter home from the hill.'[336] De la Mare often equates the pursuit of the Ideal Vision to a traveller's quest in search of something beautiful that will take him home.

Both views are juxtaposed in 'The Creatures', and the story ends with the words '*Femina Creature'* inscribed on a woman's grave. This could mean the hopeless end mooted by Davison, but the actual word '*Femina'* is a rarely used, enigmatic word – as enigmatic as Christus and Maria in context. It obscures the finality of the buried body and instead betokens a beginning, as everything inevitably returns in de la Mare, sooner or later. *Femina Creature,* therefore, may symbolize what lies at the other end of the grave, The Ideal Vision, the light of home. Although Helen of Troy and Eve are visions of the femme fatale, they serve as a

[332] Ibid.
[333] de la Mare, 'The Vision', in *The Complete Poems*, p. 496.
[334] Edward Davison, 'Modern English Poetry, Some Notes On', *English journal*, 15, (1926), p. 407.
[335] de la Mare, 'The Vision', in *The Complete Poems*, p. 496.
[336] Gardener, *New Oxford Book of English Verse*, p. 794.

counterpoint to the author's more favoured conceptualization of alluring beauty. The Ideal Vision does not end in the grave but is an eternal concept.

The narration of this curious and complex story began significantly on a train. The author's persistent concern with the circuitous journey, appearing in his fiction, poetry, anthologies and even reviews, is again at work. It is reflected in the words of the compelling poem 'The Exile'. 'Oh, from wide circuit, shall at length I see | Pure daybreak lighten again on Eden's tree?'.[337] Anne Bentick calls this poem a 'companion piece in prose' to 'The Creatures'.[338] Both texts portray the writer's long-held vision of a return to an Edenic place. Both texts express a sense of loss: lost territory, lost time, and lost peace of mind. The anguish felt by the poem's narrator is also felt by the narrator in 'The Creatures'. Childhood innocence is demonstrated in both texts, and the suggestion is made that this is the key to entering Eden.

The narrator in 'The Creatures' was frantically attempting to regain the welcome and peace he found in the enclave of the Creatures as he travelled through life. Simon, the young protagonist in *Come Hither*, is still on his journey, which has yet to end. However, in comparison, the two young creatures are static and waiting, as we recall in 'we wait, we wait!'. They wait in infinite patience in a place of chequered beauty. They could be waiting to welcome man to the garden, a place of return and redemption. Therefore, de la Mare's vision for man, in his more hopeful moments, could answer the enigmatic question of where the light of home is and the true nature of the traveller's bourne.

[337] de la Mare, 'The Exile', in *The Complete Poems*, p. 201.
[338] Bentick, *Romantic Imagery in the Works of Walter de la Mare*, p. 244.

Chapter Three: Heartsick of His Journey

The Three Friends

> Rebellious heart, why still regret so much
> A destiny which all that's mortal shares?
> Surely the solace of the grave is such
> That there naught matters; and there no one cares?[339]

The above quote from de la Mare's poem 'The Bourne'[340] expresses lyrically what he often tried to express in his writing: that the grave can be a final place of peace, whether there is any further afterlife for man or not. Furthermore, the use of the interrogative indicates the uncertainty of man's fate. There are many questions raised in this author's work, but no definite answers are given. De la Mare often wrote about heaven or Eden as the longed-for destiny. However, he also acknowledged that there cannot be any surety of achieving it and that there is a very human fear of hellish encounters in order to be sure of it as a destination.

De la Mare's constant questioning of the existence of an afterlife leaves him uncertain even about the grave. In the short story 'The Three Friends', he imagines a strange human hell that is non-infernal and secular yet frightening in its simplicity. This vision of hell is as skewed as his vision of Eden in 'The Creatures'. Therefore, as I have shown in earlier chapters, de la Mare's view of the afterlife encompasses many different views of what eternity will mean for the culmination of the transitory state of his travellers' journey.

Although his biographer, Teresa Whistler, was certain that in de la Mare's poetic imagination, an afterlife existed, the author, as he investigated dimensions of being, did not turn from the idea that it might not be fortuitous to man. '*Evidence* of an afterlife seemed to him positively to crowd into this one as life went on though- of its *nature* he was less sure; it might have its own great dangers'.[341] In his works, de la Mare imagines different afterlife scenarios: long-sought Eden, fearful visions of hell as described in the short story 'The Wharf', and acceptance

---

[339] de la Mare, 'The Bourne', in *The Complete Poems*, p. 606.
[340] Ibid.
[341] Whistler, *Imagination of the Heart*, p. 345.

of the grave as an everlasting sleep or even a state of nothingness. He reflected on the existence of such a state, sometimes as a place, other times as part of the human psyche, but always as the culmination of the transitory state of his traveller's journey. While his characters may have fervently hoped for Eden, heaven, or some equivalent rewarding state, there was always the idea that the afterlife could offer, at best, a trap and, at worst, unknown horrors.

In the abovementioned short story, 'The Wharf', the atmosphere is eschatological with its threat of damnation and annihilation. As in 'The Three Friends', the effects of the woman's horrific dream linger in the mind and affect her mental state to its great detriment. With the help of her husband and medical professionals, the protagonist is able to overcome the ghastly effects of her singular dream by spending time in a quiet residence on a farm in the country. The Wharf is peopled with frightening characters, demons, with huge spades who shovel away the detritus of men's souls: an echo of St Michael the Archangel weighing the souls of men, a well-known image from medieval art.

In 'The Three Friends', the occupants of Eaves' dreams are the harmless figures of his everyday life. His wife and three friends, in his disordered mind, assume the proportions of tormentors simply because they are part of his dream and have accompanied him in these dreams into his feared and fearful eternity. However, he is vouchsafed no respite, unlike the woman in 'The Wharf'. The eschatological in the dreams of both protagonists is focused on the end of things, resonating with the word's Greek origins. It is ironic, however, that in Eaves' dream and de la Mare's work, there are no definite endings. In 'The Wharf', the narrator says, 'It seemed as though she had come to the end of things – a vacant abyss.'[342] The lack of an ending is what Eaves dreads most.

In the short story 'The Three Friends', de la Mare visualizes a non-infernal, even post-infernal hell. Instead of being a separate place, the protagonist, Eaves, transfers to a hell, which is a perpetuation of his ordinary human life. Hell has long been thought of, in folkloric and religious writings, as a separate location, usually underground, where wrongdoers are met with dreadful punishments.

[342] de la Mare, 'The Wharf', in *Short Stories 1895–1926*, p. 363.

Instead of going underground, Eaves makes no descent but merely transfers to his eternal, transposed state through the medium of sleep. He dies in his sleep and crosses over into a state of everlasting sameness. Eternity and hell are inseparable. The narrator appears to grasp the fact that the sheer hellishness of hell is the fact that it lasts forever. Eaves has already undergone, through his dreams, a form of hell on Earth stemming from the realization of how unfulfilling his life is, and a prolongation of this life is horrifying in its fruitless simplicity. He says:

> It seems as if there I can't change either; can't. If you were to ask me how I know – why I couldn't say. It's a dream, But that's what's the difference. There's nothing to come. *Now:* why! I might change in a score of ways; just take them as they come. I might fall ill; or Mrs Eaves. I might come into some money; marry again. God bless me, I might *die!* But there, that's all over; endless; no escape; nothing. I can't even die.[343]

This is the longest sentence that Eaves speaks in the text and is a sign of both his increasing anxiety and his fatalistic acceptance of his singular fate.

Fears of damnation have saturated Western imagination and culture for centuries, and de la Mare was testing these issues when other writers, particularly of the supernatural, such as Arthur Machen and Algernon Blackwood, were exploring similar analogies. He, like them, realized that hell could be a mental state as well as a physical location. Nevertheless, a persistent trope of eternal damnation existed. For centuries, man's transient state had been lamented in literature, and the consignation to hell feared. Earth is repeatedly seen as a border territory between heaven and hell:

> A place of exchange between two immortal giants, between two opposing but secular empires, a place of exchange and contact between the Kingdom of light and that of darkness, a transit camp and passing point for opposite

[343] de la Mare, 'The Three Friends', in *Short Stories 1895–1926*, p. 97.

> destinations, the departure point for obligatory and unsolicited journeys into eternity and for inconsumable sojourns in immortality.[344]

If his dream is true, Eaves' occupation of hell constitutes an everlasting occupation of this distressing state of stasis. Camporesi says, in his observations on Earth's unsatisfactory state, that 'Days on earth seem to be a foretaste of those in the underworld; they are troubled, confused, anxious and painful: a dress rehearsal for the everlasting and severe torments of a temporal hell'.[345]Although Eaves may be relieved of the physical torments, it is clear from his personal reflections and intimate conversations with his friends that his life on Earth is unsatisfactory.

Eaves is one of four characters, three of whom are the story's friends. He is accompanied by his friend Sully into a familiar public house, where they greet their third friend, Miss Lacey, the barmaid. It is revealed that Eaves has had a series of disturbing dreams in which he finds himself in a peculiar hell. Instead of a hell of 'fire and brimstone',[346] which Miss Lacey talks of, he has found, in his dream, that he is doomed to an unending existence of endless repetition. Miss Lacey is full of pity and consideration for her friend while, oddly, Sully is full of morbid curiosity and an inexplicable irritation at Eaves' revelation. Sully displays signs of abjection, throwing off his fear and anger onto his fellow being. He encourages and even forces Eaves to reveal his eerie dream. When he returns to the bar two days later, he tells a shocked Miss Lacey that Eaves has died.

As can be seen from this brief description of the roles of the friends, each of them has a different personality, although they interact as if in a play, as I shall indicate later. They appear in vignettes of themselves, for example, Sully's sardonic character, Eaves' deflected though genuine fear and Miss Lacey's deceiving appearance of intellectual deficit. De la Mare also uses humour in their surnames to isolate each personality in much the same way Dickens does, matching their personalities to persons or places in the narrative. Nearly all of this author's characters live on the edge, and the name Eaves invokes, which in Old English means

---

[344] Piero Camporesi, *The Fear of Hell: Images of Damnation in Early Modern Europe,* trans by Lucinda Byatt (Pennsylvania State University Press, 1987), p. 16.
[345] Ibid. p. 5.
[346] de la Mare, 'The Three Friends', in *Short Stories 1895–1926*, p. 96.

'overhanging'. This perfectly describes a character who is on the threshold of two worlds. Likewise, Sully is flawed while Miss Lacey, 'a little plump, bright satiny woman',[347] is one of this author's types of landladies where obesity goes hand in hand with kindliness. She is one of a line of Delamarean landladies who are plump, usually blonde, and welcoming. In 'The Creatures', the landlady is 'a corpulent and blonde woman'[348] while a cottager is old but kindly. They are in complete contrast to the author's other female carers who are odd, slightly sinister, controlling or even plain evil, as is the aunt figure in 'Seaton's Aunt'. The landladies, however, dispense good advice and local knowledge. Miss Lacey is more closely described than his other landladies and has an emerging, lively personality, which provides a contrast to the static self she will become if she truly features in Eaves' dream.

In 'The Three Friends', there is a lack of de la Mare's frequent lyrical description, and the resulting literary cadences read more like a play or a closet drama, with the four characters spotlighted and enclosed in the dim surroundings of a public bar, under the constant gaze of the reader. The story is unusually short and has a play's economy of content with Eaves' revelation, nonetheless, persisting in the mind.

The closet drama aspect of 'The Three Friends' highlights the existential anxieties of many of de la Mare's texts, and this anxiety, although sometimes a product of the paranormal, just as often stems from the instability of the character's mindset. In the story, Eaves displays troubling psychological traits in his manner, speech and obsession with his dreams. There is horror in this story, but de la Mare's sophisticated technique makes it difficult to distinguish between overt horror of the paranormal variety and the subconscious. Often, the two are inextricably welded together in his texts.

This form of literary amalgamation is a transition from the late Victorian ghost story. One example is M. R. James, with his antiquarian and academic protagonists being beset by spectral presences in disquieting forms and shapes, sometimes descending into violent physical horror as in the story, 'Lost Hearts'.[349] De la Mare's protagonist in 'The Three Friends' is suffering

[347] Ibid.
[348] Ibid., p. 158.
[349] M. R. James, Lost Hearts and Other Chilling Tales (Penguin, 2009).

less from visible, frightening entities than from the result of an uneasy psyche. De la Mare further emphasizes this point by employing the dream sequence, which he uses as a key device to unlock Eaves' unsettled psyche.

In 'The Three Friends, de la Mare positions his character in the familiar public bar he frequents to better emphasize the descent into horror engendered by Eaves' psychological state. Julia Briggs describes this as 'a tension between the known and the unknown, security and exposure, the familiar and the strange'.[350] When Miss Lacey talks of 'fire and brimstone and such',[351] she is evoking a familiar vision of hell, an accepted form of it that has endured throughout the centuries, with Biblical authority, such as Matthew 25 and Revelations 20, and which has, in modern times, lost some of its terror and dread. What imbues de la Mare's tale with fear and disquiet is that he has exchanged a fantastic yet familiar vision of hell with a futuristic space of hell with earthly parameters, which may or may not be the product of Eaves' disordered mind.

The scene of the short story is set with the introduction of inclement weather, a burgeoning storm in the 'zenith' that is contrasted with the 'narrow street'.[352] The 'zenith' is the sphere directly visible above the two characters, although the word is imbued with a sense that the main character is on the verge of some momentous change. The zenith is described as 'darkening'[353], and the usual cheerful, life-affirming camaraderie of the friends is challenged. The lives and friendships of these friends are emphasized by the play-like structure and show how interwoven their lives are. The construction of the text sets up the discussion by the interplay of voices, set against an almost stationary background, where only nods of the head, jerky movements, pointing, glances and involuntary movements achieve the effect of the reader having to fill in gaps and complete or guess at unfinished sentences, through having to pay close attention to the dialogue.

Comparisons can be made with de la Mare's contemporary, the Belgian playwright Maurice Maeterlinck (1863–1947). He saw his characters as marionettes who were pulled, pushed, and

[350] Julia Briggs, *Night Visitors: The Rise and Fall of the English Ghost Story* (Faber & Faber, 1977).
[351] de la Mare, 'The Three Friends', in *Short Stories 1895–1926*, p. 96.
[352] Ibid., p. 94.
[353] Ibid.

propelled at the whim of unknown forces in a baffling world. This comparison can be drawn, mainly in the dialogue of the play-like short story where – as in Maeterlinck's dramas – what is being said is less important than what is being suggested. Maeterlinck believed that human emotions were not as important in controlling human behaviour as external forces, leading to the characters having a limited understanding of themselves. This is indicative of Eaves, who is bewildered by his dreams and what they might mean.

There is a particular comparison with Maeterlinck's play *The Intruder*.[354] Both use buildings as a background to draw attention to patterns of behaviour, such as the way the public house is a fitting contextual backdrop for Eave's behaviour. These form not only backgrounds but encourage a focus on the characters' behaviours. There is also an emphasis on doors and windows in both texts. The half-formed dialogue and unfinished sentences of de la Mare's narrative recall the Belgian playwright's use of the same. There are also entrances and exits, partial and final, which emphasize the play-like structure of the narrative. De la Mare's skill as a stylist is therefore shown by his literary choice of the shape of the text, and it enfolds the characters in a narrow world, similar to Maeterlinck's.

De la Mare, as Whistler intimated, was aware of the potentially grave dangers of an afterlife and illustrated that even a harmless life, such as Eaves appears to lead, can be threatened by grave, unknown dangers; the entire text is permeated with the threat of the unknown. The author similarly reinforces his idea of life's frailty by introducing the idea of suicide early in 'The Three Friends', just as he hinted at it in the woman's psychological condition in 'The Wharf'. He introduces it through Miss Lacey – with the sombre nature of her revelation at odds with her usual cheerful nature – when she tells of a young man of her acquaintance who committed suicide because of his frightening dreams: '[B]ut there was a young gentleman down Charles-street, where I used to be, that had dreams — well, there, shocking!'.[355] The idea of non-death, an unnatural state, is highlighted by the mention of suicide, an unnatural death. Eaves' revelation has unsettled all the characters' fears and exposed the fragile nature of human life. Although suicide is merely hinted at in the text, it leaves a lingering doubt that Eaves may

[354] Maurice Maeterlinck, *The Intruder: A Play* (Gowans & Gray, 1913).
[355] de la Mare, 'The Three Friends', in *Short Stories 1895–1926*, p. 95.

have propelled himself in abandonment, out of this world and into the afterworld, like the knight in 'Song of Finis', in the desperate hope that his dream was not a premonition.

Both stories, 'The Wharf' and 'The Three Friends', explore the extraordinary idea of shame, which both main characters experience. The woman is ashamed for having dreamt such an outlandish and suggestive dream, while Eaves is ashamed of and reluctant to disclose his dreams. Although Eaves and the female character in 'The Wharf' both experience frightening dreams, there is a contrast between the domestic situations of the two. The woman finds comfort in her husband but is also able to find support later from the farmer. Eaves, on the other hand, appears to have only superficial relationships, and even his wife is referred to in a passing manner. The contrast suggests that the stable relationship of the woman and her husband has contributed to her recovery from her dream, while Eaves' shallow relationships and domestic scenario accentuate his succumbing to his dream.

De la Mare draws a parallel between the woman's apparent religious belief and her soteriological questions about the fate she dreams of: 'To have believed in such a doom; to have supposed that God […].'[356] In 'The Three Friends', however, God, the devil and religious beliefs are not mentioned and may account for the profane state of Eaves' destination. It also draws comparisons with both the religious state and its possible, ironic ending and the secular hell of Eaves' secular life. In Eaves' case, neither man's aspirations to heaven nor his mortal fear of a punishing hell are realized. There was no satisfactory end for Eaves' regardless of whether he possessed faith or not.

De la Mare, in this narrative, explores a non-infernal hell where no God or even Satan is mentioned. Similarly, neither appears to be of Eaves' own making. Instead, God is felt through his absence, as is the case in so much of this author's work. Kajita refers to this phenomenon in de la Mare's work as 'being haunted by God's absence'.[357] Many of the author's characters, whether in prose or poetry, approach the yet longed-for presence through signs and symbols of his absence. This peculiar condition sprang from the author's singular concept of God as the

[356] Ibid.
[357] Yui Kajita, 'Ghostly Sensations in Walter de la Mare. Reading the Body as Haunted House', *English Literature as Translation, 1880–1920*, 61.3 (2018), pp. 374–388.

'divine Abandoner'.[358] De la Mare speaks of the 'divine Abandoner' with the telling demotion of the 'divine' shown by the lack of a capital D, which indicates that God might still exist or has existed but has abandoned his creatures.

The phrase 'the divine Abandoner' appears in the short story 'The Vats', where the narrator and a friend believe they have discovered the very source of God's redemption, the waters of life and time, destined to benefit all humankind, contained in huge, mysterious vats. This precious gift, however, has been mysteriously withdrawn and abandoned. 'In the utmost depths of our imaginations, it was clear to us that these supremely solitary objects, if not positively cast out of thought, had been abandoned.'[359] This unsettling thought of God abandoning his creatures pervades the whole of 'The Three Friends'. In this story, the author pictures an afterlife bereft of God that consists of an everlasting extension of ordinary life, a challenge to death, and an indictment of the power of time.

In the chapter 'Time' in his anthology *Early One Morning in the Spring,* the author acknowledges that there is the 'labyrinthine problem of time to consider'.[360] The interconnectedness of time, timelessness, and abandonment into time permeate this text. De la Mare was interested in time and discussed it with his fellow poet Edward Thomas, revealing later to Gerald Bullett, a scholar, that the discussion was the origin of his short story 'The Vats' because both writers agreed to author a story based on time. In de la Mare's case, the result was the curious and poignant tale wherein time was stored, presumably by God in immense vats and later, inexplicably abandoned by him.

It was not, however, only fellow writers with whom he engaged in discussions about time. De la Mare also discussed it – and science in general, particularly physics and astronomy – with several eminent scientists, including Dr Russell Brain, a neurologist and author of the work *Tea with Walter de la Mare*. De la Mare discusses the subject at length with Brain in a series of 'tea talks', a term invented by de la Mare, 'Indeed he had invented the term 'tea-talk'.[361] Brain had previously suggested at one of these meetings that 'we obviously need a different

[358] de la Mare, 'The Vats', *The Riddle: And Other Stories,* p. 301.
[359] Ibid.
[360] Walter de la Mare, *Early One Morning in Spring* (Macmillan Company, 1935) p. 144.
[361] Russell Brain, *Tea with Walter de la Mare* (Faber and Faber,1957), p. 19.

scale on which to measure experienced time – Bergson's *durée* – from the clocks which measured physical time'.[362]

The idea that time has two faces is subsumed in de la Mare's work and appears with startling frequency, culminating in his long poem, *Winged Chariot,* alluding to Marvell's poem about the passage of time. De la Mare's poem is written in tercets to achieve the sombre tone necessary for such a serious subject: a subject Lovecraft refers to as the most profoundly dramatic and grimly terrible thing in the universe.[363] The poem is another reminder of the divine Abandoner, present throughout the short story, as one part of *Winged Chariot* alludes to a real childhood memory when the poet discovered a vast reservoir, which, of course, accords with his short story 'The Vats', where the two travelling companions find the huge vats and realize in awe, that 'Time – pure *is'.*[364]

De la Mare's textual inconsistencies are subtle yet effective. He sees the afterlife as a series of visions that are brought to life by the use of literary techniques. These techniques include wordplay, literary allusions, and formal features such as the brevity and structure of the text. This brevity ensures the immediate involvement of the characters, who quickly become embroiled in each other's concerns. He also points to the idea of two worlds by his setting of two separate bars, one in darkness, within the one interior.

Climactic words and phrases are employed to effect. He builds on 'worry', 'health', 'ill' and 'hushed gloom', 'darkening', 'darkness', 'accentuated darkness', and similar cumulative references. He uses the literary reference 'skeleton at the feast', which is usually used as a *memento mori*.[365] It is known from Longfellow's poem, 'The Old Clock on the Stairs', which also, tellingly, features the timepiece reverberating with the suggestive sound of 'Forever-never! | Never-forever!'.[366] While Longfellow warns that time is short, and nothing endures, de la Mare plays with this widely utilized idea and plunges his protagonist into dreams of forever as an actual reality.

---

[362] Ibid., p. 60.
[363] H.P. Lovecraft, *Supernatural Horror in Literature & Other Essays* (Wildside Press, 2008).
[364] de la Mare, 'The Vats', *The Riddle: And Other Stories,* p. 303.
[365] de la Mare, 'The Three Friends', in *Short Stories 1895–1926,* p. 95.
[366] Henry Wadsworth Longfellow, 'The Old Clock on the Stairs', in *The Poetical Works of Henry Wadsworth Longfellow in Six Volumes* (Frederick Warne and Co, 1889), p. 53.

As well as symbolism such as this, de la Mare often uses humour and wordplay to carry his literary intentions. He applies it in 'The Three Friends' by using, at the very end of the text, as a succinct summing up, 'If you ask me, that's merely a question of time.'[367] He succeeds in underscoring the combination of the idea of time, around which the entire narrative revolves and which is unfathomable, in the use of the ponderable word 'question' in a light, almost colloquial way. He concludes with this commonplace saying both as a pithy way of summarizing the contents of the story and suggesting another imponderable ending. In 'The Three Friends', he uses every literary technique at his disposal to emphasize his intense concern with the notion of another world other than our own.

In this story, however, the author is looking beyond the idea of an otherworld to the eerie and disturbing visualization of such a place being merely an unwanted extension of Eaves' unsatisfactory present existence. This is not the first time the author has pondered such a fate. In the poem, 'Winged Chariot', de la Mare says, 'And what of the life beyond | Even were that of this a further lease | It might yet win to a blest state that is | Past thought.'[368] As this quote from the long poem demonstrates, the poet hopes there is still something beyond the state of extended life. However, there is no such aspiration in 'The Three Friends'. There is no sense of furtherance or ascent in Eaves' future, only the mundane – forever. This point is emphasized in the text when Eaves outlines his everyday life, routines, and surroundings to his friends, lining up the everyday artefacts surrounding him: 'I sit with my wife, all just the same; cap and "front" and all, just the same; gas burning, decanter on the table, books in the case, marble clock on the mantelpiece, just the same.'[369]

De la Mare uses different fictive forms to denote his concerns with the afterlife, one of which is humans' obsession with worldly goods. Possessions can form a cage for man, and this obsession with them is portrayed in two of de la Mare's short stories, 'The House' and 'The Connoisseur'. The cage is a recurrent trope in de la Mare. Sometimes, it is the body trapped in

[367] de la Mare, 'The Three Friends', in *Short Stories 1895–1926,* p. 99.
[368] de la Mare, 'The Winged Chariot', in *The Complete Poems,* p. 572.
[369] de la Mare, 'The Three Friends', in *Short Stories 1895–1926,* p. 97.

a cage of clay; sometimes, the image is of a caged bird. In these short stories, the possession of material things denotes a lesser spiritual life.

In 'The House', Mr Asprey, a man about to die, surveys his everyday belongings in much the same way as Eaves. However, Mr Asprey readily leaves his everyday goods on the ground floor to 'ascend' to the attics, symbolizing his aspirations for a more enlightened afterlife. This juxtaposes with Eaves, who is still rooted in the fundamentals of life and the social shackles of middle-class life. He dies among the mundane, in his sleep, in his house.

In 'The Connoisseur', the shadowy figure of old St Dunstan, the patron saint of gold and silversmiths, arrives to accompany the protagonist, Mr Blumen, to the next life and finds him among a display of 'exquisite objects',[370] which he is reluctant to leave. The old saint points out that these treasures amount only to a cage for man, in the words, 'Still, cages remain cages'.[371] Machen named these possessions 'hideous mental furniture'.[372] The old man tells Blumen about the imprisoning nature of possessions and suggests they are better held in the imagination rather than 'round one's neck'.[373]

De la Mare's characters are often found in domestic settings, among their accumulated treasures. In fact, he often writes about the comfort of material things, and indeed, many of his stories favour the cosy and the comforting, at least on the surface, when describing household and home. The poem 'Comfort' features, as do other of de la Mare's poems, a cat, the very epitome of domestic comfort.[374] The poem describes solid comfort, warmth, and security. Eaves' litany of his everyday possessions and routine underlines his human attachment to them. At the same time, the narrative suggests that to pursue them through eternity will be to exist in a kind of limbo or hell, giving the tale its creepiness and understated horror. This cosiness often obscures the uncanny in his stories – the opposite of homely. 'Unheimlich', unhomely, is a word first used by German psychiatrist Ernst Jentsch and later appropriated by Freud. Jentsch

[370] de la Mare, 'The Connoisseur', in *Short Stories 1895–1926*, p. 263.
[371] Ibid.
[372] A Reynolds, W. Charlton and D. Lewi, *Arthur Machen: A Short Account of His Life and Work* (J. Baker for Richards Press, 1963), p. 76.
[373] de la Mare, 'The Connoisseur', in *Short Stories 1895–1926*, p. 266.
[374] de la Mare, 'Comfort', in *The Complete Poems*, p. 283.

was aware of how the harmless can be translated into the terrifying. In his book on de la Mare's poetry, William Wootten quotes Jentsch on this subject:

> In the dark, a rafter covered with nails thus becomes the jaw of a fabulous animal, a lonely lake becomes the gigantic eye of a monster, and the outline of a cloud or shadow becomes a threatening satanic face. Fantasy, which is indeed always a poet, is able now and then to conjure up the most detailed terrifying vision out of the most harmless and indifferent phenomena.[375]

However, home can also represent oppression, and each protagonist's list of possessions bears this out. Dark secrets, too, can be hidden in our own homes and in 'The Three Friends', de la Mare suggested a prolongation of this insecurity for all eternity, a horrifying thought. In Eaves' case, there is no escape from the confines of the home that was once a sanctuary.

The lack of descent and ascent dreamt by Eaves in his secular hell of an unsought prolongation of life is echoed by Rachel Falconer in her chapter on katabatic ascent in her work *Hell in Contemporary Literature*.[376] 'In classical katabasis, the descent to Dis or Hades is about coming to know the self, regaining something lost or someone lost, or acquiring superhuman powers or knowledge.'[377] There is, however, no katabasis in this short story, no descent or consequent ascent. As no katabasis occurs, there is no transformation or cathartic change. Eaves occupies a liminal location, accentuated by his dream and highlighted by the textual introduction of this character in the street, itself a place of liminality. Eaves will simply go on but must relinquish all hope of a better life.

Falconer continues this concept with, 'circumambulation culture is saturated with the idea of a self-being forged out of an infernal journey'.[378] This katabatic notion, of which perhaps Dante is the chief poet, relies on the narrative of a journey through hell, a descent to an underworld, which is a cathartic experience for the traveller, resulting in the survivor coming to a better

[375] Ernst Jentsch, 'On the psychology of the uncanny (1906)' *Angelaki: Journal of Theoretical Humanities*, 2(1), (1997), pp. 7–16.
[376] Rachel Falconer, *Hell in Contemporary Literature Western Descent Narratives Since 1945* (Edinburgh University Press, 2005), p. 3.
[377] Ibid.
[378] Ibid.

understanding of him or herself, and acquiring wisdom. Just a year after de la Mare wrote 'The Three Friends', war broke out in 1914. No one could have visualized that hell could exist on Earth. In later poems, de la Mare addressed some of the horrors of war, although these were surprisingly few, perhaps because of his guilt at being a non-combatant. However, in 1913, he was challenging the traditional idea that hell had to be an infernal 'other place', underground and full of demonic horrors. This is not the traditional view of infernal hell but a forward-looking post-infernal hell destabilizing traditional views. It also suggests that de la Mare may have felt, in rethinking the uses of literature, that the task of escaping or lessening hell fell to secular writers, as faith in providence had been badly hit by the horrors of World War I. De la Mare had entered, through his literary talent, the sort of secure social world that was to be undermined by the ravages of war. 'Idealism, nobility, romance, value attached to great areas of human experience that, once crumbled, and soured into disillusion, would not return'.[379]

Falconer explores how, in the descent narrative about which she writes, heroes have broken with the full-blown, traditional descent or crossed over to infernal territories. Instead, they are represented as inserting themselves into these regions by negotiating cracks and interstices. 'Descent heroes are found peering through cracks, ripping back curtains, opening trapdoors to find infernal worlds contingent and coterminous with our own.'[380] This is a fair description of many of de la Mare's characters and narrators who live on the edge, continually peer in and out of windows, stand in doorways, and enter trapdoors and narrow spaces to discover other worlds parallel with ours. Many of his characters have a precarious foothold in another world.

In 'The Three Friends', Eaves is surrounded by portals, doors, and an attic window and frequently visits a public bar with only chequered light. In the bar sits the mysterious character of the Commissionaire, who always occupies the darkened side of the room, never speaks and is a symbol of the enablement of doors opening and closing – the guardian of portals. The idea of doors and portals, ingress and egress, is a favourite leitmotif of de la Mare and forerunner of Falconer's literary heroes who access spaces to discover other worlds. In this story, the two friends enter first through a mock marble porch, where they pause, then Eaves and Sully enter

[379] Whistler, *Imagination of the Heart*, p. 233.
[380] Ibid.

the bar through a swing door, which, of course, closes behind them, indicating Eaves' approach to and the sealing of his fate.

As de la Mare explored the world of the supernatural, he was in the company of other writers such as Arthur Machen, Algernon Blackwood and May Sinclair, a feminist, literary critic, suffragist, and author of two volumes of horror stories, *Uncanny Stories,*[381] and *The Intercessor and Other Stories*.[382] Whistler observes, 'Of all the *fin de siècle* storywriters, Arthur Machen 1862–1949, was perhaps the closest to him, for it was Machen who discovered how to juxtapose the commonplace of modern life with what stirred, romantic and sinister, just below the crust'.[383]

Machen led the way in realizing that unknown horrors could lie below the surface of familiar everyday situations. He believed that the humdrum world hid mysteries relating to the world beyond. The lifting of the veil, such as in Eaves' dream and the physical lifting of the sheet in Emmeline's dream, could lead to madness or death, which befell Eaves two days after his revelations. Lovecraft recognized that de la Mare had in common with these writers the ability to trace the unknown and the fear that lurked beneath normal life. He says of de la Mare's peculiar vision, 'An unseen mystic world is ever a close and vital reality.'[384] He notes the author's ability to identify the 'terrible and forbidden dimensions of being'.[385] Eaves' dilemma is not to be beset by demonic entities but to be deprived of the ability to seek the numinous.

In *A Fragment of Life,* Machen pursues the idea of 'the horrors of suburban respectability',[386] which, as we have seen, surround Eaves. These elements of hidden horror and brooding fright are wholly applicable to the character of Eaves and what he fears. De la Mare partook readily in this style of writing, and Eaves' problem is a good example of the horrific intruding on the familiar. Another significant connection exists between Machen and de la Mare and their writing of the 'weird' in fiction.

---

[381] May Sinclair, *Uncanny Stories* (Hutchinson & Co, 1923).
[382] May Sinclair, *The Intercessor and Other Stories* (Hutchinson & Co, 1931).
[383] Whistler, *Imagination of the Heart,* p. 68.
[384] Lovecraft, *Supernatural Horror in Literature & Other Essays,* p. 84.
[385] Ibid.
[386] Arthur Machen, *A Fragment of Life* (Tartarus, 2000).

Weird fiction, practised by both, is hard to define; like de la Mare's work, it is slippery and unreliable. David Punter, in his work on the modern Gothic, remarks, 'Nobody can be trusted in de la Mare.'[387] I have already shown how de la Mare's texts are swathed in ambiguity, hover rather than end and how he uses landscape over narrative and certainly over dialogue. 'Atmosphere not action is the great desideratum of weird fiction' according to Lovecraft.[388]

De la Mare's writing also resembled Machen's in the prioritization of atmosphere. Machen was a pioneer of psychogeography, which focuses on the correlation between landscape and the mind. Lovecraft says of Machen and this technique:

> Mr Machen, with an impressionable Celtic heritage linked to keen youthful memories of the wild domed hills, archaic forests, and cryptical Roman ruins of the Gwent countryside, has developed an imaginative life of rare beauty, intensity, and historic background. He has absorbed the medieval mystery of dark woods and ancient customs.[389]

Frank Belknap Long, the American poet, wrote 'On Reading Arthur Machen', a sonnet praising Machen, which reflects this background:

> There is a glory in the autumn woods
> The ancient lanes of England wind and climb
> Past wizard oaks and gorse and tangled thyme.[390]

The ancient lanes of England were, in reality, the ancient lanes of Wales. Machen wrote of his native country in 'Chronicles of Clemendy',[391] and Lovecraft calls the magic of that 'ancient Welsh environment' the author's own. [392]

---

[387] David Punter, *The Literature of Terror: A History of Gothic Fictions From 1765 to the Present Day*, 2nd edn, (Longman, 1996) p. 48.
[388] Lovecraft, *Supernatural Horror in Literature & Other Essays*, p. 118.
[389] Ibid., p. 93.
[390] Frank Belknap Long, *On Reading Arthur Machen: A Sonnet* (Dog and Duck Press, 1949).
[391] Arthur Machen, *The Chronicle of Clemendy* (Martin Secker, 1925).
[392] Lovecraft, *Supernatural Horror in Literature & Other Essays*, p. 92.

De la Mare responds to the Cornish landscape in the same way, in his case, to the mystic environs of Cornwall, where he wrote 'The Creatures' and responded to the influence of Cornwall that surrounded him. The short story 'The Creatures' was an example of the kind of writing that came to be associated with the weird in fiction. In the garden of the Creatures, there grows strange fruit, 'wind stunted lichen covered trees' and fruit that was 'scarce, rank and uncultivated', 'utterly unknown', 'gnarled' and 'alien' symbolic of the tentacular of weird fiction.[393]

A similar botanical description appears in 'The Tree',[394] referred to by Lovecraft as 'a frightful, vegetable growth'.[395] The tree grows in the yard of a half-starved artist who says, 'I have been looking at trees all my life. This resembles all, reminds me of none'.[396] The artist's half-brother, alarmed by the tree, secretes some of the rare flowers in his pocket and takes them home. On producing them for further perusal, he discovers, the next morning, that they are 'black, slimy and unrecognisable'.[397] De la Mare uses accumulation of detail in this way to disturb and derange. These disturbances are what Lovecraft names 'cosmic fear'.[398] There are many examples of this fear and indifference in de la Mare's work. In his essay 'Supernatural Horror in Literature and Other Essays', Lovecraft speaks of this dread:

> The one test of the really weird is simply this-whether there be excited in the reader a profound sense of dread and of contact with unknown spheres and powers; a subtle attitude of awed listening, as if for the beating of black wings or the scratching of outside shapes and entities on the known universe's utmost rim.[399]

Another aspect of the weird tale is the move away from anthropocentric explanations. In 'The Lord Fish', a children's story, the fish is a talking, tyrannical creature, an alien being who acts and talks like a human, 'Hst, he comes! The Lord Fish.! Angry and hungry. Beware'.[400] The

---

[393] de la Mare, 'The Creatures', in *The Riddle: And Other Stories,* p. 283.
[394] de la Mare, 'The Tree', in *The Riddle: And Other Stories,* p. 205.
[395] Lovecraft, *Supernatural Horror in Literature & Other Essays,* p. 84.
[396] de la Mare, 'The Tree', in *The Riddle: And Other Stories,* p. 213.
[397] Ibid., p. 214.
[398] Lovecraft, *Supernatural Horror in Literature & Other Essays,* p. 92.
[399] Ibid., p. 20.
[400] Walter de la Mare, *Short Stories for Children,* ed. by Giles de la Mare (Giles de la Mare, 2006), p. 216.

creature is abhuman and monstrous. The protagonist in the story, John Cobbler, has himself been transmogrified into a fish and is waiting to eventually be consumed by the Lord Fish, who eats its own kind. That this is a children's story is an indication that the bizarre and the weird are never far away in de la Mare's work, and this story itself is rooted in the primordial biological fear that marks the weird.

Lovecraft established a lineage of the 'weird' from gothic romance through Poe to the modern masters, which include Arthur Machen, Algernon Blackwood, Lord Dunsany, and M.R. James. Lovecraft includes de la Mare in his list when he says, 'These persons include great authors as well as insignificant amateurs like myself – Dunsany, Poe, Arthur Machen, R James, Algernon Blackwood, and Walter de la Mare being typical masters in this field'.[401] Lovecraft also mentions Robert Aickman, of whom Mike Ashley writes of in an Obituary in *The Times*, when he says, 'He brought to these (strange tales) his immense knowledge of the occult, psychological insights and a richness of background and characterization which rank his stories with those of M.R. James and Walter de la Mare.'[402]

Veronica Hollinger defined the weird as 'not a *kind* but a *method*, a way of getting something done'.[403] However it is defined, the weird in fiction is difficult to pin down and often oozes into the cracks in mainstream literature.

Also comparable to de la Mare is the author Algernon Blackwood, who, like him, engages in writing about houses and buildings with lingering psychic presences, such as the old house in *The Listener*, which becomes the frightening scene of a haunting by a leprous ghost. In de la Mare's old, haunted houses, the presence never leaves the interior of its former residence but continues, unless something happens in the plot, to imbue the house with its lingering manifestation. Sometimes, this presence is malevolent, such as the presence of the butler in 'Out of the Deep', but often, the haunter is merely wistful and sad, as in the poem 'The Ghost'. This association of old houses is one demonstration of the fearfulness of the familiar, and in 'The Three Friends', this is shown by the friends' everyday habits, routines, and meetings,

[401] Lovecraft, *Supernatural Horror in Literature & Other Essays*, p. 114.
[402] Mike Ashley, 'In Memoriam: Robert Fordyce Aikman', *Fantasy Newsletter* (June 1981), p. 13.
[403] Veronica Hollinger, 'Genre, and Mode in Latham', *Oxford Handbook of Science Fiction* (Oxford University Press, 2016), p. 140.

which, although ordinary, are imbued with a fear of the future. Like de la Mare, Blackwood also 'records the overtones of strangeness in ordinary things and experiences'.[404]

De la Mare contrasts the safe and comfortable surroundings with hidden horrors to come, such as in 'The Wharf', where the unnamed female protagonist, safe in her bright and cosy kitchen, suddenly has a flashback to a horrifying dream of hell she once endured. Both the narrators in 'The Three Friends' and 'The Wharf' expose the underlying horrors that lie underneath family life and companionship.

There is a generic tonal instability implicit in these two texts. Modes and techniques are used to interesting effect. Instability is shown, for example, not only by the move away from de la Mare's familiar idiom to the play-like structure but also by the obsession with dreaming and waking. There is a continual contrast between sleeping and waking, bridged by dream. The Commissionaire, for example, is uneasily asleep during the whole story, as if, like the Red King in *Through the Looking Glass,* he is dreaming of the other characters. Like the Red King, they will cease to exist if he wakes up and stops dreaming of them.

Meanwhile, in *Alice,* the Red King is 'fit to snore his head off'.[405] The Connoisseur, always asleep, is as pivotal in the text as the Red King is to the three characters in *Alice* and refers to their mutual fascination with dream. In 'The Three Friends', with the Connoisseur drifting in and out of sleep, the friends find themselves always having to glance at him, taking their cue from him before they speak. His slumbered wandering results in Eaves rarely finishing a sentence, Sully's demeanour fluctuating from affable to cold, and Miss Lacey's good humour being tested. All this occurs while lightning flickers and thunder's 'faint but cumulative rumble'[406] peals. This provides a physical background of instability caused by the physical manifestation of the weather and points out the implicit instability in the text.

De la Mare's sense of humour also parallels Carroll's in many ways, and a wry sense of it is present even amidst the gloom of the present narrative. He appears to make a comparison with

[404] Lovecraft, *Supernatural Horror in Literature & Other Essays,* p. 100.
[405] Gardner, *New Oxford Book of English Verse,* p. 238.
[406] de la Mare, 'The Three Friends', in *Short Stories 1895–1926,* p. 95.

Alice's situation in *Through the Looking Glass* when, with Tweedledum and Tweedledee, she sees the Red King asleep, to the situation the three friends find themselves in. Sully refers to the Commissionaire with the words, 'He'll break his neck.' [407]

Every aspect of this story relies on the revelation and consequent discussion of dream. Dreams and dreamers were a source of fascination to de la Mare, and he had published an anthology on the subject entitled *Behold, This Dreamer,* the full title of which was *Behold, This Dreamer! Of Reverie, Night, Sleep, Dream, Love-Dreams, Nightmare, Death, the Unconscious, the Imagination, Divination, the Artist and Kindred Subjects.* This title shows that de la Mare was aware of the different ramifications of the oneiric and was duly fascinated by it. The title *Behold, This Dreamer* is itself a reference to the Old Testament story of Joseph and his brothers, where the brothers mock Joseph's dreams, as Sully mocks Eaves'.[408]

Although dreaming is an internal experience, on this occasion, Eaves' fear and his very human desire to involve others triggers him to reveal his dream to his friends, although this then causes him difficulty, both personally and verbally. Dreams are seldom of interest to others, but in this short story, Eaves' dream assumes import, especially the unanswered question in the text of the precognicity of his dream.

As mentioned earlier in this chapter, the Commissionaire is significant in the dream scenario. He spends the entire narrative in an unsettled sleep, obviously dreaming because of his sporadic movements. This is a sign of the hypnagogic state. Many of de la Mare's contemporaries were interested in the oneiric, in hypnagogy and its opposite, the hypnopompic. Hypnogogy is the state between wake and sleep, when hallucinations sometimes occur, both visual and auditory. It is a threshold awareness state, befitting this story of thresholds and liminal spaces. De la Mare describes it in *Behold, This Dreamer.* The fugitive imagery, the protean 'physic material, that fluttering wavering patterning of retinal luminosity, the abrupt emergence of some mental phantasm having no perceptible relation whatever to its surroundings and now and then the

[407] de la Mare, 'The Three Friends', in *Short Stories 1895–1926,* p 96.
[408] Genesis 37:19

sound of many voices, or a sudden shout'.[409] Here is a lyrical description of a scientific phenomenon which captures the essence of this peculiar state.

The hypnagogic highlights Eaves' liminal position on the borders of sleep and dream, life and death. This limbic state, suggested in the text, is what gives this tale such a creepy and horrifying aspect. When Eaves transfers from sleep to death, the circumstances blend one into the other, facilitating Eaves' seamless transition from sleep into his feared state. It is indicative, too, of the reader's state of suspense. Nothing can be proven about the precognicity of the dream, but the power of suggestion in the text causes disturbing feelings.

There is also no sense of the cyclical in the hypnagogic as it is a self-limiting state. The cyclical is found in normal, rounded dreams of which there is no trace in Eaves' dream. Furthermore, the Commissionaire dreams of Eaves' dreams of the others, and neither appears to complete a sleep or dream cycle. The Commissionaire does not awaken, and Eaves dies in his sleep. This corresponds with the lack of cyclical completeness in the whole narrative.

Eaves describes his dream but does not name the place he visualizes as hell, with 'My dream was only – *after;* the state after death, as they call it.'[410] He is trying, desperately, using familiar terms, to achieve a sense of the apotropaic, distancing himself from his perceived fate. What frightens Eaves is the sense of being enclosed, like in a play with continual performances. There is no change and no exit. De la Mare forestalled Sartre, whose play *No Exit*,[411] written years later, features three characters in an endless hell of utter futility, exacerbated by their proximity and enforced congress. Eaves is similarly doomed, it appears, to a life of everlasting irrevocability and continued congress.

The story invites this connection partly through Eaves' palpable fear, 'It was just as if a scared rabbit had scurried out of Mr. Eaves' long white face'.[412] This fear is irrational as it is based on a dream. Yet there is a persistent sense of Eaves' belief in the dream. He despairs that Sully will not, and Miss Lacey cannot understand his fear. Eaves is horrified at having been singled

[409] Ibid., p. 29
[410] de la Mare, 'The Three Friends', in *Short Stories 1895–1926,* p. 97.
[411] Jean–Paul Sartre, et al. *Huis clos* (Klett, 2005).
[412] de la Mare, 'The Three Friends', in *Short Stories 1895–1926,* p. 97.

out to withstand the worst of what he appears to see as the prescient nature of his dream. 'Mr Eaves gazed dispassionately, and yet with some little dignity, in the isolation of attention he had evoked.'[413] This uneasy exposition emerges from the idea of the pity felt for Eaves by his friends. In Sully's case, feelings of pity are subsumed in fake sanguinity, annoyance, and coldness. It goes deeper for Miss Lacey. Eaves is the object of her pity, but she too internalizes it, which is expressed with the words, 'But then what about us?'.[414] Eaves' position is frightful – simultaneously an object of pity while being the channel of fear and self-pity of the other characters.

David Punter felt that pity could change people to their detriment. Pity has worked this way through fear for Sully, who becomes angry and whose pity for Eaves flies in the face of his own fear. [415] As for Eaves, Punter expands on how it might feel to be Eaves, 'After all, if we are to be the mere objects of pity, then all our personal, individualistic myths of strength, stability, selfhood, all the enduring investments we have placed and must continue to place in the security of the ego go down.'[416] Eave knows that his is no passing dream but one which is persistently recurrent.

He is associating the persistence of the dream with the idea that it must, inevitably, come true. His death two days later in his sleep emphasizes the bridge between dream and reality. According to the poem of the same name, this bridge has 'one pier on earth, the other in the unknown'.[417] If this futile existence persists in the afterworld, then, spiritually speaking, down goes all hope of a transformative or meaningful afterlife, and it is indeed a hell.

Eaves' fear of the unknown has become a fear of the familiar. He seems certain of his fate, even though it is all based on a dream; Eaves speaks in a tone of great certainty when he says, 'There is nothing to come.'[418] His revelation, almost immediately followed by his death, appears to finalize and concretize, for Sully, all of Eaves' fears. A usually sceptical Sully says,

---

[413] Ibid., p. 96.
[414] de la Mare, 'The Three Friends', in *Short Stories 1895–1926*, p. 98.
[415] David Punter, *The Literature of Pity* (Edinburgh University Press, 2014), p. 63.
[416] Ibid.
[417] de la Mare, 'The Bridge', in *The Complete Poems*, p. 367.
[418] de la Mare, 'The Three Friends', in *Short Stories 1895–1926*, p. 97.

'Why, where else *could* he go?'.[419] This highlights Eaves' strange, unique hell, for in this perpetual life, he does not actually transgress the law of mortality like, for example, the 'mortal immortal' in Mary Shelley's story of the same name.[420] Unlike Winzy, the protagonist in Shelley's story, Eaves does not relish the idea of eternal life but appears to see past any elation this could bring to a mortal man to the psychological anguish beyond. Also, unlike Winzy, Eaves actually dies. However, he is an anomaly who, like the mythical Wandering Jew, is forced to wander the human world forever, but, unlike them, he has, as far as we can tell, not committed any sin or crime. Nor is he a hero figure; he represents the defeated aspirations of humanity.

The idea of such a non-transformative state occurs throughout much of de la Mare's work, as his characters veer between aspiration and resignation. The short story 'Disillusioned'[421] is an aptly named narrative where a doctor's unexpected patient imposes on his time and patience and tells the doctor that he is convinced that life is hardly worth living in its triviality and pointlessness. He also sees, with a mounting sense of horror, that he is trapped in life and that there may be nothing beyond. He says, 'But quite, quite seriously, doctor, why *are* some of us singled out to realize the appalling trap we are all in?'.[422] Once again, as with Eaves, the narrator points to the protagonist's resentment and fear of being singled out and made to be 'the other'.

'The Three Friends' was finally published in 1926 in *The Connoisseur and Other Stories*, with several manuscript alterations made by de la Mare in his copy of *The Connoisseur*. 'The Three Friends' was first published in the *Westminster Gazette* in 1913, although it was not collected until 1923, in de la Mare's first-ever published collection of short stories, *The Riddle and other stories.* The author had been writing fiction for years, and had his prose proved as well-known and popular as his poetry, many thematic and lyrical similarities would have emerged, rather proving Kenneth Hopkins' point of view that all this author's works need to be read 'all of a piece'.[423]

---

[419] Ibid., p. 98.
[420] Mary Shelley, *Tales and Stories*, Introduction by Richard Garnett (W. Paterson & co., 1891), p. 163.
[421] de la Mare, 'Disillusioned', in *Short Stories 1895–1926*, p. 289.
[422] Ibid., p. 300.
[423] Hopkins, *Walter de la Mare*, p.10.

Thirteen years lay between these two short stories, 'The Three Friends' and 'Disillusioned', though a clear sense of uncertainty is present in both narratives. Both protagonists seek succour from fellow human beings who cannot help, as they are in the same precarious state. 'Disillusioned' clearly indicates what the character in 'The Three Friends' is trying to articulate. Pritchard addresses his concerns more succinctly than Eaves, in the words, 'But then you see, there is all the difference between not seeing a purpose in life because you haven't looked for one; and being sure there is no purpose when you have.'[424] Seemingly, Eaves lived an unexamined life compared to Pritchard in 'Disillusioned'. However, Pritchard describes much the same feelings that Eaves had, that even the cessation of an unsatisfactory life will bring no sense of meaningful transition, of going somewhere elevated, of no better world.

Man's constant aspiration after knowledge of a more elevated state is conferred in the words of the disillusioned Mr Pritchard:

> We are haunted by this hope, even this divination of another state or condition of being that is beyond our mortal senses to realize. A place or condition where – well, after death, of course. And yet, I feel, if we are not capable of it here and now, how is the transition to be made?[425]

The non-transitional state is born from man's imprisoning sense of the self as a profane entity rather than anything spiritual. Human life cannot easily be transmuted into the astomatous or spiritual. After death, man cannot aspire to a better life without a struggle because his humanness is all too tangible. With many of de la Mare's characters, including Eaves, this hope often translates into stoic resignation. Mr Pritchard utters his disillusioned words while Eaves resigns himself to his fate: 'It's my sentence.'[426] Pritchard calls this 'my-*self*' and, like Eaves, reveals a selfhood immured in the human condition. 'Disillusioned' reads like a continuation of 'The Three Friends', with the non-transformative, static state expressed with more clarity than Eaves' halting sentences.

---

[424] de la Mare, 'Disillusioned', in *Short Stories 1895–1926,* p. 294.
[425] Ibid.
[426] de la Mare, 'The Three Friends', in *Short Stories 1895–1926,* p. 97.

Parallel with the nature of Eaves' fate is the evasive question of punishment and whether Eaves deserves such retribution. De la Mare would have been familiar with hell through Biblical, classical, and even medieval writings as a place of perpetual but 'just' punishment for man's wantonness or disobedience. In 'The Three Friends', de la Mare rejects the physical tortures of everlasting flames but retains the idea that hell is a separation from God. However, in de la Mare's vision, God has separated himself from man – and Eaves – and hell is a mysterious place where God is not present. This is not because Eaves has committed any sin but because God has mysteriously turned away from his creatures.

As such, we have the idea of the divine Abandoner again: that strange state of the vacancy of his presence. Eaves remarks, 'You see, it isn't: so I seem to take it. It's what you are.'[427] Eaves appears to have been abandoned merely because of his human state. Miss Lacey sums up the implied fate of all of them when she says, 'Why, according to that, who's safe?'.[428] Spiritual safety is absent from this narrative. There are also inevitable questions raised by her for the discerning reader. Who, if anyone, goes on to a good place? Does Eden or heaven still exist for some? If the answer to any of these questions is yes, then part of the horror of Eaves' situation, if the dream is prescient, is why and how he has been singled out.

While hell may seem outdated and implausible to modern readers, the idea of a hell of fire and brimstone persisted for centuries, as seen through Miss Lacey's eyes. Falconer commented on the modern eschewal of an infernal hell and mentioned Campsie as an adherent of this idea. He observes that Campsie is one of many modern writers who have separated hell into pre-modern and modern views. De la Mare, writing his narrative 'The Three Friends' in 1913, was from a pronounced religious upbringing steeped in traditional views of a fiery hell. Nevertheless, he wrote of a curious and intriguing non-infernal hell, retaining, however, the idea that being in hell is being removed from the presence of God. De la Mare tested the idea that hell, although everlasting, 'tormented day and night for ever and ever',[429] need not be physical torture. Joel Buenting comments on this in the work he edited, *The Problem of Hell*, stating that 'The idea

[427] Ibid., p. 98.
[428] Ibid.
[429] Revelation 20:10.

is that hell is the separation from God and with it comes the loss of love (including God's love), purpose and community'.[430]

Dream, abandonment, and a sense of timelessness pervade the text of 'The Three Friends'. De la Mare's concept of time is as elusive as time itself, with time becoming an unshakeable enemy. Even the act of dying will not displace it but will persist. Falconer discusses this undoing of death itself and, therefore, of any hope of final escape when describing a character in Philip Pullman's novel, *The Amber Spyglass*. She makes the crucial point that 'What this image underlines is the importance of death as a natural and individuating presence in each life. Fear of Hell is not so much a fear of death as a fear of having your death taken from you'.[431] Years earlier, de la Mare advocated the same horrific condition for his character, Eaves.

However, de la Mare's attitude to science and theology changed, mellowed and matured over time. He once felt that 'science ate like an acid into the meaning of life',[432] but as time went on, he began to accommodate science in his literary and artistic outlook, as he could not help but be attracted by the discoveries in physics and the universe during his lifetime. Whistler tells us how de la Mare's natural curiosity and imagination enabled him to embrace the momentous changes in science and technology. 'The change came not just by maturity, nor the great widening of his range of interests, but was, partly also due to the enormous development in science itself during his lifetime – most of all in physics.'[433]

As well as science, many pseudo-sciences, such as phrenology and spiritualism, proliferated during de la Mare's lifetime, and he was curious about them. Consequently, they fed into his work. Spiritualism, in particular, intrigued the author. He was six when Mary Baker Eddy founded the Christian Science Church, and the popularity of spiritualism continued unabated throughout the nineteenth century. Although he eschewed the trappings of the practice – potently expressed in the short story Mr Kempe about a demented figure enmeshed in the paraphernalia and theatricality of spirit seeking – he was interested in it as a source of textual

[430] Richard Sturch, 'The Problem of Hell: A Philosophical Anthology' ed. by Joel Buenting, *The Journal of Theological Studies*, 62.1, (2011), pp. 425–427.
[431] Falconer, *Hell in Contemporary Literature Western Descent Narratives Since 1945*, p. 23.
[432] Whistler, *Imagination of the Heart*, p. 65.
[433] Ibid., p. 376.

inspiration. He was also aware of the Society for Psychical Research, founded in February 1882, with the purpose of conducting formal scientific research into psychical matters. However, like some of his contemporaries, including Arthur Machen, he did not join.

De la Mare was aware that while time affects change, time itself does not change. Therefore, he visualized his protagonist as caught up in this fascinating, frightening immutability. Such was the enormity of Eaves' fate that practical considerations such as the encroachment of senescence and the role of memory were ignored, being incorporated instead into the reader's suspension of disbelief. This suspension is one way the author's writing invites and sometimes demands input from the reader to fill in gaps and throw light on textual shadows – the reader's imagination continuing what de la Mare instigated. The author's deferment of answers to raised questions makes reader participation significant. Eaves' fate is a case in point. The unique nature of his hell gives the reader pause and continues the disturbing idea germinated, even beyond the text. The reader relies to a certain extent on the narrator as the story unfolds, but de la Mare's suggestions and his subtle hinting and hiding necessitate creative input by the reader both inside and outside the text.

It is unclear how Eaves will move through his everyday hell, either trudging stoically onwards with no further hope or moving in 'circumulation drear'[434] like the earwig in his poem 'The Round', where the unfortunate creature goes round and round the rim of a vase in ceaseless motion.[435] The idea that life is a circle, always changing and renewing, as de la Mare suggests in many of his stories and poems, is absent from 'The Three Friends', 'It's – it's just the same,' says Eaves.[436] Eaves foresees ahead of him no renewal but only a spiritual stagnation, which frightens him. This feared endless existence is manifested in de la Mare's fear of endings, found in so many of his writings, as I have shown in previous chapters. This fear ranges from the traumatic, unexpected encounter with death in 'Kismet' to the fight to overcome death in 'What Dreams May Come' and the ghostly return of the restless spirit in the poem 'All Hallowe'en'.

In *Behold, This Dreamer* de la Mare quotes Mary Sibylla Holland, a prolific letter writer:

---

[434] de la Mare, 'The Round', in *The Complete Poems*, p. 310.
[435] Ibid.
[436] de la Mare, 'The Three Friends', in *Short Stories 1895–1926*, p. 97.

> I think I could make my body submit to any discomfort if only that *something* which is neither my mind or my soul, but which is *me myself* could be left at peace, to dream and to sleep, and at last to die, nothing attempted and nothing done.[437]

This point of view runs parallel to the hope of achieving Eden. It is indicative of de la Mare's hesitancy in committing himself to any fixed idea of what eternity could mean for his travellers. The above quote from the anthology corresponds with his creative work, like many of de la Mare's selections in his anthologies. It also outlines what Eaves wanted for his afterlife: nothing more than everlasting peace wherever it was to be found.

In earlier chapters, I described the anthology *Come Hither* and how Whistler believed it was permeated by de la Mare's 'own *company*, throughout'.[438] The same is true of all his anthologies, where the selection he makes is highly personal and attuned to his creative output so that they become, in turn, creative works. In the introduction to *Private View*, Lord David Cecil says of de la Mare that he 'instinctively looks at the works of other authors for imaginative qualities akin to his own.'[439] Whistler says of his anthologizing, 'He collected no random miscellanies. The mosaic of other men's words remained strongly expressive of his own mind and personality.'[440] The Holland quote, therefore, is apposite, for it sums up what de la Mare has been striving to say throughout his oeuvre: that there may be no peace for man in another world. There may be inconsistencies, even dangers and what Holland advocates may be the best-case scenario, avoiding dangers such as Eaves' dreadful repetitive hell and finding a final peace only in the grave.

De la Mare displays, through his works, a fascination for and a fear of endings. This fear is justified in some of his more horrific works, such as the short story 'The Wharf', where the end for man is seen as a horrifying disposal of his eternal soul in a vast heap, being shovelled away by winged creatures. This concept of the human to the humic is, of course, a complete contrast

---

[437] de la Mare, *Behold, This, Dreamer!* p.37.
[438] Whistler, *Imagination of the Heart,* p. 321.
[439] de la Mare, *Private View* (Faber & Faber, 1953), pp. vi–vii.
[440] Whistler, *Imagination of the Heart*, p. 360.

to the fate of his protagonist in ‘The Three Friends’, where the protagonist appears to have overthrown even death in exchange for a post-terrestrial life. In this life, although there are no demonic fears, the author explores through his characters the idea of a life outside of the presence of God.

Once more, the divine Abandoner has, if Eaves’ dream is true, abandoned him to a Godless, profane state. The idea of this state is embodied in a dream, and that condition of dreaming lends the story its suggestive eeriness. No answers are provided, only speculation.

Conclusion

In the preceding chapters, I have shown how the traveller figure haunts Walter de la Mare and his work. It was a literary obsession that shaped the content of his entire oeuvre. Everything returns in de la Mare's writing, and his characters all bear a familial resemblance and keep circulating throughout the corpus of his work, constantly merging into each other. Although these characters are at times interchangeable, they all converge from different points in the journey and are bound for the destination of death. De la Mare's ghosts attempt the return journey to life, but any knowledge they have acquired on this journey is never fully divulged. It is never imparted to the mortals they meet, and they never reveal where they have been or what they have seen.

He wrote of or alluded to Eden many times and envisaged returning to and regaining this lost state as the ultimate happy destination for his travellers. However, his writing also emphasizes the tragic loss of Eden through man's disobedience. Travelling towards a new Eden was where he located his travellers, and throughout their trials and ordeals, Eden was the capstone of their desire. Not all were destined to achieve Eden; indeed, in the examples I have shown, few achieved a happy or even a final ending. However, in de la Mare's tales and poetry, even in his anthologies, a desire to attain it seems to lie in the heart and imagination of his travellers. De la Mare's evocation of the traveller is not a simple premise and is not always transparent. It is a complex set of associations bound up in his writings, and too, as I have shown, his characters can be travellers, pilgrims, exiles, wayfarers, and voyagers.

The fictional and poetic examples I have chosen in the foregoing chapters illustrate the diverse ways in which the author approaches the idea of every human being on a journey from birth to death and the enthralling unanswered question of what lies beyond death. Many make the journey in dream, a perpetually recurring motif of great significance. Whether the figures discover abiding happiness and contentment or a vast nothingness, no one can avoid the journey being made.

Earlier in this thesis, I quoted David Cecil, who commented that de la Mare addresses some of the most fundamental existentialist questions known to man, and he *does* address important questions such as where we are going on life's journey and what lies at the journey's end. He

addressed these matters not only through prose and poetry, anthologies, and reviews because the question never left his mind and imagination. The idea of the human journey coloured everything he produced. His writings were an outward inscription of innermost feelings that came from the core of his imagination but also from his heart. These feelings and thoughts were centred around the travelling figure who bore all the outward signs of travel's depredations but inwardly bore the signs of an indomitable human spirit.

In my thesis, I have shown how de la Mare manipulates certain situations involving travel and travellers to address certain metaphysical questions, such as the borderline between life and death, the role of dream and life beyond life. He uses the persona of the traveller not in any pedestrian manner but in diverse and intriguing ways to emphasize the metaphysical aspects of each journey, such as man's solitariness even in companionship, which is sometimes enforced, the fear of the unknown and the overcoming of that fear.

Another important aspect of de la Mare's literary life was the sheer longevity of it. His writing throughout three reigns saw him bridge the significant gap between Victorian poetry and modernism.

His style, however, did not rest comfortably in either division, which resulted, as Leighton observes, in him being 'a poet who has been both widely forgotten, yet remains widely known'.[441] The same poems – his most popular ones – continue appearing in poetry anthologies, even today, ironically creating the impression of a minor poet. De la Mare was and is an important and influential poet and writer. To disregard the proliferation of his work is to miss the haunting beauty of it. Although T. S. Eliot was sometimes critical of the writer's romantic diction, he said, on the occasion of the publishing of de la Mare's long, late poem 'The Traveller' that the poem had 'all the verbal beauty and the sense of mystery which we expect from him'.[442] De la Mare's writings encompassed much beauty, mystery and enchantment, but the constant evocation of the travelling figure never lost sight of the humanity of these travellers, who traversed many highways, pathways and trails but always with the

[441] Leighton, *Hearing Things: The Work of Sound in Literature*, p. 117.
[442] Leighton, *Hearing Things: The Work of Sound in Literature*, p. 118.

sense of questing for a better place, searching for that unknown better life which de la Mare associated, in his work, with Eden.

Walter de la Mare's long journey ended on 20 June 1956, in the night of the longest day. On his deathbed, he spoke to his friend Richard Brain of 'All these onlookers'.[443] It is tempting to imagine the whole gamut of the characters who travelled through his work gathered in that room to bid him farewell, at least in his imagination.

[443] Brain, *Tea with Walter de la Mare*, p. 127.

Bibliography

Adams, Richard, *Watership Down*, (Penguin Books, 2012)

Aesop, *Aesop's fables* (Harper Collins, 2012)

Alder, Emily, *Weird Fiction and Science at the Fin de Siècle* (Palgrave Macmillan, 2020)

Ashley, Mike, 'In Memoriam: Robert Fordyce Aikman', *Fantasy Newsletter* (June 1981) 13

Atkins, John. *Walter de la Mare: An Exploration* (C. & J. Temple, 1972)

Auden, W. H., and W.W. Jacobs, 'The Monkey's Paw' in *The Lady of the Barge* (Harper & Brothers, 1906)

——, and John Garrett, *The Poet's Tongue: An Anthology* (G. Bell & Sons, 1935)

Belknap Long, Frank, *On Reading Arthur Machen: A Sonnet* (Dog and Duck Press, 1949)

Bentick, Anne, *Romantic Imagery in the Works of Walter de la Mare* (Edwin Mellen Press, 2001)

Betjeman, John, *Daily Herald*,1 December 1946

Bonnerot, Luce, *L'oeuvre de Walter de la Mare*: Une Aventure Spirituelle: Thèse Pour Le Doctrat Ès Lettres. Didier (1969)

Botting, Fred, *Gothic* (Routledge, 2014)

Brain, Russell, *Tea with Walter de la Mare* (Faber & Faber, 1957)

Briggs, Julia, *Night Visitors: The Rise and Fall of the English Ghost Story* (Faber & Faber, 1977)

Bunyan, John, and Margaret A. Gilliland, *Bunyan's Pilgrim's Progress* (E.P. Dutton, 1921)

Camporesi, Piero, *The Fear of Hell: Images of Damnation and Salvation in Early Modern Europe*, trans. by Lucinda Byatt (Pennsylvania State University Press, 1987)

Carroll, Lewis, 1959. *Alice Through the Looking-Glass* (Splendour Books)

—— 'In a boat beneath a sunny sky', *The Annotated Alice,* ed. Martin Gardner (Penguin, 1970)

—— *Alice's Adventures in Wonderland and Through the Looking Glass* (Methuen, 1978)

Chandran, Narayana, 'Phantoms of the Mind: T.S. Eliot's to Walter de la Mare', *Papers on Language and Literature*, 33.2 (1997) 213

Charlwood, Catherine, ‘Corresponding Listeners: Walter de la Mare and Robert Frost’ in Yui Kajita, Angela Leighton and A. J. Nickerson, eds. *Walter de la Mare: Critical Appraisals*, 1st edn (Liverpool University Press, 2023)

Chesterton, G. K., ‘Walter de la Mare’ *Fortnightly Review*, 132 (1932), pp. 47–53

Clements, A.J., *The Mystical Poetry of Thomas Traherne* (Harvard University Press, 1969)

Coleridge, Samuel Taylor, *The Ancient Mariner* (London & Co, 1905)

Dante, Alighieri, and Musurus Pasha, *Dante’s Inferno* (Williams and Norgate, 1882)

Darwin, Charles, and W. R. Thompson, *The Origin of Species* (J.M. Dent & Sons, 1928)

Davison, Edward, ‘Modern English Poetry, Some Notes on’, *English journal*, 15, (1926) 407

De la Mare, Walter, ‘Kismet’, *Pall Mall Gazette*, 6 September 1902, p. 8

—— *Henry Brocken* (John Murray, 1904)

—— ‘The Question’, The Lady’s Realm, XXV (1908), p. 106

—— *The Return* (John Murray, 1910)

—— *The Three Mulla-Mulgars* (Duckworth, 1910)

—— *The Listeners and Other Poems* (H. Holt and Company, 1912)

—— ‘The Three Friends’ *The Westminster Gazette*, 17 April 1913, p. 3

—— *Poems 1901-1918* (Constable & Co, 1920)

—— *The Return* (A. A. Knopf, 1922)

—— *The Collected Tales of Walter de la Mare* (London: Knopf, 1922)

—— *Songs of Childhood* (Longmans, 1923)

—— *The Riddle: And Other Stories* (Selwyn & Blount, 1923)

—— *Peacock Pie: A Book of Rhymes* (Constable and Company, 1926)

—— *The Connoisseur: And Other Stories* (W. Collins Sons & Co. Ltd, 1926)

—— *Stories from the Bible* (London: Faber & Faber, 1929)

—— *Desert Islands and Robinson Crusoe* (Faber & Faber, 1930)

—— *The Eighteen-Eighties: Essays* (Cambridge University Press, 1930)

—— *Lewis Carroll* (Faber & Faber, 1932)

—— *On the Edge – Short Stories* (Faber & Faber, 1932)

—— *The Fleeting: And Other Poems* (Constable, 1933)

—— *Early One Morning in the Spring* (Macmillan Company, 1935)

—— *Animal Stories: Chosen, Arranged and In Some Parts Rewritten by Walter de la Mare* (Faber and Faber, 1939)

—— *Behold, This Dreamer: Of Reverie, Night, Sleep, Dream, Love-Dreams, Night, Death, The Unconscious, The Imagination, Divination, The Artist, And Kindred Subjects* (Faber & Faber, 1939)

—— *Pleasures and Speculations* (Faber & Faber, 1940)

—— *Bells and Grass* (Faber & Faber, 1941)

—— *Henry Brocken: His Travels and Adventures in The Rich, Strange, Scare-Imaginable Regions of Romance* (Faber & Faber, 1942)

—— Love (Faber & Faber, 1943)

—— *Come Hither* (Constable & Co, 1945)

—— *Collected Stories for Children* (Faber & Faber, 1947)

—— *Private View* (Faber & Faber, 1953)

—— *The Complete Poems* (Faber & Faber, 1969)

—— *Short Stories 1895–1926* ed. by Giles de la Mare (dlm, 1996)

—— *Short Stories 1927–1956* ed. by Giles de la Mare (dlm, 2001)

—— *Short Stories for Children,* ed. by Giles de la Mare (dlm, 2006)

—— *A Choice of De La Mare's Verse*, ed by W. H. Auden (Faber and Faber, 1963)

——, and Estella Canziani, 'The Pilgrim', in *Songs of Childhood* (Longmans, 1923)

—— *Reading Walter de la Mare*, ed by William Wootten (Faber & Faber, 2020)

Duffin, Henry Charles, *Walter de la Mare, a Study of his Poetry* (Sidgwick and Jackson, 1949)

Eliot, T. S, The Waste Land (Boni and Liveright, 1922)

——, and Edmund Blunden, *Tribute to Walter De La Mare: On His Seventy-Fifth Birthday* (Faber and Faber, 1948)

Falconer, Rachel, *Hell in Contemporary Literature, Western Descent Narratives since 1945* (Edinburgh University Press, 2005)

Gardner, Helen, ed, *New Oxford Book of English Verse 1250-1950* (Oxford University Press, 1972)

Griffiths, Joe, 'Walter de la Mare's Quest', *The Walter de la Mare Society Magazine*, 1, 1998. http://www.walterdelamare.co.uk/28.html [accessed 23 February 2024]

Hardy, Thomas, *The Dynasts* (The Macmillan Company, 1904)

——*Satires of Circumstance: Lyrics and Reveries; With Miscellaneous Pieces* (Macmillan, 1914)

—— *Moments of vision and miscellaneous verses* (Macmillan, 1917)

—— 'The Haunter' *Satires of Circumstance: Lyrics and Reveries with Miscellaneous Pieces* (Macmillan and Co, 1919)

—— *Poems 1840–1928*, ed. by Tom Paulin (Faber and Faber, 2016)

Harrison, Robert Pogue, *The Dominion of the Dead* (Chicago University Press, 2003)

Hollinger, Veronica, 'Genre, and Mode in Latham', *Oxford Handbook of Science Fiction* (Oxford University Press, 2016) pp. 139–152

Hopkins, Kenneth, *Walter de la Mare* (Longman, 1952)

Hudson, Derek, *Lewis Carroll: An Illustrated Biography* (Constable, 1976)

Hunter, Adrian, *Cambridge Introduction to the Short Story in English* (Cambridge University Press, 2007)

Jacobs, W.W., 'The Monkey's Paw' in *The Lady of the Barge* (Harper & Brothers, 1906)

James, Henry, *The Lesson of The Master; The Death of The Lion; The Next Time and Other Tales* (Macmillan, 1922)

Jentsch, Ernst, 'On the psychology of the uncanny (1906)' *Angelaki: Journal of Theoretical Humanities*, 2(1), (1997) pp. 7–16

Joyce, James, *Stephen Hero* (Cape, 1950)

Kajita, Yui, ‘Ghostly Sensations in Walter de la Mare. Reading the Body as Haunted House’. *English Literature as Translation, 1880-1920*, 61.3 (2018), pp. 374–388

——, Angela Leighton and A. J. Nickerson, eds. *Walter de la Mare: Critical Appraisals*, 1st edn (Liverpool University Press, 2023)

Keats, John, *Lamia, Isabella, The Eve of St. Agnes, and Other Poems* (Taylor and Hessey, 1820)

Kendon, Frank, and Walter de la Mare, *The Small Years* (The University Press, 1932)

Le Vay, John, *The Delamarean Otherworld*: Thesis (1984), Retrieved from https://www-proquest-com.ezproxy-prd.bodleian.ox.ac.uk/dissertations-theses/delamarean-otherworld/docview/193959701/se-2 [accessed 23 February 2024]

Leighton, Angela, *Hearing Things: The Work of Sound in Literature* (The Belknap Press of Harvard University Press, 2018)

Lewis, C. S., *Mere Christianity* (William Collins, 1953)

Liggins, Emma, Andrew W. Maunder, and Ruth Robbins, *The British short story* (Macmillan, 2011)

Longfellow, Henry Wadsworth, *The Poetical Works of Henry Wadsworth Longfellow*, (Frederick Warne and Co, 1889)

Lovecraft, Howard Phillips, *Supernatural Horror in Literature & Other Literary Essays* (Wildside Press, 2008)

Lubbock, Percy, ‘Henry Brocken’, *The Times Literary Supplement*, 8 April 1904 (117), p. 109

Machen, Arthur, *The Chronicle of Clemendy* (Martin Secker, 1925)

—— *A Fragment of Life* (Tartarus, 2000)

Maeterlinck, Maurice, *The Intruder: A Play* (Gowans & Gray, 1913)

McCrossan, Doris Ross, *Walter de la Mare* (Twayne Publishers, 1966)

Megroz, R. L., *Five Novelist Poets of Today* (Joiner & Steele, 1933)

Milton, John, *Paradise Lost* (Hardwicke and Bogue, 1879)

Oxford English Dictionary (Oxford University Press, 2023), Natural, N. (1), Sense I.3.a.’, doi.org/10.1093/OED/9465559317

Perry, Seamus, ‘O, Where Are You Going?’: Walter de la Mare and W. H. Auden’ in Yui Kajita, Angela Leighton and A. J. Nickerson, eds. *Walter de la Mare: Critical Appraisals*, 1st edn (Liverpool University Press, 2022)

Pridmore, Rev. John, ‘Is there Anybody There? The Child’s Experience of the Other and the Beyond in the Poems and Stories of Walter de la Mare’. *Walter de la Mare Society Magazine*, 12, (2009)

Punter, David, *The Literature of Terror: A History of Gothic Fictions From 1765 to the Present Day*, 2nd edn, (Longman, 1996)

——*The Literature of Pity* (Edinburgh University Press, 2014)

Ramal, Walter, ‘Kismet’, *The Sketch*, 7 August 1895

—— Songs of Childhood (Longmans, 1902).

Reeves, James, *Understanding Poetry* (Heinemann, 1965)

Reid, Forrest, *Walter de la Mare: A Critical Study* (Faber &Faber, 1999)

Reynolds, A., W. Charlton, and D. Lewi, *Arthur Machen: A Short Account of His Life and Work* (J. Baker for Richards Press, 1963)

Richards, I. A, ‘Reconsideration: Walter de la Mare’ *The New Republic*, 174.5 (1976) 31

—— Science and Poetry (K. Paul, Trench, Trubner & Co. Ltd, 1926)

Sackville-West, Vita, ‘Walter de la Mare and The Traveller: Wharton Lecture on English Poetry’ *Proceedings of the British Academy*, 39, (1953)

Sartre, Jean-Paul, *Huis clos* (Klett, 2005)

Scupham, Peter, ‘Walter de la Mare’ *PN Review*, 25.6 (1999) 44

Shakespeare, William, *Hamlet*, IV.i.63–67 in The Riverside Shakespeare, ed. by G Blackmore Evans (Houghton Mifflin,1974)

Shaw, Valerie, *The Short Story: A Critical Introduction* (Longman, 1983)

Shelley Mary, *Tales and Stories*, Introduction by Richard Garnett (W. Paterson & Co., 1891)

Sinclair, May. 1923. *Uncanny Stories* (Hutchinson & Co, 1923)

—— *The Intercessor and Other Stories* (Hutchinson & Co, 1931)

Smith, Andrew, *Gothic Literature* (University Press, 2007)

Stevens, David, *The Gothic Tradition* (Cambridge University Press, 2000)

Sturch, Richard, 'The Problem of Hell: A Philosophical Anthology' ed. by Joel Buenting, *The Journal of Theological Studies*, 62.1, (2011), pp. 425–427

Tomalin, Claire, *Thomas Hardy* ed. by 1st American (Penguin, 2007)

——*Thomas Hardy: The Time-torn Man* (Penguin, 2007)

Wagenknecht, Edward, 'Walter de la Mare', *Etudes anglaises*, 26.3 (1973), 290

Whistler, Theresa, *Imagination of the Heart: The Life of Walter de la Mare* (Duckworth, 1992)

Williams, Charles, *Poetry at Present* (Clarendon Press, 1930)

Wootten, William, *Reading Walter de la Mare* (Faber & Faber, 2021)

—— 'The Critical Reception of Walter de la Mare and the Legacy of I.A. Richards' in Yui Kajita, Angela Leighton and A. J. Nickerson, eds. *Walter de la Mare: Critical Appraisals*, 1st edn (Liverpool University Press, 2022), pp. 229–246