The Burning-Glass: A Developmental Study of Walter de la Mare's Poetry

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Abstract

This dissertation offers a revaluation of Walter de la Mare's poetry; it counters two common critical misconceptions: escapism and lack of development. The overall pattern of imagery in the poetry reflects de la Mare's understanding of reality. It outlines a universe of four interpenetrating "worlds": this world, the other world, the child world, and the adult world. This pattern is used as a frame of reference. Key poems are closely read so the complexity beneath apparent simplicity is pointed up. The poetry divides into three chronological stages, with two peaks of maturity. In the early peak, *The Listeners* (1912) and *Peacock Pie* (1913), a distinctive, dense symbolic mode is perfected. After a transitional period of formal experimentation, a late peak is achieved with *Bells and Grass* (1941) and *The Burning-Glass* (1945), where symbolic imagery forms the core for a quiet, reflective, conversational mode. Throughout, the children's and adult poetry are considered as a unit.

Résumé

Cette thèse vise à réévaluer la poésie de Walter De la Mare et réfute á ce titre les deux critiques formulées à son encontre: fuite devant la réalité et manque d'étoffement. L'imagerie de la poésie de De la Mare reflète pourtant l'appréhension qu'il a de la réalité. Elle décrit l'univers de quatre "mondes" étroitement liés: notre monde, l'au-delà, la monde enfantin et le monde adulte. Ce mondèle sert de cadre de référence. Les principaux poèmes de l'auteur sont examinés de près pour faire ressortir leur complexité, sous-jacente à une apparente simplicité. Son oeuvre se divise en trois périodes chronologiques marquées par deux tournants capitaux. Le premier, caractérisé par *The Listeners* (1912) et *Peacock Pie* (1913), voit l'aboutissement d'un mode symbolique, dense et original. Après une période de transition marquée par une expérimentation formelle, De la Mare opère avec *Bells and Grass* (1941) et *The Burning-Glass* (1945) un second tourant où l'imagerie symbolique est au coeur d'un mode serein, pensif et dialogique. Cette thèse envisage globalement la poésie pour adultes et pour enfants

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Contents

Chapter 1: Introduction

Do diddle di do,
Poor Jim Jay
Got stuck fast
In Yesterday.... (*CP* 145)

This early children's lyric by Walter de la Mare (1873-1956) may be taken to express a common critical misconception about his poetry. In the 1920s and 1930s, I.A. Richards and F.R. Leavis excluded him from their discussions of modernist poets because they considered him to be escapist, to have turned away from the problems of contemporary life to "seek shelter in the warmth of his own familiar thickets of dream, not to stay out in the wind." They believed de la Mare's personalized rhythms compounded this by lulling the reader into a trance, so as to cause dreamy "visions" but not alert "vision" (Richards, "Poets" 72; Leavis 52-53) The dominant critical opinion has tended to be along these lines; de la Mare is dismissed as a belated Romantic who matches his nostalgic fascination with innocence, childhood, and dream with an equally old-fashioned style. He is depicted as blithely continuing to present his escapist vision in conventional forms and metres as if the modernist movement had never occurred.[1]

Jim Jay's plight of being locked in the past like a "rusty pin," however, may be better applied to this narrow, unyielding critical perception of de la Mare's poetic achievement and stature. In the post-war years, paralleling the more balanced perspective achieved about modernism, de la Mare's poetry has been occasionally re-examined and more sympathetically assessed For example, in 1963, Stephen Spender observed that the notion of what constituted modernism in the 1920s and 1930s was now itself considered quaint and that working within established forms was not a basis on which to dismiss de la Mare's writings (165-66). Luce Bonnerot's landmark dissertation, *L'oeuvre de Walter de la Mare. Une aventure spirituelle*, published in 1969, encompasses all of the writings--both fiction and non-fiction--as well as the poetry. She believes that de la Mare does not reject life; on the contrary, he

continually searches for the human truth behind our masks, for the reality behind the facade of our existence (330-31).[2] Bonnerot thereby considers him to be not regressively gazing backward but rather contemplatively looking within.

I.A.Richards himself suggested in his 1976 "Reconsideration" that his earlier assessment was the result of prescribing a too "limitary theory" about what poetry should be Unfortunately, while conceding this one point, Richards endorsed a second popular critical misconception about de la Mare's poetry by claiming that none of the later work approaches the level achieved by *The Listeners* and *Peacock Pie* in 1912 and 1913 (32-33). Making the blanket statement that de la Mare does not develop poetically has been one convenient way to belittle his achievement; but I suspect it may be more a symptom of the same critical laziness that W.H. Auden had earlier detected in the gushing, contemporary book reviews where he was considered a poet to love but not to discuss ("Walter de la Mare" 10). In order to assess the poetry honestly, the entire corpus has to be read, no small task since the *Complete Poems* is over 900 pages long.[3]

Two recent critics, David Perkins and Michael Kirkham, could not be accused of laziness Each clarifies one of the major critical misconceptions about de la Mare's poetry: the former, the label of belated Romantic; the latter, the view that the poetry is static. Perkins considers de la Mare to be a modern writer because he breaks through the limitations of chronological and logical expression by employing irrational conventions from children's poetry, folk rhyme, and fairy tale, and because he uses the Romantic mode self-consciously to provide not only the themes, images, and diction of his work but also a group of conventions to be exploited as such (182-83). He contrasts de la Mare's subtle, self-aware manipulation of Romantic conventions with Alfred Noyes (1880-1958) who wrote as if Romanticism were still a dominant force, noting that their respective techniques are well exemplified by "The Listeners" and "The Highwayman" (77), two poems which are often unconsciously confused due to

their superficial resemblance of "plot." Perkins considers de la Mare to be a "symbolist poet" insofar as his language evokes associations with literature (particularly Romantic), rather than concrete objects, and achieves its suggestion as much by sound and colour, as by sense (183). His analysis of "The Song of the Mad Prince" demonstrates these points: the skillful manipulation of the conventions of riddle game and mad song as well as the evocation of literary associations from *Hamlet* (187-88).[4]

I agree with Perkins' discussion of "The Song of the Mad Prince" as far as it goes, but not with his rather limited interpretation of its symbolic techniques. Examining the way conventions are played with is an excellent way to enter a riddle or game poem, but the associative web is broader than he allows. As will be seen when the poem is analysed in chapter three, the first lines, "Who said, 'Peacock Pie'? / The Old King to the sparrow:" immediately, by association, jump the reader to the folk world of nursery rhymes by the similarity of image to that of "Sing a song of Sixpence." The water metaphor at the end of the poem, "Life's troubled bubble broken," for its part, is a reiteration of one of de la Mare's leitmotifs about the fragility of life, the image being an early recurring natural comparison (*CP* 187). The imagery of "The Song of the Mad Prince," then, is drawn from Shakespearean and folk literature as well as from the natural world. To claim de la Mare draws only from the former two is incorrect. In the better poems, the imagery is firmly grounded either in nature or in the speaker's sense of his own existence; literary associations enhance an individual, sensuous apprehension of life.

Kirkham views the poetry developmentally. Although he does not follow the extreme position of Auden that de la Mare continues to mature continually until his death (Introduction 395), he does detect two distinct phases. He believes the poetry between 1902 and 1921 represents an early maturity, *The Listeners* (1912) and *Motley* (1918), the volumes that established de la Mare as a major voice of the period and gave rise to his high reputation, constituting a first peak. These poems are in what

came to known as the "de la Marean" style: "a self-enclosed symbolic world" with a distinct sound, diction, and range of imagery (Kirkham 115). The poems of the 1930s, *The Fleeting* and *Memory*, he argues, slowly evolve into a plainer style with a more direct voice (123). In *The Burning-Glass* (1945) this "reflectively conversational," "quietly intimate" mode culminates in a second peak of maturity (125-26).[5]

Like Kirkham, I too take a developmental approach to de la Mare's poetry, although I do not exclude from consideration the volumes of poems intended primarily for children. On the contrary, some of these poems, like "The Song of the Mad Prince," are epitomes of the early symbolic mode; in other early poems, like "The Buckle," the apparently transparent, direct voice creates a clear image of a vital speaker, a device which will reappear in the late poems with equal vividness. I retain both Kirkham's notion of de la Mare possessing two distinct peaks of poetic maturity and his convenient labels, "symbolic" and "reflectively conversational." But I group the poetic corpus into three stages, considering the work of the 1930s as a transitional but necessary phase of experimentation needed to resolve numerous poetic problems.

As indicated by the above comment on voice in the early children's poems, I do not consider the "symbolic" and "reflectively conversational" modes to oppose one another as Kirkham intimates they do. Nor are they mutually exclusive: the symbolic method does not disappear in order to allow the conversational manner to emerge. In the better poetry, although one or the other tends to dominate in the respective phase, both strains are evident, and the interplay between them provides added depth.

In the early period, the dense symbolic imagery is a major cohesive force. Analysis of these images and the pattern they form reveals the structure of the work. In a children's poem like "The Buckle," for example, the symbolic dimension of the girl's apparently random choice of flowers adds a disturbing undercurrent to this otherwise artless celebration of nature. At the same time, de la Mare displays a dazzling array of personae. Sometimes, as in "The Listeners," he is so subtle and

oblique that the speaker seems to be invisible; all that is heard is the voice. In approaching this kind of poem, it is essential to understand the perspective of the voice and then deduce who the speaker is. In other poems using the convention of riddle or game like "The Song of the Mad Prince," the question of the speaker's identity forms part of the structure. Solving the puzzle provides an interpretative key to the work itself. Careful attention must always be paid to the smallest verbal cues, rhetorical devices as well as grammatical structures, since they provide hints to the speaker's identity.

In the late period, by contrast, the relation between the symbolic and conversational modes is inverted. The poems now tend to be dominated by a quiet speaking voice appearing close to that of the poet himself. Some poems, like "Reflection," for example, seem to be self-portraits. Yet embedded in this deceptively direct, intimate conversation lies a pattern of symbolic imagery that forms the work's intellectual core. In "The Burning-Glass," for example, it is essential to understand the ramifications of the symbols and their overall design in order to appreciate the power of the work.

Because of its symbolic connotations, the burning-glass image forms a perfect title for my study. Its ability to concentrate the sun's rays suggests the condensing force of the symbolic imagery which forms a central focus for the poetry. Its ultimate ability to force the sun's rays into flame suggests both the poetic development and the self-growth that I trace throughout de la Mare's long career. In the middle, transitional years he had to undergo a painful, purging process in order to eliminate the self-pity and self-consciousness he had allowed to seep into his poetry. This dross had to be stripped away until only the essential poetic impetus remained. The poem "The Burning-Glass" is not only an impressive record of the successful culmination of this process in old age, but also a triumphant vindication of his late poetic method where the symbolic structure forms "the burning heart" of the work (*C.P.*, 456).

(ii)

In order to study the developmental process of Walter de la Mare's poetry, a frame of reference is necessary which would be flexible enough to be able to reflect his changing attitudes and techniques, and resilient enough to confront the key criticism of escapism. The structure I propose fulfils these requirements. Because de la Mare believes that "reality" consists of various "intersecting planes" or "interwoven aspects" and is not completely accessible through the senses and reason (Perkins 181), he employs a complex pattern of imagery in his poetry which I label "four-world" images. As will be seen in the following discussion, this pattern of contrasting imagery outlines a distinct poetic universe which does not reject the "experiential, external world" as fantasy does (Schlobin xxxvi), but rather incorporates "this world" into a larger context. Likewise, this four-world universe is not a retreat into a dream world, but a complex system consisting of many pairs of opposing elements of which dream forms one-half of a central antithesis. "Sleep" (1912), for example, contrasts the alternating states of wake and sleep as separate spheres of existence.

> Men all, and birds, and creeping beasts,
> When the dark of night is deep,
> From the moving wonder of their lives
> Commit themselves to sleep.
>
> Without a thought, or fear, they shut
> The narrow gates of sense,
> Heedless and quiet, in slumber turn
> Their strength to impotence.
>
> The transient strangeness of the earth
> Their spirits no more see:
> Within a silent gloom withdrawn,
> They slumber in secrecy.
>
> Two worlds they have--a globe forgot,
> Wheeling from dark to light;
> And all the enchanted realm of dream
> That burgeons out of night. (*CP* 118)

By depicting the dream state as requiring a negation of the senses and a cessation of

public, physical activity, the poem suggests that the opposing functions of the imagination and private, mental activity are now working. "Noon and Night Flower" (1912), extends this antithesis between the day and night worlds by using two flowers to symbolize the respective mental states. The last half of the poem is as follows:

> Lovely beyond the rest
> Are these of all delight:--
> The tiny pimpernel that noon loves best,
> The primrose palely burning through the night.
>
> One 'neath day's burning sky
> With ruby decks her place,
> The other when eve's chariot glideth by
> Lifts her dim torch to light that dreaming face. (*CP* 112)

Inverting the conventional associations of daytime activity and night-time rest, the pimpernel is described as a passive reflector of light, while the primrose is depicted as being an active creator of light. This upturning parallels the depiction of outward and inward life in de la Mare's poetic universe, for the former relies on the senses to provide stimuli, while the latter seems to possess inner resources (Kirkham 116). As can be seen, the rigid parallel structure suggests that the two flowers and the opposing worlds they represent are equivalent opposites.[6]

This basic antithesis is expanded throughout the poetry to encompass a wide range of aspects, including the natural and the supernatural, as in "The Old Angler" (1921), the material and the spiritual, as in "The Burning-Glass" (1945), and the temporal and the eternal, as in "The House" (1950). Many works present the interpenetration of one world by another. "The Listeners" (1912), a popular and much-anthologized poem, (discussed in chapter three), demonstrates both the antithetical pattern and the intermingling of opposites. It concerns a traveller who is vainly trying to gain admittance to a deserted house; when no one answers him, he leaves. But this action of apparent failure actually symbolizes a human attempting to communicate with the supernatural and achieving partial success. Each form of being is depicted as

responding appropriately to its own kind, the human causing sound and the suprahuman silence. Although unacknowledged, they do sense one another. Both the contrast and the reciprocation are reproduced in the structure of the poem. Paradoxically, the poem creates a clear impression of the nothingness that composes the "phantom listeners" and the enveloping silence as vividly as that of the noisy, natural world (*CP* 126).

So far, I have distinguished "two worlds" or planes of existence made up of numerous pairs of oppositions within de la Mare's poetic universe which are antithetical but capable of interpenetrating one another (Kirkham 112). "This world" is known through the senses; the "other world" is suprasensory and is reached primarily through the imagination. In addition to these, I believe de la Mare's poetry portrays two more antithetical worlds--(worlds in the extended sense of being systems bound together by common characteristics). These two are the "child world" and the "adult world," denoting respectively the state and/or perspective of being a child and being an adult.

As with the delineation of "this world" and the "other world," the "child world" and "adult world" are created with detailed particularity, here to create a realistic impression of experiencing life from one perspective or another. Sometimes, one world will be viewed from the opposite vantage-point, for example, the uncomprehending child persona observing adult behaviour in "The Funeral" (1902), where the ritual of burial is dispassionately described. Ironically, the naive speaker concentrates on the surrounding natural details:

> They dressed us up in black,
> Susan and Tom and me;
> And, walking though the fields
> All beautiful to see,
> With branches high in the air
> And daisy and buttercup,
> We heard the lark in the clouds,--
> In black dressed up.

They took us to the graves,
Susan and Tom and me,
Where the long grasses grow
And the funeral tree:
We stood and watched; and the wind
Came softly out of the sky
And blew in Susan's hair,
As I stood close by.

Back through the fields we came,
Tom and Susan and me,
And we sat in the nursery together,
And had our tea.
And, looking out of the window,
I heard the thrushes sing;
But Tom fell asleep in his chair.
He was so tired, poor thing. (*CP* 44-45)

Not only is the child able to use his senses acutely; he can also perceive imaginatively, for he calls the yew the "funeral tree" and personifies the wind as as gentle comforter. This emphasis on externals does not suggest that the speaker is callous, however, for within the stark outline of the work significant details imply a loving unity among the bereaved children. The speaker stands close to Susan, either for her comfort or his protection, and pities the exhausted Tom, masking personal feelings of exhaustion by using the adult cliché, "poor thing" (R. Smith 32). Poignantly, this describes the pathetic situation of them all.

On the other hand, the child figure may be the subject of a poem spoken by an adult. To avoid sentimentality, de la Mare usually adopts the attitude of a dispassionate but keen observer. One manifestation resembles that of the omniscient, ballad-like narrator. Because this voice is completely unobtrusive, the reader's attention is focused exclusively on the child. In these poems, of which "The Sleeper" (1912), discussed in chapter three, is an excellent example, a sensitive child's actions, perceptions, thoughts, and feelings form both the subject and the structure of the work. As with "The Listeners," an ordinary incident is invested with symbolic significance. Here, a little girl comes into her house to find her mother asleep during the day. This discovery causes her to sense the "other world" within "this world." Moreover, the girl

recognizes two kinds of otherworldliness. On the one hand, her mother's face seems to have been transfigured by sleep; therefore, she imagines that her mother has accordingly assumed supernatural powers of sight. On the other hand, her mother's hands are chillingly heavy and still; consequently, she is seized with dread on recognizing the closeness of sleep to death (Kirkham 115). This immanence of the "other world" creates a sense of awe in the girl, for the poem is framed by her quiet, reverential movements appropriate to either a church or a mausoleum.

As with "this world" and the "other world," the worlds of the child and the adult are presented as contrary states of existence. Sometimes, the plight of the adult exiled from the innocent world of spontaneous impressions and reactions is articulated. For example, in "Two Gardens" (1945), the adult considers the child's mental world to be a double paradise, the world of alert senses by day and of vivid dreams by night, while he often feels shut out from both worlds. The child seems to belong, but he feels himself to be an outsider:

> Two gardens see!--this, of enchanted flowers,
> Strange to the eye, and more than earthly-sweet;
> Small rivulets running, song-reechoing bowers;
> And green-walled pathways which, ere parting, meet,
> And there a lion-like sun in heaven's delight
> Breathes plenitude from dayspring to the night
>
> The other:--walls obscure, and chaces of trees,
> Ilex and yew, and dream-enticing dark,
> Hid pools, moths, creeping odours, silentness,
> Luna its deity, and its watchward, *Hark!*
> A still and starry mystery, wherein move
> Phantoms of ageless wonder and of love.
>
> Two gardens for two children--in one mind:
> But ah, how seldom open now their gates I find! (*CP* 457)

Because ease of access to imaginative perception and vision is often denied to the adult, he must strive for entry. Because of this being compelled to search for imaginative wholeness, the figure of the traveller recurs throughout de la Mare's poetry.

Although the "child world" and "adult world" are opposites, this does not mean they never interpenetrate or intersect. Occasionally, there are figures of abnormal adults who are childlike in their innocence, like the madman in the "Song of the Mad Prince," (1913), the fool in "Motley" (1918), or the simpleton in "Sillie Sallie" (1941). The main emphasis though, is on ordinary people and how they can retain some aspects of innocence, for de la Mare believes that in order for an adult to fully participate in life, the childlike qualities of clear perception and vivid imagination must continue to function. These normalized adult figures include the dreamer, as in "Nod" (1912), the lover, as in "The Secret" (1945), and the poet, as in "Poetry" (1950), all mental travellers in their own way. Sometimes, de la Mare even conflates the two extremes of old age and infancy. For example, in "The Chart" (1945), a new-born baby is described as having an age-old face full of secret wisdom:

> That mute small face, but twelve hours here,
> Maps secrets stranger than the seas',
> In hieroglyphics more austere,
> And wiser far than Rameses'. (*CP* 467)

Or the childlike or even childish qualities of an old man are emphasized, as in "A Portrait" which concludes with the image of one who reluctantly watches night come, just like a child:

> A foolish, fond old man, his bed-time nigh,
> Who still at western window stays to win
> A transient respite from the latening sky,
> And scarce can bear it when the Sun goes in (*CP* 454)

With these various interminglings between the opposing worlds of the child and the adult, their characteristics thereby become separated from the age groups to achieve an extended use in de la Mare's universe.

As has been seen, because the boundary lines among the various worlds are fluid, one can interpenetrate or intermingle with the other, creating different

combinations. Opposing worlds are able to intermix: "this world" with the "other world," and the "child world" with the "adult world." But movement between the two sets also creates complex groupings, "The Listeners" and "The Sleeper" demonstrating respectively how a perceptive adult and sensitive child can sense the "other world" within "this world."

(iii)

Using the pattern of four-world imagery as a frame of reference to approach the poetry, I will locate and analyse major poems, both those that gave rise to de la Mare's high contemporary reputation and those which I consider to be his finest works. These poems will be subjected to a close, critical reading which I hope will open them up to the interested reader so that the full extent of de la Mare's considerable achievement at all stages of his career can be revealed. In order to represent accurately the course of his poetic development, I restrict my study to the major collections of poems published between 1902 and 1953. (These comprise Part I of the *Complete Poems*.) Commissioned poems and those written to accompany the fiction are excluded because in these works the poetry is mainly an embellishment and should not be considered apart from its immediate context. The criticism is similarly excluded. This is partly for manageability; from 1908 onwards, as a professional "man of letters," de la Mare wrote a great number of essays, introductions, prefaces, and book reviews. (Edward Wagenknecht discovered over 200 reviews in the *Times Literary Supplement* alone.) In addition, he painstakingly compiled anthologies of poetry and prose for children and for adults: *Come Hither* (1923,1928), *Desert Islands* (1930), *Tom Tiddler's Ground* (1931), *Early One Morning* (1935), *Behold, This Dreamer* (1939), and *Love* (1943). All the critical writings display a wide breadth of knowledge in the course of presenting sensitive and thoughtful explorations of the subjects. As always, de la Mare conveys his highly individualistic *Private View*, where

the imaginative world is considered as "real" as the world of observable phenomena, and the topic is explored for those qualities which de la Mare finds akin to his own interests (Cecil vi-vii). At worst, this approach can appear stubbornly idiosyncratic, as in the self-indulgent, meandering *Desert Islands*, where the actual anthology is contained only in the notes. At best, the unusual angle of vision produces an insightful commentary, as in the allegory of a child discovering poetry which introduces *Come Hither*, and reviews such as "Georgian Poetry" (1913) and "My Mind to Me" (1938) collected in *Private View* (1953).

Throughout this body of material, de la Mare returns to his central concerns with poetry and the nature of the imagination, and knowledge of his critical position can help orient a reader to his poetry. The introduction to *Behold, This Dreamer* contains his most extended discussion of these topics. Near the end he sums up his ideas about the origin of poetry and the poet's task in the following manner:

> ...every creative work of the imagination had its seed in the 'Unconscious,' and .. its flowers and fruits, like those in Aladdin's magical garden, owed their origin to a graft of the waking mind on the wild and ancient stock of dream. (106)
>
> Since language is acquired and is not innate, the intellect must supervise its use as a medium, but it cannot of itself originate poetry-- any more than a craftsman originates the material in which he works.... Intent on a stuff as nebulous as that of dream, [the poet] must so record this inward vision that his refractory symbols, words shall lull here, awaken there, any reader enchanted by them into listening (107-08)

Perkins understands de la Mare's acceptance of the validity of dream images as enabling him to confidently exploit a "daring discontinuity or irrationality" in a poem (187). Kirkham notes that dream is presented as being a separate realm of existence (112). Moreover, even these fragments reveal a similar pattern of contraries to that which I have outlined in the previous section, the imagination, the unconscious, dream, inward vision, and innate abilities being aligned to depict one world, while the waking mind, intellect, language, and acquired abilities form an opposing world. The poet's

task is to "graft" the latter onto the former, to create a new unity, or to mediate and interpret the inner world to the outer world. From either metaphor it is apparent that both contraries are essential. Indeed, near the beginning of the introduction, de la Mare refers to wake and sleep as necessarily opposing but equal "collaborators" of existence (11).

This same belief about wake and sleep forming alternating spheres of existence, "two worlds," is expressed in the poem "Sleep" (1912) previously quoted. Indeed, when reading the criticism, one is repeatedly struck by the similarity of theme, image, and even phraseology to that of the poetry. Sometimes, as in this instance, an idea is first conveyed by a poem and later elaborated in the prose. Other times, the reverse procedure occurs. In an early review of the poetry of Edward Thomas, written in 1917, for instance, de la Mare quotes "Adlestrop," remarking how the sounds of the names of English villages can themselves be potent, "as if the very sound of them might surrender a hidden secret, as if they were a talisman, a rune, an incantation" (*Private View* 120; *Edward Thomas* 71). Later in "Incantation" (1938) de la Mare expresses a similar idea about the evocative sounds of three apparently unrelated nouns, their lack of continuity illustrating Perkins point:

> *Vervain .. basil . orison--*
> Whisper their syllablings till all meaning is gone,
> And sound all vestige loses of mere word. .
> 'Tis then as if, in some far childhood heard,
> A wild heart languished at the call of a bird,
> Crying through rumous windows, high and fair,
> A secret incantation on the air
> A language lost, which, when its accents cease,
> Breathes, voiceless, of a pre-Edenic peace (CP *368*)

But yet again, especially in the middle, transitional period during the 1930s, an idea or image will appear in both the criticism and the poetry since he was obviously working on both concurrently. In *Early One Morning* (1935), for instance, he describes the preservative power of memory to retain childhood memories by using the image of a fly

embalmed in amber:

> Though it is but the reflex of an infinitesimal patch of the never-ceasing woof and weft issuing from the loom we call experience, henceforth it may remain isolated, as though embalmed-- a rare, or common fly in amber. And it is such flies as these, when they are distant enough in time--according to the calendar-- we call our first or early memories. (115)

This same image is used in the poem "Memory" (1938):

> Ay, so bewitched her amber is
> 'Twill keep enshrined the tiniest flies--
> Instants of childhood, fresh as when
> My virgin sense perceived them then-- (*CP* 373)

These three instances from the many available suggest that de la Mare would return to a theme or an image and elaborate on it whether he was writing criticism or poetry. Overall, a general pattern can be seen which links the two forms of writing. In the early period his major ideas tend to be presented first in the poetry. A good example is the early lecture "Rupert Brooke and the Intellectual Imagination" (1919) which categorizes poets into two classes, the visionary and the intellectual, based on whether they possess childlike or boylike characteristics. But the prolonged discussion of the first group is only an elaboration and extension of the qualities of childlike apprehension displayed by the child figures in the poetry of the early period in *Songs of Childhood* (1902), *Poems* (1906), *The Listeners* (1912), and *Peacock Pie* (1913). As mentioned above, the transference between the poetry and criticism seems more lateral in the transitional period. In the late period, however, the earlier pattern seems to reverse itself somewhat, since at times the themes or images recall those from earlier prose writings. The tiny, exquisite, poem "'Love'" from *Inward Companion* (1950), for instance, describes children as grave:

> Children--alone--are grave,
> Even in play with some poor grown-up's toy;
> Solemn at heart, and wise:
> Whence else their secret joy?

> And the deep sleep they crave?
>
> So Love is pictured--with his bandaged eyes,
> To veil the blinding beauty of his skies--
> And laughs out, naked, like a little boy. (*CP* 529)

This same quality was emphasized in *Early One Morning* (1935) where de la Mare cautions adults against misinterpreting children's behaviour:

> In their behaviour children often appear to be silly and witless, when all else forgotten, like lamb, puppy, kid and kitten they are merely indulging their animal spirits. This makes it easy to overlook their no less natural gravity of mind and spirit. No dignity of self-expression, not even the grand manner, could be in excess of that gravity. A steady look at the Infanta in Velasquez's well-known picture, at Durer in the drawing he made of himself when he was fourteen, or at Emerson on his mother's knee, is all that is needed.. .(430)

But this type of generalization must be sharply qualified, for the date of composition of most poems in the final volumes is unknown. Throughout, the prose and poetry show a remarkable consistency although even the few examples cited here indicate that primarily de la Mare is a poetic thinker, more associational than logical,--a poet, not a theorist. The insights contained in his criticism tend to be elaborations of ideas expressed more vividly, precisely, and economically in his poetry. For these reasons I refer to them only when it will enhance the exploration of a poem.

(iv)

As mentioned above, I will use the pattern of four-world imagery as a frame of reference to approach the poetry, so I can chart the course of de la Mare's poetic development and self-growth. Similarly, I will follow the use of personae throughout his career. A return is seen here: there is a shift from the directness of the early child voice poems, to a number of complex masks that range from the highly contrived to the bizarre, back to a more intimate, direct voice in the late poems with the persona of an aging or aged adult. These changes parallel a maturing process observed in the various adult figures themselves; after slowly and painfully gaining self-enlightenment,

the speakers seem, once again, to be able to assume a forthright expression.

By considering symbolic imagery to form the core of the poetry, I hope to present de la Mare as a sophisticated but accessible modern poet. Subtly refining public symbols to his own ends, he created a poetic universe reflecting his attempts to come to terms with the essentials of life. But his better poems are much more than accurate renderings of his own particular view. A number of these poems may initially appear simple, if not simplistic, but close reading will reveal them to be complex structures whose patterns of imagery, rhetoric, rhythm, and rhyme are held in balance with one another. The poems are in prescribed verse forms, the tension of a boundary seeming to liberate de la Mare's imagination. Within these circumscribed shapes he would offset contrary formal elements against one another to establish a dynamic poise. The final effect is of an integrated, finished whole in which each part is inextricably bound to the others.

De la Mare's poetry deserves to be read and appreciated by present-day readers. Perhaps because he practised poetry with exceptional grace and apparent ease, the polished surface of the end product makes it appear too simple and clear to many readers. But one should not be fooled by this illusion; fellow practitioners such as W.H. Auden (Introduction 386) and T.S. Eliot have always remarked on de la Mare's craftsmanship, the latter in a poetic tribute ending,

> .by those deceptive cadences
> Wherewith the common measure is refined;
> By conscious art practised with natural ease;
>
> By the delicate, invisible web you wove--
> The inexplicable mystery of sound. (106-07)

In this dissertation, I hope to show that in de la Mare's better poetry, profound depths are contained beneath an apparently limpid surface. As he said himself, the price of understanding a poem is giving it our attention:

> Attention is not only a focusing of the senses, the mind and the spirit; it is the half-conscious surrender of the whole of one's past that is available for the time being to the object scrutinized As we attend, instantaneously, we dye, dilute, distill, essentialize, compare and re-make. ("Poetry" 19)

If we do the same with his poetry, I believe that de la Mare will be seen as a modern poet of considerable achievement with his own unique vision and distinct voice.

Chapter 2: Early Poems: *Songs of Childhood* (1902) and *Poems* (1906)

Although flawed, *Songs of Childhood* (1902) and *Poems* (1906) do not deserve to be ignored or, in the case of the former, relegated to the nursery. They are important to my study not only because they lay the base for de la Mare's multi-world poetic universe but also because their main weakness, a too evident tracing of the author's reading, will in time develop into an important aspect of his allusive symbolic technique (Richards, "Reconsideration" 32; Perkins 183,188-89). This latter tendency manifests itself differently in each volume; but in neither case is it naive. At first glance, *Songs of Childhood's* echoes of folk ballads, fairy tales, and such Victorian writers as Edward Lear, Christina Rossetti, and Robert Louis Stevenson may appear unintentional (Wood 149,199,210,254,331,414). On closer inspection, it can be seen that just as the wording of the title seems deliberately to recall Blake's *Songs of Innocence*, so the fabric of the poetry consciously draws on a body of literature commonly associated with childhood. At this stage, however, the original material has not always been transmuted and traces of his reading overwhelm the new work.[1] "The Sleeping Beauty," for example, works with a staple of fairy tale, the enchanted princess:

> The scent of bramble fills the air,
> Amid her folded sheets she lies,
> The gold of evening in her hair,
> The blue of morn shut in her eyes.
>
> How many a changing moon hath lit
> The unchanging roses of her face!
> Her mirror ever broods on it
> In silver stillness of the days.
>
> Oft flits the moth on filmy wings
> Into his solitary lair;
> Shrill evensong the cricket sings
> From some still shadow in her hair.

In heat, in snow, in wind, in flood,
She sleeps in lovely loneliness,
Half-folded like an April bud
On winter-haunted trees. (*CP* 35-36)

Technically, the poem is quite clever, for it deliberately creates a sensation of motionlessness appropriate to its subject. Setting the figure of the girl in her bedroom against a dusky backdrop of moving insects emphasizes her stillness, while the regularity of the form and metre lend a ritualistic quality to the description. But this device does not prevent the poem from being inert, so it never moves beyond being a scenic description. The problem lies with the persona; it is as if the speaker is a reader looking at an illustration. Although the speaker attempts to enter the scene by beginning with the olfactory imagery of the bramble's scent and continuing with the auditory image of the cricket, the dominant visual images and the generalized, stylized way they are presented indicate that he is an outsider. This perspective creates a sensation of being at two removes from the subject, devitalizing the description. As a consequence, the reader's interest lags. If instead of presenting this safe perspective, the speaker had been a key figure in the fairy tale, like the prince, the formal inertness could have reinforced his observation about the princess's state before acting to break the spell. Later on, as will be seen, in "Maerchen" (1921), folktale elements will be brilliantly incorporated into a powerful atmosphere of which the speaker's perspective forms an integral part.

Songs of Childhood has the additional difficulty of being a children's work. De la Mare will later address this problem when he includes the volume in his *Collected Rhymes and Verses* (1944), his final collected edition of all his poems "intended for children." In the introductory note, he stresses the artificiality of the label, calling the differences between his adult and children's poetry "little problems" he will not concern himself with. Rather, he prefers to emphasize the essential unity of his work: "Somewhere the two streams divide--and may re-intermingle. Both, whatever the

quality of the water, and what it holds in solution, sprang from the same source." He also expresses his respect for children as readers, considering it a "chastening reflection" that they are "unflinching critics" who "make no allowances" (Note, *Collected Rhymes*, 5). De la Mare then, hardly thought writing for children required anything less than his best.

The poetic universe of *Songs of Childhood* is both surprising and predictable. One unexpected emphasis, considering Richards' and Leavis' charges of escapism into a dream world, is the secure grounding of the poems in this world (Richards, "Poets" 72; Leavis 52-53). Almost every poem in some way concerns the tangible, everyday world; the other world receives a secondary emphasis only slightly exceeding that given to the child and adult worlds. More than half the poems, however, involve movement between this world and the other world, indicating that de la Mare's fascination with the interrelation of opposing worlds exists from the outset of his career.

Both child and adult worlds receive approximately equal emphasis, yet the impression remains that the former is much more important, while the adult world receives a rather perfunctory treatment. The descriptive title draws attention to the child world by suggesting that the poems are celebrations of the child state; therefore, those works involving a child figure, whether subject or speaker, come into a stronger focus. Many of the more striking pieces have a child narrator talking about his or her world. As will be seen, the establishment of a distinct child voice is a major achievement of the volume.

These child world poems form a composite portrait of a child figure which becomes a trademark--the "delamarean child." Those about the child are usually spoken by an anonymous adult voice; only rarely, as in "The Christening" or "Cecil," does the speaker identify himself. The child is idealized, as if belonging to a higher plane of existence, the adult's repeated fear being that the child will return to the other world and leave him bereft. Accordingly, the child is seen to possess almost magical

powers. In "As Lucy Went A-Walking," for instance, the girl is able to see a witches' dance because she can interpret the symbolic significance of three crows, a bunch of elder-twigs, and the shadows of seven poplars (de Vries 120, 151, 160, 372, 416, 463). Although witness to a brilliantly hued frolic with a wealth of sensuous illusions, because she is innocent, she does not understand their potentially ominous significance as bribes.[2] Instead, she naively asks why the witches are performing such feats on a Christmas morning, causing them to vanish. Although the girl is depicted as instinctively possessing esoteric knowledge, she is not harmed by it due to her innate goodness and by her ability to confront the supernatural and ask what is going on.

This placing of the child in an indifferent or hostile setting is used in a number of other poems like "The Phantom" and "The Supper" where, as in fairy tales, the unprotected child undergoes a self-revealing test (Iona and Peter Opie, *Fairy Tales* 11) In the former, because she is innocent and brave, the little girl meets only a gentle, ghostly counterpart of herself; in the latter, the little girl is protected by supernatural intervention. Usually, as in most fairy tales, the child emerges triumphant due to his or her inherent energy, ingenuity and intelligence. Several poems, however, contradict this positive image. "The Grey Wolf," "The Miller and his Son," "The Silver Penny," and "The Pedlar" show the child being destroyed by evil forces or the environment as in certain fairy tales like "Little Red Riding Hood," "The Wonderful Sheep," and "The Yellow Dwarf."

By showing the child to be not infallible, giving negative exempla to balance the positive, de la Mare borrows a traditional didactic device to convey his beliefs about existence. To this end, evil is not excluded from the child's world. He considers innocence to be both a sword and a shield, but like these magic weapons, innocence must be wisely and assertively used (de la Mare, *Early One Morning* 306). If a child is passive, ignores magic warnings, or foolishly puts himself or herself at the mercy of an evil being, destruction will result. As in the stark black and white universe of the fairy

tale, evil and good are in constant battle. Mistakes cannot be tolerated because evil does not provide a second chance for the imprudent or the unwary.

In contrast to this presentation of the child as a symbol, where all individual characteristics are excluded, the child voice poems present a welcome particularity, with each figure possessing a distinct personality. The more striking poems are vividly realized portraits of children experiencing the world about them, as in "Sleepyhead," "Tartary," "The Buckle," "The Hare," "John Mouldy," "I Saw Three Witches," and "The Funeral." Even in "Tartary," where a bookish child imagines himself master of an (uninhabited) paradise, the exuberance of his rhyming wishes vitalizes the whole. In these poems, the adult is granted the rare privilege of sharing the child's unique world from within, in all its sensory delight and imaginative freedom.

Two poems showing the child in widely differing circumstances are "The Buckle" and "John Mouldy." Both feature solitary children in a sheltered environment out-of-doors. In the first, a little girl is playing in a walled garden; in the second, a little boy is playing around houses. In these physically protected settings, they encounter opposing sides of nature, the girl meeting only the gentle aspect but the boy encountering the horrific. In "The Buckle" an imaginative little girl celebrates her unity with all life. She is equally at ease with the tangible world of nature as with the intangible world of the supernatural:

> I had a silver buckle,
> I sewed it on my shoe,
> And 'neath a sprig of mistletoe
> I danced the evening through!
>
> I had a bunch of cowslips,
> I hid 'em in a grot,
> In case the elves should come by night
> And me remember not.
>
> I had a yellow riband,
> I tied it in my hair,
> That, walking in the garden,
> The birds might see it there.

I had a secret laughter,
I laughed it near the wall:
Only the ivy and the wind
May tell of it at all. (*CP* 6)

The poem is an informal account by the child speaker of a series of actions she performed during a typical busy day. Happy and active, she is always doing something, be it sewing, dancing, playing hide-and-seek, walking, or laughing. Her simple diction and clarity of voice lend a colloquial tone to her speech, which is unaffected by the syncope and occasional poeticism and archaism. On the contrary, these enhance her tone, the former suggesting a youthful lisp, while the latter two characterize her as a bookish child who prefers the romanticized forms of "grot" and "riband" to their ordinary forms.

This persona is reinforced by the structure of the poem. Initially simple and straightforward, the sentence structure becomes progressively more complex. As might be expected with a child speaker, she makes a mistake when she attempts a subordinate sentence construction in the third stanza, making it unclear who or what is walking in the garden, although she means herself. Again consistent with a child narrator, her account of her day is not logical. Instead of employing chronological order, as would be expected, she begins in the evening, goes on to night, but ends in the daytime, presenting the sequence of events according to her understanding of their intrinsic importance. By moving from the past tense to the present, the final actions gain immediacy, for she seems to have just finished sharing her "secret laughter" with her surroundings.

A modified ballad form (iambic trimeter in lines 1, 2 and 4, with iambic tetrameter in line 3, abcb rhyme) produces the impression of a little girl chanting a song she has invented. The rhythm is quick and regular, only altering twice in the long third line of stanzas three and four. The first instance occurs in the grammatical error "That, walking in the garden." By the addition of an initial spondee and reversal of the

iambic metre to trochaic, the rhythm is modified to match the child's walking steps. In the second instance, "Only the ivy and the wind," by an initial trochee and a middle anapest, "ivy" and "wind," the sharers of the child's secret, are emphasized. At the same time, the lightness of the wind's movement is suggested. The quick triple time of the metre creates an aural image of the little girl dancing by herself. This recalls the visual image of the beginning of the poem to produce a cyclic effect.

The impression of a singing voice is reinforced by the repetitive form, which serves as a structural refrain. The first half of each verse consists of two sentences in parallel structure describing what the child has and what she does with it. Seemingly arranged in random order: "buckle," "cowslips," "riband," "laughter," these items alternate between man-made and natural objects and sounds, while moving from the tangible to the intangible. As will be seen more clearly when the pattern of imagery is discussed, this progression is also from the supernatural to the natural. The parallelism places opposing aspects of this world and the other world, natural and artificial, tangible and intangible, factual and imaginary, into an equal relation, emphasizing the girl's equal ease of access to both worlds.

In keeping with the persona, the imagery is sparse, mainly visual, and seems to work on a literal level only. In the first stanza, a silver buckle shines beneath (green) mistletoe; in the second, (yellow) flowers are hidden in a grot; in the third, a yellow ribbon flutters in a (green) garden; and in the fourth, there is a wall with (green) ivy. Only in the final line does the speaker move beyond the literal to personify the ivy and wind and introduce other senses than the visual. The internal logic of the poem suggests that a number of these apparently unrelated items have additional significance. Why does the girl attach a silver buckle to her shoe to dance beneath mistletoe? What do cowslips have to do with elves or loss of memory? From the context of another poem in the volume, "As Lucy Went AWalking," it appears that de la Mare associates buckles and mistletoe with witches since here they wear buckled

shoes and put a sprig of mistletoe into their hats when they dance. (*CP* 28). When the traditional association of mistletoe with witches is noted, it seems most likely that the child is playing at being a witch (de Vries 324). But the possible significance of hiding cowslips and elves is not so immediately obvious. It is even ambiguous what the girl might forget, the flowers' position or the elves' habits. Yet when the traditional symbolism of cowslips with fairyfolk and with improving the memory is considered, these connections with the supernatural add an unexpected level to what purports to be child's song (de Vries 115).

The second half of the poem emphasizes the child's vibrant connection with nature. Most of the natural images--garden, birds, ivy, and wind--do not seem to have any hidden meaning but simply denote the girl in her setting. The mention of ivy at the end of the poem, however, raises the possibility of symbolic associations tying in with those of mistletoe. Although both are evergreens traditionally linked with Christmas, in folklore, both are also used as protection against witches (de Vries 22, 324). This suggests that this delightful celebratory song may also be a charm against evil, giving an opposite interpretation to the child's dance at the beginning. The link between ivy and mistletoe, of course, is reinforced by the cyclic shape of the versification.

But if de la Mare is overlaying symbolic associations onto the second half of the work, the structure of the poem does not emphasize them. Rather, through parallelism, the denotative level is stressed, giving the natural images equal weight with the supernatural ones in the first half of the poem. The thrust of the action similarly emphasizes the primary level of meaning, for the little girl plays just as imaginatively here, transforming the bird, ivy, and wind into daytime friends. Within her walled garden, she lives literally in a "protected world" where she can act freely and spontaneously (Frye 42). Although appropriate symbolically, this garden image does not have the biblical overtones that it would have with an adult figure.

In "John Mouldy" a little boy records seeing a corpse. Apparently not

disconcerted, he names the body and describes its immediate location and background:

> I spied John Mouldy in his cellar,
> Deep down twenty steps of stone;
> In the dusk he sat a-smiling,
> Smiling there alone.
>
> He read no book, he snuffed no candle;
> The rats ran in, the rats ran out;
> And far and near, the drip of water
> Went whisp'ring about.
>
> The dusk was still, with dew a-falling,
> I saw the Dog-star bleak and grim,
> I saw a slim brown rat of Norway
> Creep over him.
>
> I spied John Mouldy in his cellar,
> Deep down twenty steps of stone;
> In the dusk he sat a-smiling,
> Smiling there alone (*CP* 7)

The stark contrast between the grisly sight being described and the exuberance of the child's voice creates a strong visceral reaction. All the formal techniques appear subjugated to the image of a boy announcing his discovery. Employing the convention of the children's game "I Spy," the boy dispassionately describes what he sees. In accord with the spirit of the game, the images are primarily visual. The horror of the silent, smiling figure is emphasized by the contrasting sound of moving water, "And far and near, the drip of water / Went whisp'ring about," while the movement of the rats heightens the immobility of the body. The structure of this phrase, "the rats ran in, the rats ran out," echoes that of "the worms crawl'd out, the worms crawl'd in," a gruesome detail in the nursery rhyme "The Gay Lady That Went to Church," the similarity of pattern reinforcing the child persona (Iona and Peter Opie, *Nursery Rhymes* 260-61).

The boy uses figurative language on two occasions. By personifying the water as "whisp'ring," he evokes an image of himself awed by his discovery. By describing the dog-star as "bleak and grim," he transfers adjectives appropriate to a body onto a

distant star (perhaps as a protective device). The phrase moreover recalls the conventional folkloric association of the star with pernicious times (de Vries 141). Both details characterize the boy as being as perceptive to background and atmosphere as he is to the figure in the foreground.

The poem's structure is integrated with the pattern of imagery to emphasize the horror of the sight and to raise questions in the mind of an adult reader. To enhance the objective stance of the child, his observations are organized in the form of a journalistic inquiry: the first stanza answers the questions "what," "where," and "when"; the second elaborates the "what" and "where"; the third explores the "when" and "where"; while the last repeats the first. Because the reporter is a naive child, the "how" and "why," those questions most tantalizing to an adult, are not addressed. Through dramatic irony, however, the experienced reader has sufficient clues to guess. The latter answer is obvious: because he is dead the man cannot perform the actions specified. Similarly, a solution to the former can be deduced from the repetition of the location, "deep down twenty steps of stone."

By presenting the child's findings in the spirit of the game "I Spy," some psychological depth is lent to the figure. The child could be adopting this form as a means to protect himself from his discovery. Just as he does not go down the twenty steps to the cellar to investigate further, but keeps to his safe vantage-point on the higher ground outside, he provides himself with some mental distance by using the device of a game. He thereby places an unacceptable sight into a familiar container, framing and reducing its impact. On the contrary, the adult reader is struck by the inappropriateness of the form to the subject. By offending decorum, the poem not only emphasizes the horror of the sight but also draws attention to the speaker's innocence.

The rollicking gait of the modified ballad (iambic tetrameter in lines 1 to 3, iambic trimeter in line 4, abcb rhyme) continues to offend adult decorum while strengthening the child persona. Yet in the refrain stanza, metrical variations subtly

adjust the rhythm to the content by trochaic inversion and added accented and unaccented feet. Lines 2 and 14 read "Deep down twenty steps of stone." The five stresses and trochaic metre upset the ballad versification while drawing attention to the words themselves. The three initial stresses slow down the rhythm to suggest the tolling movement of a funeral bell; the action of the trochees imitates walking down stairs. The latter also help form a pattern of stressed "s" sounds, their alliteration emphasizing the gruesome sight of the smiling corpse.

The child figure himself is characterized by his voice, for he speaks simply and directly, his diction is modern, and he uses only one and two syllable words. The one poeticism, the syncope "whisp'ring" although necessary metrically, does not jar but sounds childish.[4] Similarly, the ungrammatical conjunction of an indefinite article with a verb, "a-smiling" and "a-falling," sounds childlike in addition to being uneducated. This second quality is also suggested by the negative pronouns in the description of the body's inaction ("He read no book, he snuffed no candle") instead of the expected negative verbs.[5] Unlike the little girl in "The Buckle," this child is not bookish or romantic. He is precise and knowledgeable about ordinary things, for he calls Sirius by its common name of dog-star and is familiar with different types of rats, identifying the large brown rat as a Norway rat. He is equally precise and practical when he uses his imagination, graphically naming the body "John Mouldy."

The simplicity with which the boy labels the corpse comes from his naivety, (this impression being enhanced by the ballad form). His perceptions and fragments of knowledge are innocent, so he does not recognize death when he encounters it, although, as seen, he does instinctively shield himself somewhat by the game form and by the echo of nursery rhyme in recalling a particularly telling detail. As the child speaker of "The Funeral," (quoted in the introduction), his lack of understanding makes him appear so detached as to be callous, when actually his uncertainty about something beyond his experience is revealed by these subtle verbal clues.

As has been seen, "The Buckle" and "John Mouldy" present complementary aspects of the child figure, the first emphasizing vivid imagination and the second matter-of-factness. Both are active figures, firmly rooted in this world as they interact fully with their surroundings. As a result, they may be alone but not lonely or bored. Because they incorporate an acute perception and a correspondingly powerful imagination into their play, they can pass easily from this world into the other world and back, as in the case of "The Buckle," or confront a manifestation of the latter in the former, as in "John Mouldy." Both children also possess an all-encompassing innocence. This allows the girl to unselfconsciously dance by herself, play hide-and-seek with (imagined) elves, show off her finery to the birds, and share her secrets with her inanimate surroundings. Similarly, the boy can spy a horrible sight and label it without knowing what he is actually encountering. Their innocence protects them so they can react immediately and directly to what they perceive, this psychological protection paralleling the physical protection offered by their domesticated natural environment.

(ii)

Poems

The literary echoes in *Poems* are the opposite of those in *Songs of Childhood*, many of these being so self-conscious as to be acts of homage to well-known Renaissance writers. For example, "The Happy Encounter" and "Gloria Mundi" are particularly stilted re-creations of an allegorical Spenserian atmosphere. By contrast, those dealing with an emerging fascination with death ("The Death Dream," "Where is thy Victory," and the sonnets "Even in the Grave," "Anatomy," and "Messengers") are fairly successful evocations of the Metaphysical style (R. Smith 49; Bonnerot 387). The thirteen Shakespearean poems beginning the volume are more sustained experiments in stylized imitation. Each is a character sketch in blank verse of a famous dramatic figure from one of the plays. This limitation of subject somewhat

curtails a tendency to weakness, while the content is an attempt to examine a character closely (R. Smith 49-50).

The technique in these poems is an objectified version of what de la Mare had attempted in prose in *Henry Brocken* (1904), where the personality of a literary character is sketched by freezing him or her in a typical act, either within the action of the work or after the plot has concluded. Although a somewhat interesting exercise, the hybrid form is not successful as criticism or art. Neither the book nor the poems come alive because they are hampered by an imitative style, static portrayal, and superficial interpretation. The character sketches from *Othello* and *Hamlet* are more effective, perhaps because in his reading of these plays de la Mare finds themes corresponding to his main concerns. These pieces become interesting because they explore elemental oppositions of innocence and experience and good and evil begun in *Songs of Childhood*. "Desdemona," "Ophelia," "Polonius," and "Hamlet" extend the depiction of innocence beyond the child, providing alternative adult figures of the madwoman, simpleton, and dreamer as well as the fairy tale innocent beauty. "Hamlet" as a child-like dreamer, externally still but internally active, will later appear as a focus for the positive adult figure. The images describing him as a "troubled son of man" undergoing "Time's dark waters in unearthly trouble" (*CP* 60) will re-emerge transformed in the famous "The Song of the Mad Prince." "Iago's" physical features of "a lean dark face, a narrow, slanting eye" (*CP* 56) will reappear as a portrait of death in "The Keys of Morning" (1912), but more important is the crystallization of evil, for his spiritual sterility and incessant activity will form the basis for later explorations of the negative adult figure.

In addition to this problem of self-conscious imitation, *Poems* displays a tendency toward conventional moralizing. For instance, "The Miracle" begins strongly, with a questioning stance that was to become identified with de la Mare:

Who beckons the green ivy up
  Its solitary tower of stone?
What spirit lures the bindweed's cup
    Unfaltering on;
Calls even the starry lichen to climb
By agelong inches endless Time?

Yet it fails to follow these particular, natural images through, collapsing into conventional generalizations about man's over-reaching ambition (Kirkham 114):

So creeps ambition on; so climb
  Mans vaunting thoughts. He, set on high,
Forgets his birth, small space, brief time,
    That he shall die;...
Rejects delight, ease, pleasure, hope;
 Seeking in vain, but seeking yet,.. (*CP* 68)

Despite these drawbacks, *Poems* extends the poetic universe of *Songs of Childhood* by its concern with the human condition, exploring particularly our relation to this world and the other world. In contrast to the first volume, the main focus is on the adult world, although the child world receives a minor but distinct emphasis in a group of poems placed at the end of the volume.

On the one hand, man is described as a restless, driven creature inhabiting an inhospitable, indifferent universe ("Age") and who engages in superficial busyness to escape contemplation ("The Market Place"). On the other hand, as stated in "The Miracle," above, man is shown vainly seeking for something beyond his immediate existence, despite little or no success (as in "In Vain," The Phantom," and "The Glimpse"). This theme may appear in the figure of the unrequited lover ("Even Rosemary" and "Irrevocable"), but more commonly at this early stage it is expressed by the figure of an adult being seduced and destroyed by the supernatural ("Come," "The Winter Boy," "They Told Me," and "Sorcery"). Another expression of the same idea is contained in the decadent Romantic image of a man resisting the temptation of "easeful death" ("Bright Life" and "Unregarding") as in Keats' "Ode to a Nightingale" (6:52). In later works these fanciful characterizations disappear, the quest theme

becoming contained in the two powerful figures of the exile and the traveller. These mature adults will possess the wisdom of experience while retaining an inner purity that propels them on.

When de la Mare focuses on the relation between this world and the other world, occasionally he is able to draw back from humanity to give a wider perspective. A good example of this kind of poem is "Shadow" where the other world is overlaid onto this world. Despite the dulling effect of the statement of belief in the last stanza, it effectively expresses his philosophy of life:

> Even the beauty of the rose doth cast,
> When its bright, fervid noon is past,
> A still and lengthening shadow in the dust
> Till darkness come
> And take its strange dream home.
>
> The transient bubbles of the water paint
> 'Neath their frail arch a shadow faint;
> The golden nimbus of the windowed saint,
> Till shine the stars,
> Casts pale and trembling bars
>
> The loveliest thing earth hath, a shadow hath,
> A dark and livelong hint of death,
> Haunting it ever till its last faint breath...
> Who, then, may tell
> The beauty of heaven's shadowless asphodel? (*CP* 66)

Although not obviously derivative or imitative, the deceptive simplicity of the technique in "Shadow" may be indebted to George Herbert. In "The Pulley" for example, Herbert uses a sophisticated version of the emblem whereby a simple visual object is equated with but not merged into an abstract idea (159-60). The image is thereby both visual and intellectual, Herbert taking the conventional tripartite structure of the emblem, namely, picture, interpretation, and application and fusing them into one (Freeman 23, 153, 156). A similar effect is achieved in "Shadow," for the three stanzas represent the three levels of meaning in the examination: the first emphasizing the natural image, the second extending a natural image to encompass a wider context,

and the third providing an explanation. Although appropriating the religious artifact of a saint on a stained glass window, the emblem is removed from a specifically religious context and placed in a wider, secular sphere.

Because "Shadow" seems to be a personal vehicle, apart from the occasional archaism and poeticism, de la Mare would appear to be speaking in his own voice. The poet-speaker gives the impression that he is gazing at a rose in water and musing about it, the present tense suggesting the immediacy of the action, while the hushed "s," "sh," and "st" sounds sustain the quiet, contemplative mood. The loose iambic metre reproduces the movement of a speaking voice, the accent falling on key words, as in conversation.

In contrast, this conversational record is encased in the rigid form of the five line stanza which distances it and lends it a sense of formality appropriate to a statement of belief Each of the stanzas consists of a triplet and a couplet rhyming aaabb. Although closure is not used, the grammatical flow prevents the stanza from fracturing into two, unless it is intended. Parallel structure is used throughout. the triplet presents a shadow, while the couplet instances when or where it is absent. In each case, the couplet qualifies the triplet by undercutting it. Extra weight is added to the couplet by setting it off physically from the triplet and shortening the line length. The overall effect is of a barely sustained balance between the two parts

The contrasting pattern of imagery stabilizes this poise while tightening the formal pattern so each stanza appears distinct. Appropriate to the subject, the images are visual, the brightness of the triplet being offset by the darkness of the couplet. But these oppositions are joined by their unity of image, the rose with its dark shadow and the water bubbles with their golden nimbus. This imagery of contrast operates on several levels. The first stanza depicts chronologically the appearance, progressive lengthening, and final disappearance of the rose's shadow. The opposing times of noon and night also represent metaphorically the rose dying after reaching its full

bloom, the compression of time lending the flower stature so it emblemizes the transience of life. The second stanza employs the even more fragile and fleeting natural image of water bubbles. Again their span is chronological, for they possess a faint, golden, circular shadow during the day but are obliterated by the star's wavering light at night. Yet by comparing the shape of the bubbles to a saint's halo in a church window, another dimension is added to the natural world, for it is connected to the man-made and slightly more permanent world of art.

Both stanzas have a philosophical dimension suggested by the final line of each. Calling the rose's existence a "strange dream" conveys the Platonic notion of temporal beauty being only an illusion, for only when it dies will the flower's essence be removed from its alien habitat and returned home. Similarly, but less overtly, the description of starlight throwing wavering lines on the water suggests the Platonic idea of earthly life being a prison.[6]

The final stanza explicates these two examples of shadows. The couplet states that they are harbingers of death, thereby providing an ominous interpretation for a key de la Mare word, "haunting." The couplet draws a corollary from the previous statement concerning eternal beauty. Because "Asphodel," the final word of the poem, is a mirror image of the opening figure of the rose, these two opposing flower symbols become linked. An extended meaning can then be understood for the rose, for paradoxically its transient beauty can also be a reminder of the asphodel's timeless beauty. By joining these images, a cyclic movement is suggested, this formal unity in turn reinforcing the idea that there may be something beyond our temporal existence. But ultimately, this hope is undercut by its presentation as a question, a stance to become identified with de la Mare's probing nature.

As mentioned, the child world receives a distinct, if minor, emphasis in *Poems*. Typically, those works from an adult perspective focus on the symbolic aspects of the child figure (R. Smith 49). Although by turning the subject into a representative child

the dramatic impact of particularity is lost, "The Children of Stare" and "The Universe" clearly articulate the adult perspective. For the most part, both avoid the temptations of being sentimental and nostalgic by closely considering their subjects.

"The Children of Stare" emphasizes paradoxical qualities of the child image by etching the joyous play of children against an ancestral mansion, frozen landscape, and wintry sky which makes them appear vulnerable and fragile by contrast. Malignant qualities are attributed to this ominous background in the fifth stanza:

> Above them silence lours,
> Still as an arctic sea;
> Light fails; night falls; the wintry moon
> Glitters; the crocus soon
> Will open grey and distracted
> On earth's austerity: (*CP* 63)

As previously in *Songs of Childhood*, the child figures are physically overwhelmed yet unaware and unaffected by evil through their active innocence. The narrator interprets this oblivion to be godlike because they "sport... in Spring attire" warmed only by their purity which is "blown to a core of ardour / By the awful breath of God." The poem thereby extends the previous examination of innocence and evil. While in *Songs of Childhood* evil is incarnated in anthropomorphic fairy tale beasts in a neutral setting, now it emanates from the environment itself, becoming at once less tangible and more disturbing. Similarly, innocence is now less overt. Instead of being represented solely by physical characteristics, as in fairy tales, the inner dimension, the spiritual vitality, is emphasized.

"The Universe," which opens a cluster of child poems at the end of the volume, articulates the adult role with respect to children. It states that although adults should provide a physically protected environment, we should not impinge upon their autonomy in any way. The poem is expressed in a somewhat sentimental and elevated fashion as seen by the ending:

O Man!--thy dreams, thy passions, hopes, desires!--
He in his pity keep
A homely bed where love may lull a child's
Fond Universe asleep! (*CP* 92)

But the respect for children with their mental "wild universe" and the idea of allowing them to freely explore the range of their imaginative power is advanced for the day.[7]

In contrast, "The Massacre," "Echo," "Fear," "Myself," and "Winter" are all spoken by children. All except the last focus on dark aspects of childhood--the fears and problems usually forgotten by the nostalgic adult. Because children possess an acute sensibility and a powerful imagination but are not yet able to analyse events, terrors or worries can completely overwhelm them. Because the child speakers are possessed by their emotions, these poems have a nightmarish intensity. Indeed, "The Massacre" is a nightmare depicting the child's desire for power and glory in an adult world. The poem shows the child speaker assuming the fairy tale role of the invincible child and defeating an army of fierce, superhuman warriors. Ironically, unlike fairy tales, the child dreams that he will be punished, since it ends with him about to be destroyed by the atmosphere in retribution for his massive killings. "Echo" and "Fear" concern waking terrors of children: fear of an echo and fear of night-time. "Myself" is about loneliness. It tells of a solitary child's sense of himself being his only companion:

There is a garden, grey
With mists of autumntide;
Under the giant boughs,
Stretched green on every side,

Along the lonely paths,
A little child like me,
With face, with hands, like mine,
Plays ever silently;

On, on, quite silently,
When I am there alone,
Turns not his head; lifts not his eyes;
Heeds not as he plays on.

After the birds are flown
From singing in the trees,
When all is grey, all silent,
Voices, and winds, and bees;

And I am there alone:
Forlornly, silently,
Plays in the evening garden
Myself with me. (*CP* 96-97)

In some ways, the presentation of the child figure in "Myself" is the antithesis of the dominant portrayal in *Songs of Childhood*. As in "The Buckle," a solitary child is playing in the protected setting of a garden. But now the garden is desolate, the birds have all flown, and everything is covered in grey mist. The child speaker, as silent and grey as his surroundings, has withdrawn into himself. The supernatural double he encounters is thereby similarly forlorn and withdrawn, unable to provide the "sweet company" that the fairy child provided the girl in "The Phantom." The two figures of the child and his double remain separate, engaged in solitary play. But even their play appears perfunctory--a joyless routine engaged in automatically.

This poem demonstrates a budding interest in child psychology, for it is a sketch of a depressed child who has projected his despair onto his shadow self. It also employs a folk interpretation of shadow whereby one's shadow is considered to be a manifestation of a person's soul or a double, so whatever happens to it occurs to the person too (De Vries 418). This idea of double, which will reappear in "The Double" (1922) and "The Shadow" (1941), (analysed in chapter six), combines the Romantic theme of the *doppelganger* with the psychological ideas of ego and alter ego (Walsh 178). As will be seen, de la Mare's own ominous definition of shadow may also be present.

Because of this analytical dimension, "Myself" is an integrated portrait of a depressed child in his bleak setting, the latter being a projection by the child of his internal sterility. The poem is an interrelated whole, every part reinforcing the desolation of the speaker. Perhaps for these reasons, the child persona does not

appear to be completely assumed. Although the speaker uses short lines, a simple tense, fairly natural diction, and words of no more than three syllables, the grammatical structure of long sentences with inverted syntax is not childlike. Thereby, the two examples of literary diction, "heeds" and "forlornly," like the sentence structure, are not touches of characterization as in previous child speaker poems, but are expedient psychologically and formally, lending distance between the speaker and his subject.

The tone and imagery reinforce this depiction of a child who is cut off from his inner self. The impersonal beginning, "There is..." and the rarity of self-referral as subject ("I" appears only twice while "me" or a variant appears four times) conveys this separation. The substance of the child's talk throws the emphasis away from himself, for instead of describing what he is doing, as a healthy, assertive child would do, he focuses on the other child in the garden. The imagery etches the child's belief of helplessness as he is dwarfed by giant tree boughs in a grey world. Both the visual and audial imagery emphasize negation and psychical blankness by their absence of colour. The occasional figurative language in turn reinforces the child's desolation while ostensibly describing the setting. The metaphor "mists of autumntide" suggests the season of dying, while the transferred epithet "lonely paths" psychologically suits the speaker's projection. "Evening garden" similarly compresses the time and place to suggest the spiritual darkness of the child.

Although the poem is presented as a narrative, there is no rising action. Rather, it is level with a slight falling off at the end due to the slowing effect of the awkward, inverted construction. Appropriate to its form of a modified ballad, (iambic trimeter, abcb rhyme), repetition is the major structural device. Three key words in the second stanza describing the child form grammatical and audial links which join the stanzas together. "Lonely," "plays," "silently" appear, or a variant appears, several times in the poem. The two adverbs receive special emphasis for a variant of "lonely,"

"alone," occurs twice as a rhyme, in the third and fifth stanzas, while "silently" or a variant occurs four times in a rhymed position. Thereby, by repeatedly circling around the image of the lonely child in his isolated spot, the speaker's desolation is emphasized.

This sense of bleakness is further reinforced by the grammatical organization. The poem is two long sentences, the longer sentence comprising the third stanza. Its length and parallel structure combine to focus attention exclusively on the other child: "Turns not his head, lifts not his eyes, / Heeds not as he plays on." Repeated negatives within an inverted syntax heighten the sense of separation between the speaker and his inner self: "Plays in the evening garden / Myself with me." The cumulative effect is a disturbing portrait of a melancholy child believing himself alone in an empty, silent universe.

Because *Songs of Childhood* and *Poems*, in many instances, offer opposing perspectives on life, it is tempting to interpret them as contraries of one another much the same way Frye interprets Blake's *Songs of Innocence* and *Songs of Experience* (237). Richard Smith explores this idea in his dissertation. On the one hand, he believes the title *Songs of Childhood* deliberately recalls *Songs of Innocence*, by the various meanings contained in the "of." He notes that although on a superficial level, it might appear that Blake writes of innocence while de la Mare writes for it, the "of" indicates that the poems are "both of and for children and, for adults too" (21). On the other hand, Smith considers *Poems* to be de la Mare's personal version of the *Songs of Experience*, for in contrast to Blake's sense of social injustice and betrayal, this is a depiction of the experience of losing irrevocably "personal innocent consciousness." Whereas formerly, in the first volume, innocence is presented from an inside perspective, in the second volume, only the outward manifestations of it are recorded. As a result, even when the child's viewpoint is adopted, a detached manner intrudes (49-53).

This type of generalization about the difference between the first two volumes is interesting if somewhat simplistic since it makes a hasty conclusion about the use of the child persona in later works. Rather, instead of being contraries, the contrasting foci in the two works, on the child and then on the adult, provide complementary treatments to one another. As has been seen, aspects of innocence and experience are present in both volumes. The presentation of the child figure is modified in the second volume, while the adult figure is amplified and becomes more prominent. Thereby, through mutual contrast, the poetic universe achieves depth, the negative aspects of both the child and adult worlds highlighting the positive. Whereas the child is able to participate easily in both this world and the other world, the adult feels restricted by the boundaries of this world, although on rare occasions (as when dreaming) the older individual can be transported beyond. What the adult figure undergoes in de la Mare's poetry of experience is the loss of easy access to the other world. As will be seen in the next chapter, *The Listeners* (1912) pinpoints the exact nature of this problem, providing not only powerful images of the disillusioned adult but also instances when he can again achieve freedom of movement between worlds. In *Peacock Pie* (1913), the child's world gains a particularity that grounds it more securely in tangible, everyday life. At the same time, the child world achieves a spiritual dimension which elaborates on the child's natural ability for profound wonder.

Chapter 3: First Peak of Maturity: *The Listeners* (1912) and *Peacock Pie* (1913)

The Listeners and *Peacock Pie* established de la Mare as a major poetic voice of the pre-war era and achieved a level of excellence that some critics believe he never reached again (Murry 136; Richards, "Reconsideration" 31). It is more accurate to consider these volumes as representing a first peak of maturity, where de la Mare perfects the individualistic style that came to be recognized as his trademark. Having largely overcome the earlier over-emphasis on literary echoes, these poems exploit the positive features from *Songs of Childhood* and *Poems*, further clarifying the speakers' voices and paying close attention to significant detail. The dominant structural design begins to come from a powerful web of associated imagery that turns the poems into fully-realized symbolic wholes.

Perkins notes that the difference between the first two volumes and *The Listeners* and *Peacock Pie* results from an increased imaginative particularity which provides a strong focal centre and a richer atmosphere (188). As a result, the figures in the poems become alive, realized through significant details and actions as well as being presented through sophisticated points of view Whereas formerly, the only figures to come alive were the speakers (usually a child) of the personal relation poems, now this energy is also imparted to the subjects. These subjects now tend to be drawn more from life experience than literature, although fantastic figures will similarly be imbued with vitality.

Two excellent portraits of this kind in *The Listeners* are "Old Susan" and "Miss Loo;" the poems begin as follows:

> When Susan's work was done, she'd sit,
> With one fat guttering candle lit,
> And window opened wide to win
> The sweet night air to enter in.

There, with a thumb to keep her place,
She'd read, with stern and wrinkled face,
Her mild eyes gliding very slow
Across the letters to and fro,.. (*CP* 101)

When thin-strewn memory I look through,
I see most clearly poor Miss Loo;
Her tabby cat. her cage of birds,
Her nose, her hair, her muffled words,
And how she'd open her green eyes,
As if in some immense surprise,
Whenever as we sat at tea
She made some small remark to me. (*CP* 103)

As can be seen, the visual imagery is concrete, not only providing significant details of the figures, but also capturing intrinsic gestures, so the scenes become animated. Whereas in "The Sleeping Beauty" from *Songs of Childhood* and the Shakespearean inspired works from *Poems*, the over-accumulation of detail created a remote, static portrayal, now a glimpse seems to be achieved into someone's life. This selective particularity is enhanced by the choice of form. The tetrameter couplet is as rigorous a verse container as the blank verse of the Shakespearean poems, but its metrical constraints force a severe pruning of modifiers so only essential details remain (Fussell 138). The resulting cleaner, sparer texture of the lines releases the metric flow, enabling them to move exuberantly, suiting the original perspective of a child.

Both the vividness of focus and liveliness of metre within a rigid form are reinforced by the speakers' perspectives. Again, in contrast to the earlier character sketches, instead of assuming the safe vantage-point of a reader, the speakers are part of the scene. Because the speakers are adults remembering an incident from childhood, a telescoping of time and vision is achieved. This double narrative perspective reduces the distance between reader and subject, enabling the women to re-enter the present by the vividness of the speakers' recollections and by the modifications of verb tense. That the speakers are adults is indicated by the

subordinate structures opening the poems and the associations of artificiality connected with the rhymed couplet. That their perspectives are childlike is apparent from the action of the poems; in "Old Susan," the watching child is reproved for staying up late, while in "Miss Loo," the child and his brother form part of the central tableau.

While the former is a surface depiction of the old nurse, focusing only on physical detail, the latter is a fairly deep, sympathetic portrait, in which the speaker shares his observations and intuitions about Miss Loo, thus revealing his personal characteristics. As the final stanza indicates, the way he describes everyone's behaviour at tea shows he is perceptive and sensitive to others:

> Till Peter's pale-green eyes ajar
> Dream, wake; wake, dream, in one brief bar.
> And I am sitting, dull and shy,
> And she with gaze of vacancy,
> And large hands folded on the tray,
> Musing the afternoon away;
> Her satin bosom heaving slow
> With sighs that softly ebb and flow,
> And her plain face in such dismay,
> It seems unkind to look her way:
> Until all cheerful back will come
> Her gentle gleaming spirit home:
> And one would think that poor Miss Loo
> Asked nothing else, if she had you. (*CP* 103)

The child seems to be as aware of emotional undercurrents as he is of physical detail, not only reproducing his acute visual, tactile, and kinesthetic observations, but also able to interpret them with a keen perspicacity. This combination of a sensitive child's observations and feelings with the sophisticated diction and formal control of an adult came to be considered a de la Mare trademark (Walsh 173).

In the same way that *The Listeners* exploits the positive stylistic elements from *Songs of Childhood* and *Poems*, it also builds on the base of the four-world universe established in the first two volumes, advancing the portrayal of both the child and adult figures with respect to this world and the other world. As in *Poems*, the adult world dominates, while the child world receives a more limited emphasis. But ease of access

to the other world now ceases to be granted only to the child, most poems focusing on the experienced adult and exploring how he can once again attain freedom of movement between worlds. "Haunted" and "Home," for instance, express the traditional Christian idea of humanity being doomed to continual motion, not achieving rest until death provides release by resolving all conflict (*CP* 33-34). But the former poem ultimately provides a positive interpretation of this state:

> Rave how thou wilt; unmoved, remote,
> That inward presence slumbers not,
> Frets out each secret from thy breast,
> Gives thee no rally, pause, nor rest,
> Scans close thy very thoughts, lest they
> Should sap his patient power away;
> Answers thy wrath with peace, thy cry
> With tenderest tacturnity. (*CP* 131)

The action of the stanza with a "raving" voice being answered by a calm, supernatural one resembles that of George Herbert's "The Collar" (Kirkham 116; Herbert 153-54). Yet by internalizing the superior being and suggesting that exile may prove to be positive, the religious associations are diminished.

This possibility of transformation, or of fusing the contraries of restlessness and rest, being exiled and welcomed home, will prove to be de la Mare's lifelong quest, reaching its fullest and final expression in "The Burning-Glass" (1945). The idea of an inward presence will also become more dominant in later work, "Lost World" (1950) finally resolving the poet's inner haunting. For these reasons, although archaically expressed, "Haunted" signifies a movement in the presentation of the state beyond external images of ghosts, goblins, and fairies. From now on, in the adult volumes, an external haunting tends to represent a corresponding internal state. This emphasis on human experience modifies the previous bleak portrayal in "Shadow" (analysed in chapter two). Now, paradoxically, haunting may be a hint of death, but it is also potentially positive in life. Ironically, the superior being who initiated man's restlessness may also provide a key to the cure, if man can come to terms with himself.

"Exile" introduces the key notion of exile to express man's relationship with the other world. Although slightly vague, it is an early attempt to articulate a key theme which will receive full expression in "The Exile" (1918) and form the central position of numerous subsequent works. At present, the term expresses a general state of banishment and alienation apart from a Christian context. The speaker is an immature figure who refuses to accept responsibility for his lot, preferring to blame the pagan gods:

> Had the gods loved me I had lain
> Where darnel is, and thorn,
> And the wild night-bird's nightlong strain
> Trembles in boughs forlorn.
>
> Nay, but they loved me not; and I
> Must needs a stranger be,
> Whose every exiled day gone by
> Aches with their memory. (CP *115*)

Ironically set as a hymn, the poem is a bitter song of experienced man and as such effectively conveys his despair. But the common hymn form seems to cause verbal ambiguities that affect any reading of the work. The repeated auxiliary verb "had" in line 1 and the subsequent shift to the present tense are confusing. In order to make sense, following the lead of the first words, the conditional must be understood. Thereby, the remainder of the first stanza expresses the state that could have been man's if he had been lucky, in other words, an imagined, untrue state. The second verse, accordingly, by the parallel structure in line 5 portrays the opposite: the actuality of existence without grace.

To cause an overbalancing for the former state, although sketchily drawn, the concrete imagery is confined to the first stanza, while the second shifts to the abstract. Appropriately, the focus shifts from external, visual, and tactile imagery to the internal, the key words here being negative concepts. But the choice of images in the first stanza and the relationship between them is confusing. If line 1 expresses a

condition, then the speaker seems to be saying that if he had been beloved by the gods, he could have lain down on a bed of darnel and thorn but not been uncomfortable. Since the weeds symbolize vice, pain, and suffering, presumably the speaker would have also been spared these tribulations (De Vries 129; Cooper 170). The "and" joining the second half of the statement is difficult to interpret, however. Is the speaker also implying the conditional here, saying he could have heard the bird singing all night if he had been blessed? But the present tense suggests that like the darnel and thorn, the nightbird's song is a fact, it being only the speaker's relation to these that has changed. If these wild and homely images are considered apart from the logical pressure of the lines, they become more cogent, for they describe an untamed, unconfined world of nature in which, if the speaker had been beloved, he would have been able to take his rightful place and spontaneously act in unity with them. Instead, the contrary is true.

The absence of concrete imagery in the second stanza underlines the negative state of existence as conceived by the speaker: it is a separation from the wild, free world of nature. In this void, all he feels is an ache. The poem concludes with a grammatical ambiguity, as it began. "Their memory" may refer to more than the gods whom the speaker holds responsible for his condition (Kirkham 116). It may also indicate the contrast between all his present exiled days as a whole and the life he imagines he could have had. This memory of the "could have been" taunts him, making him even more miserable and preventing him from coming to any acceptance of his condition.

As has been seen, "Haunted," "Home," and "Exile" present a bleak portrait of man, for he is restless, bitter, internally divided, and grieving for an impossibility. Sleep thereby provides a necessary release, for it allows him to forget temporarily the darnel and thorn, the tribulations of his life. This basic aspect of sleep is expressed in "Nod," an excellent companion piece to "I Met at Eve" from *Songs of Childhood*.

Each captures the opposing perspective of the respective speakers. In the earlier piece, the "Prince of Sleep" is seen as a youthful, serene shepherd who wanders barefoot in grey robes, wearing a wreath of poppies. This world is fragrant, hazy, and lovely. The dreams that "haunt his solitary woods" are rosy pink and only "clear visions" "lurk" in his "dark pools." (*CP* 49). Despite the ambiguity of this last line, the speaker who is an innocent dreamer observes only these features in his visit to the dream world.

In contrast, the experienced dreamer in "Nod" does not enter the dream world, for instead of meeting Sleep, he observes him from a distance. Although the same rose colour pervades the scene and the atmosphere is equally mild, now the shepherd is old and wrinkled. The dreamer indicates the personal appeal of the dreamworld only in the last stanza:

> His are the quiet steeps of dreamland,
> The waters of no-more-pain,
> His ram's bell rings 'neath an arch of stars,
> 'Rest, rest and rest again.' (*CP* 109)

No longer is the sleeper interested in the visionary potential of dream but in the basic need of rest. Appropriately, the details of the setting have been altered from a "valley steep" (*CP* 49), to the "steeps" themselves. Neither is the water imagery simply decorative as in the first poem, but now serves the express function of washing away pain. The versification and texture of the later poem heighten this appeal to rest, the rhyming trimeter lines, for example, emphasizing the sleep-inducing aspects. Similarly, the quiet musicality of the long vowels and of the cluster of "m," "n," "l," and "s" consonants are soporific (Bonnerot 397; Perkins 185).

The name of the sleep shepherd itself has an interesting range of reference. Although it appropriately images someone falling asleep, another darker meaning may also be implied. Biblically, "Nod" refers to the "Land of Nod," the land east of Eden where Cain went after being condemned to be a fugitive. The term then means

"wandering" (Fulghum 147). This accords well with the experienced dreamer who speaks the poem, himself forced to wander the earth, searching for a way home. By conflating the two meanings together, "Nod" becomes a paradoxical symbol of man's restlessness and the common way to achieve temporary respite.

Yet in *The Listeners*, sleep is presented in more than this capacity. In "All That's Past," through parallelism, the antiquity of nature is first connected to man's ancient wisdom and then dreams are described as remnants of our pre-history. The last stanza is as follows:

> Very old are we men;
> Our dreams are tales
> Told in dim Eden
> By Eve's nightingales;
> We wake and whisper awhile,
> But, the day gone by,
> Silence and sleep like fields
> Of amaranth lie. (*CP* 117)

The usual order of life is inverted to suggest provocatively that wake is only an interval between periods of sleep. Because they are expressions of our ancient heritage, dreams are the main link connecting these two opposing worlds.[1]

Describing dreams as an entry point to the other world suggests that sleep does not belong completely to one world or the other, to life or death, but is a suspended state between. This ambiguity is beautifully depicted in "The Sleeper" where a little girl encounters her mother asleep during the day:

> As Ann came in one summer's day,
> She felt that she must creep,
> So silent was the clear cool house,
> It seemed a house of sleep.
> And sure, when she pushed open the door,
> Rapt in the stillness there,
> Her mother sat, with stooping head,
> Asleep upon a chair;
> Fast-fast asleep; her two hands laid
> Loose-folded on her knee,
> So that her small unconscious face
> Looked half unreal to be:

So calmly lit with sleep's pale light
  Each feature was; so fair
Her forehead--every trouble was
  Smoothed out beneath her hair.
But though her mind in dream now moved,
  Still seemed her gaze to rest--
From out beneath her fast-sealed lids,
  Above her moving breast--
On Ann; as quite, quite still she stood,
  Yet slumber lay so deep
Even her hands upon her lap
  Seemed saturate with sleep.
And as Ann peeped, a cloudlike dread
  Stole over her, and then,
On stealthy, mouselike feet she trod,
  And tiptoed out again. (*CP* 105)

The record of Ann's behaviour and thought processes organizes "The Sleeper" as it details her perception of a transformation process which turns her mother into an otherworldly being. Two quatrains envelop the poem connecting the child's timid entrance and departure to the atmosphere. Aware from the moment she enters of the unusual silence and coolness, she creeps in, an action appropriate to either a church or tomb. At the end, she leaves as quietly, awestruck at her intimation of death. The body of the poem, comprising two long sentences, is a series of smooth transitions from physical to spiritual depiction. The first (ll.5-16) describes the woman's appearance, which soon begins to assume otherworldly beauty The second (ll. 17-24) records the child's accompanying thought where she attributes supernatural powers to the sleeper The slight modification of the ballad form underscores the short duration of the event, the hold sleep has on the woman, as well as inextricably binding the child's actions to her mother's sleep. By being presented as a single block instead of separate stanzas, the instantaneousness of the child's impressions are suggested. She thereby comes in and goes out in the course of a few moments. The only recurring rhyme, "creep," "sleep," "deep," "sleep" (ll. 2,4,22,24) with its sustained long vowel slows the pace to underscore the profoundness of the mother's sleep and tie the child's responses to her mother's state.

Although Ann's actions, perceptions, thoughts, and feelings form the matter of the poem, she is not the speaker. Instead, it is an adult voice, similar to that of the dispassionate, omniscient, ballad narrator. The voice is so unobtrusive that the reader focuses exclusively on the subject being presented, the scrupulous language relaying an acute perception. "Rapt" (l.6) which refers to the hold sleep has on the woman also describes the girl's reactions to come; "saturate" (l.24) creates an organic sense of heaviness in the depiction of the woman's hands. Both words suggest an indwelling of one world in the other.

By depicting an extremely sensitive girl, "The Sleeper" extends the portrayal of the child figure. Not only perceptive of what is around her, Ann, like the boy in "Miss Loo," is highly responsive to other people's state of being and can thereby respect their needs without being able to analyse the situation. This is demonstrated by her consideration in not wishing to disturb her mother's sleep. At the same time, she can distinguish differing qualities in the atmosphere, sensing the other world within this world. As seen, Ann is even able to identify two kinds of otherworldliness. On the one hand, because her mother's face seems transfigured by sleep, accordingly she imagines that her mother has assumed supernatural powers of sight and is aware of her daughter watching her. On the other hand, since her mother's hands are chillingly heavy and still, Ann is seized with dread, recognizing the similarity of sleep to death (Kirkham 115). It is this discovery of the immanence of the other world in this world that creates the awe in the child

A human sensing the otherworldly within the mundane is also the basis of "The Listeners." There is moreover, a subtle if restricted movement between the two worlds. The most anthologized of all de la Mare's poems, "The Listeners" is for many people their sole encounter with his work. It is quintessential early de la Mare, and features all his trademarks of a moonlit night, a "haunted" house, and a solitary, questing figure. (From now on, the horseman replaces the pilgrim as the dominant

symbol of the Romantic quest.) Simple yet profound, "The Listeners" is provokingly suggestive of a wide range of interpretation. On the one hand, there is a possibility that the poet is playing with his audience, and there is no serious interpretation to be found. On the other hand, because it may represent nothing or have profound symbolic significance, it can be seen as a microcosm of the human condition (Perkins 185; Dyson 153).

'Is there anybody there?' said the Traveller,
  Knocking on the moonlit door;
And his horse in the silence champed the grasses
  Of the forest's ferny floor.
And a bird flew up out of the turret,
  Above the Traveller's head:
And he smote upon the door again a second time;
  'Is there anybody there?' he said.
But no one descended to the Traveller,
  No head from the leaf-fringed sill
Leaned over and looked into his grey eyes,
  Where he stood perplexed and still
But only a host of phantom listeners
  That dwelt in the lone house then
Stood listening in the quiet of the moonlight
  To that voice from the world of men
Stood thronging the faint moonbeams on the dark stair,
  That goes down to the empty hall,
Hearkening in an air stirred and shaken
  By the lonely Traveller's call.
And he felt in his heart their strangeness,
  Their stillness answering his cry,
While his horse moved, cropping the dark turf,
  'Neath the starred and leafy sky;
For he suddenly smote on the door, even
  Louder, and lifted his head--
'Tell them I came, and no one answered,
  That I kept my word,' he said.
Never the least stir made the listeners,
  Though every word he spake
Fell echoing through the shadowiness of the still house
  From the one man left awake.
Ay, they heard his foot upon the stirrup,
  And the sound of iron on stone,
And how the silence surged softly backward,
  When the plunging hoofs were gone (*CP* 126)

The action of the poem, where a person tries without success to gain admittance to a house, occurred previously in the brief "In Vain." Now, the setting has

become more elaborate and mysterious and the apparent failure to enter a partial success because the man's sensitivity to the otherworldly inhabitants paradoxically transforms no audible answer into a suitable response. Their mutual, although unacknowledged, sensing of one another thereby becomes a reciprocation between opposing worlds. By making the ultra-sensitive human an adult, connections or the possibilities of connection are established among the adult world, this world, and the other world.

One striking success in "The Listeners" is the paradoxical transformation of absence into a disturbing presence.[2] As mentioned earlier when discussing "John Mouldy" and "Myself," de la Mare is fascinated with negative depiction, creating an eerie impression of stillness by describing what a figure does not do. In this poem the process is taken one step further, for by concrete detail a vivid sensation of nothingness is created, the sensation of the phantom listeners and the enveloping silence being as palpable as that produced by the noisy, natural world Accordingly, the imagery shifts from being mainly visual in the first half of the poem to being mainly auditory and kinesthetic in the second. Initially, the opposing worlds are linked by an emphasis on motion in the verbs and verbals: a man knocks, a horse champs, a bird flies, and phantoms throng and then hearken to the human voice. But this unity is undercut by the auditory images which set up a pattern of contrasts between the sound of the natural world and the silence of the supernatural. This contrast is stressed by the natural world continuing to move while the supernatural is soon still. Paradoxically, at the end, after the natural world cuts its way through the supernatural silence and stillness and leaves, the final sensation is kinesthetic.

Appropriately, the pattern of imagery is itself paradoxical. In the third stanza, a visual image of nothingness is drawn, while in the ninth, an auditory impression of silence is created. This is achieved in stanza three by the repetition of "no one" and "no head" and by the parallel structure of the clauses which describe so clearly and

precisely what is not there that a figure is almost conjured up (Dyson 153). Balance is lent to the long, second clause by giving equal descriptive time to the posture of the human and to the non-action of the supernatural. Yet the latter is emphasized by the repetition of the consonant "f" and assonance of "ea" which slows down the articulation of the lines. The contrast between the non-beings within and the human without is reinforced by the "still"/"sill" rhyme.

Repetition again creates the effects of the last stanza. In parallel structure, it chronologically lists the fragments heard by the listeners as the traveller leaves. Moving rapidly from a precise account of concrete natural events to intangible, and thereby by association, supernatural ones, aspects from contrary worlds are placed into an equal relation. Again, the latter is stressed by a slowing of pace, here through the alliteration of the phrase "silence surged softly."

Another remarkable feature of "The Listeners" is the speaker's voice which is a modification of the detached, inconspicuous, omniscient, ballad narrator. Occasionally in the first volume, as in "The Pedlar" and "The Silver Penny," this persona had become an intrusive figure which had detracted from the poem's unity. This kind of speaker is now severely controlled, "The Sleeper" and "The Keys of Morning" in *The Listeners* featuring speakers so unobtrusive that the focus on the subject is undisturbed. With the title poem this is carried even further, so the persona becomes an invisible speaker. The ambiguity of the speaker is resolved when all the subtle clues embedded in "The Listeners" are taken into account. The poem is a dispassionate record of a past event from the perspective of a spectator. He appears to possess suprahuman powers since he sees and hears the supernatural as easily as the natural. All these qualities are in keeping with the conventional ballad narrator. But on closer inspection, what seems to be omniscience regarding human feelings (l.21-22) is actually interpretation. Because stanzas six and seven are a single sentence, the coodinate conjunction "for" at the beginning of the seventh (l.25) indicates that the

speaker has deduced the previous intuitive exchange from the traveller's actions. The last two stanzas, again a single sentence, record minutely both the non-action of the listeners and the sounds of the traveller. In the final stanza, the speaker's emphatic "ay" affirms that the listeners had heard the human. This raises the question of how the speaker could affirm this unless he were himself one of the listeners.

Although the speaker never directly associates himself with the listeners, once the possibility is raised, numerous details reinforce this interpretation. For instance, the narrator obviously knows the scene well, for he is able to highlight the surroundings and external appearance of the house as well as pinpoint the area inside where the listeners congregate. This last particular, along with the description of the subtle change of inner atmosphere, intimates that the speaker's perspective is from within the house. This ghostly internal perspective again suits the previously noted details about the shift from visual to auditory imagery since the former could all be observed from inside. Because the narrator is one of the listeners, he has mainly aural cues to give, producing the precise but fragmented imagery of the departing horseman at the end of the poem. Appropriately, the only sustained descriptions are about the listeners in their context.

Paradoxically, if the speaker is one of the listeners, the impression of limited omniscience is explained. As shown, he notes the human's feelings because he is interpreting the man's behaviour. The absence of emotion in the listeners themselves can be seen as characterizing them as a group. Ironically, the supernatural appears to be as restricted as the natural, for just as the horse, bird, and man are confined to the world outside the door, the phantoms are restricted to the world within. Neither can cross the threshold between them (Bonnerot 302).

This limitation of the otherworldly explains the speaker's somewhat naive tone. Although his diction suggests an adult, he offers no explanation for the listeners, either who they are, or why they act the way they do. He only provides hints--they are not of

the "world of men" and they are not "awake." The former denotes the other world, but the latter does not state the kind, they could be asleep, dead, or enchanted. Moreover, the rudeness of the listeners as opposed to the gentlemanly conduct of the traveller is not explained. The reader is left wondering if they are afraid to answer or simply unable to. This remains unanswered because the invisible voice is only a phantom balladeer, he serves as the "voice" for the silent world of the listeners but is not their apologist.

(ii)

Peacock Pie

While *The Listeners* is dominated by the adult world, continuing themes introduced in *Poems*, *Peacock Pie*, like *Songs of Childhood*, is a celebration of the child's world. But the poetic universe as a whole is enhanced because the child figures, while retaining their freedom of movement between this world and the other world, are yet more firmly grounded in this world by the particularity of their presentations. Again, as in the first volume, the title indicates this emphasis, although in an indirect manner. "Peacock Pie," a phrase from the famous "The Song of the Mad Prince," echoes with associations from the world of nursery rhymes through the similarity of its image to that of the "four and twenty blackbirds / baked in a pie" which were set before the king (Iona and Peter Opie, *Dict. Nursery Rhymes* 394). Considering the traditional connection between these folk rhymes and children, *Peacock Pie* emerges as de la Mare's strongest children's volume, in which he presents his fullest presentation of the child figure. One poem, "Miss T," has even been thought of as a traditional rhyme.[3]

A good number of poems are aimed specifically at children. The familiar device of the child persona is used in over a third of the works; moreover, many deal with events and concerns in a small child's life. Some of these experiences are

pleasant while some are not, for instance, playing with a toy soldier ("The Horseman"), losing a pet dog ("The Bandog"), having problems with schoolwork ("The Dunce"), visiting the barber ("The Barber's"), dealing with sibling rivalry ("Mima"), and visiting a grandmother ("The Cupboard"). Some poems in the adult voice have a similar precise focus and narrow range, as being tired ("Tired Tim"), losing a shoe ("The Lost Shoe"), or being embarrassed by an unusual name ("Mr. Alacadacca").

This last poem is an excellent application of child psychology. In a humorous manner, a childish adult tells about his problem and in doing so illustrates the insensitivity of people to one another, (especially applicable to children when encountering anyone a bit different). The name is delightfully exaggerated, long and difficult to pronounce. By being mainly composed of the first four letters of the alphabet, except "b," the child reader can feel clever on discovering Mr.A's error when he pleads for an abbreviation to be used:

> Mr. Aladadacca's
> Long strange name
> Always filled his heart
> With shame.
> 'I'd much --much--rather
> Be called,' said he,
> 'Plain "Mr. A,"
> Or even "Old B";
> What can Alacadacca
> Mean to me!'
> Nobody answered;
> Nobody said
> Plain 'Mr A';
> 'Old B,' instead.
> They merely smiled
> At his dismay--
> A-L-A-C-A-D-A
> C-C-A. (*CP* 144)

The fanciful name, short lines, repetitions, insistent rhyme, and rollicking rhythm all would appeal to a child reader. Perhaps memory of this little piece would provide comfort in a similar situation.

Simple poems as this about mundane events elaborate the earlier portrayal of

the child by providing concrete examples of everyday life. Some depth is added to the figure, while the emphasis on perception, sensitivity, and imagination is kept. The figure is moreover grounded in England but without too many period trappings which would prevent the child reader from identifying with it.

In *Peacock Pie* the sensitive child is shown responding positively to all living beings. This communal empathy may be expressed openly as in "Tit for Tat," where the child speaker imagines the hunter's role reversed with that of his prey, or more covert, as in "I Can't Abear," where the child is revolted by the carcasses hanging in a butcher's shop. Since de la Mare tends to be more effective when indirect, the best poem of this kind is "Alas Alack," although the child speaker may initially appear callous:

> Ann, Ann!
> Come! quick as you can!
> There's a fish that *talks*
> In the frying-pan.
> Out of the fat,
> As clear as glass,
> He put up his mouth
> And moaned 'Alas!'
> Oh, most mournful,
> 'Alas, alack!'
> Then turned to his sizzling,
> And sank him back (*CP* 138)

In "Alas, Alack!" a little child is cooking a fish. While flipping it over to brown on the other side, she personifies it, imagining the fish to be able to bemoan its cruel fate. Significantly, she does not enter her fantasy, for she does not rescue the fish but leaves it to die alone and defenceless. Instead, unemotionally, she imagines the details of its actions. This imagined non-involvement on the child's part reveals a cruel aspect; yet because the girl spontaneously personifies the fish, her play reveals an instinctive involvement with the creature. She could only have imaginatively transformed the fish into an actor by identifying with it.

This paradoxical quality of children allows them to be empathetic and

detached, kind and cruel, at the same time. In this poem, the negative qualities characterize a dark curiosity, previously exemplified in "John Mouldy" (Reid 39). The positive qualities result from living in a "protected" universe (Frye 42). Because the little girl believes in an innocent, interdependent world, she instinctively empathizes with the creature. This contradictory feature of what de la Mare calls a child's apprehension will be returned to much later in "Dry August Burned" (1938).

Unusually, "Alas, Alack!" resembles a dramatic monologue, for it is a direct speech addressed to a silent, specified auditor (Barnet et al 41). The forthright manner of the child's speech enables the reader to participate in the event while it is being related. This monologue reveals the child speaker's personality, her diction and presentation together characterizing her as an imaginative little girl. No jarring effects intrude to break the illusion of a child voice.

Presented as a single stanza to underline the unity of the event, the twelve lines break down into an introduction which makes a general statement and a body which chronologically details the supporting evidence. The introductory quatrain serves several purposes. The insistent "Ann"/"pan"/"can" rhyme emphasizes the scene while establishing a quick rhythm to match her excited voice. The initial spondees, "Ann, Ann," convey a sense of speed and urgency to set the fast pace of the duple metre, highlighting the instantaneousness of the fish's act. By using the initial words to set the speed as in "One, two, / Buckle my shoe," de la Mare is applying what he calls the "sprung rhythm of nursery rhymes" (de la Mare, Introduction *Nursery Rhymes* 11). The ballad-like rhyme of the body of the poem charts the rising and falling action of the fish. The "glass"/"alas" rhyme of the middle quatrain marks the fish's thrust out of the fat while "alack"/"back" of the last quatrain indicates its fall. In addition, by internally rhyming the key words, "alas, alack," they become a capsule of the action itself.

The child's diction is similarly integrated into her persona. Because the

imperative mood and colloquial speech set the tone of the poem, the two inversions (ll.5-8;11-12) demanded by the rhyme do not appear forced. Rather, they chart the shift in emphasis from cooking onto the fish and then back again. The simile in line 6, where the girl compares the fat to glass and not to water, as might be expected, reveals her background. It suggests that she has been more exposed to fish in fish bowls than in ponds or lakes. This, taken in conjunction with the following line, creates the familiar image of a fish seeming to mouth at the viewer through the glass.

"Turned" is a particularly apt word choice; it implies both returning and flipping over to the other side, thereby fusing the fish's imagined act with the speaker's actual cooking. "Sizzling" is just onomatopoeic enough to gruesomely emphasize the fish's death, while returning the focus to the child. Likewise, the archaic words spoken by the fish: "alas, alack," do not detract from the girl's natural tone, for their elevated cast lends dignity to its dying. By doing so, the child speaker reveals that she is bookish in nature and likes the romantic, like the little girl in "The Buckle." Moreover, by using contrasting language for the fish, the child distinguishes it from herself, perhaps as a protective device. Like the child speaker of "John Mouldy," when confronting a manifestation of death, incorporating a borrowed element into the relation can serve as a shield against something not understood.

Typically, the child figure in *Peacock Pie* is equally sensitive to both the natural and supernatural aspects of existence. On the one hand, a boy befriends a lame old donkey in "Nicholas Nye," sensing the animal's innate dignity beneath its decrepit, nondescript frame. On the other hand, a child senses the uncanny, believing there is a lonely face peering out from a haunted house in "The Old Stone House" or intuiting a comforting, otherworldly presence under Christmas mistletoe in "Mistletoe." The child's ability to wonder and ponder about things is brought out. No subject is too ordinary, as is apparent in "Miss T" where the child speaker marvels about eating:

It's a very odd thing--
  As odd as can be--
That whatever Miss T. eats
  Turns into Miss T.;
Porridge and apples,
  Mince, muffins and mutton,
Jam, junket, jumbles--
  Not a rap, not a button
It matters; the moment
  They're out of her plate,
Though shared by Miss Butcher
  And sour Mr. Bate;
Tiny and cheerful,
  And neat as can be,
Whatever Miss T. eats
  Turns into Miss T. (*CP* 146)

By tracing the speaker's innocent logic, "Miss T" demonstrates how nothing is taken for granted in a small child's world (Peschman 131). The disappearance of the same food into different people represents a magical process, for instead of being changed by what they eat as the child expects, the food is incorporated into the people. This continuity, that Miss T. remains the same no matter what she eats, fascinates the child for he has stumbled onto the question of identity.

As can be seen, this kind of poem tracing the process of a child's thought moves from being a simple exploration of a topic towards being a profound examination of the nature of existence (Reid 159-60; Wiley and Orel 381). Of this impressive group of poems, "Mrs. Earth," "Hide and Seek," "Jim Jay," "All But Blind," "Will Ever," and "Nobody Knows," the last demonstrates the process by which a child's simple question is transformed into a metaphysical exploration. A good way to appreciate its power and complexity is to compare it to Christina Rossetti's poem on the same subject, beginning "Who has seen the wind?":

Who has seen the wind?
  Neither I nor you;
But when the leaves hang trembling
  The wind is passing through.

Who has seen the wind?
  Neither you nor I;
But when the trees bow down their heads
  The wind is passing by. (42)

"Nobody Knows"

Often I've heard the Wind sigh
  By the ivied orchard wall,
Over the leaves in the dark night,
  Breathe a sighing call,
And faint away in the silence,
  While I, in my bed,
Wondered, 'twixt dreaming and waking,
  What it said.

Nobody knows what the Wind is,
  Under the height of the sky,
Where the hosts of the stars keep far away house
  And its wave sweeps by--
Just a great wave of the air,
  Tossing the leaves in its sea,
And foaming under the eaves of the roof
  That covers me

And so we live under deep water,
  All of us, beasts and men,
And our bodies are buried down under the sand,
  When we go again,
And leave, like the fishes, our shells,
  And float on the Wind and away,
To where, o'er the marvellous tides of the air,
  Burns day (*CP* 181)

The Rossetti poem is spoken by an adult voice responding to a small child's question about the wind. In the de la Mare poem, the question has been internalized by the child who is the narrator, the poem charting the progress of her thought as she mulls over the mystery of wind by herself. In neither case is an conclusion reached since the questions are unanswerable. The first poem seems constrained by its form and the relation between speaker and audience. Because of the question-answer form and the teacher/pupil relation it signifies, the speaker is restricted to providing repetitive visual evidence of the wind's path. By contrast, the impossibility of answering the question does not constrain the child speaker of "Nobody Knows." On

the contrary, when the child exhausts her first tack of examination at the end of the first stanza, she freely moves onto another approach.

"Nobody Knows" begins with the child describing in concrete detail her nightly experience of hearing the rise and fall of the wind and wondering about it in her semi-conscious state. Then, she repeats in her own terms what is generally known about the wind, passing imperceptibly into her own creative presentation of what the wind is. The second half of the poem is a conceit in the sense of being an extended metaphor about the similarity of the wind and water. Because the child's quiet, colloquial voice is sustained throughout, the sophisticated device (as well as the occasional archaisms) do not jar with the persona but appear as a natural progression.

This extended metaphor unifies the wind with the child speaker. In the first stanza, she precisely locates each in a separate spot: the wind outside, by a wall; herself inside, safely in bed. Only the parallel phrases "in the dark night," "in the silence," and "in my bed" suggest any relation between the two. In the second and third stanzas, she describes the wind as a wave first washing over her and then carrying her away. If this were fact, the event would be terrifying as she would be drowned; on the contrary, however, she presents the sweep and return of the wave as exhilarating. It is as if it enables her to cast off her old body and float off toward day, revitalized or reborn. As the poem moves from the concrete to the transcendental, the focus shifts from the expressed subject, the wind, briefly onto the speaker herself, to end on the human race.

The pattern of imagery underlines the shifts in the child's thought. Initially, auditory images predominate, except for the locating of the wind and speaker, significantly in the dark. The sounds made by the wind, animated in a childlike manner, are reinforced by the assonance of the long "i." In the remainder of the poem, visual imagery predominates. The second stanza shifts from the spatial to the kinetic, the mystery and sweep of the air wave being emphasized by the assonance of the

various combinations of the letter "o." The third stanza progresses from stasis to movement. Appropriately shifting from dark to bright, the initial alliteration of "b" and terminal alliteration of "s" join these opposites together. The wind thereby becomes a symbol of the diurnal cycle of death and rebirth undergone by all.

Both poems employ the formal base of the abcb quatrain. In the brief Rossetti poem, the rhymes are used to link the mysterious wind and the child audience together as a comforting device. In the longer de la Mare poem, the same rhyme scheme is employed to follow the progression in the poem from separateness to unity, the turning point being the midpoint of the work where the conceit begins. Thereby, each poem is symmetrical. "Who has seen the wind" is formed by two similar halves, the second being a variation of the first; "Nobody Knows" pivots around its centre, paralleling the diurnal rotation of night to day, dark to light, emphasizing the balanced nature of the child speaker's speculations.

A group of songs are placed at the end of *Peacock Pie*. Half of them, "The Song of The Secret," "A Song of Enchantment," "The Song of the Mad Prince," and "The Song of Finis" continue the trend in "Nobody Knows" to examine profound themes. They are not spoken by child figures, however, but by different experienced voices and are in different modes, some seeming personal and others impersonal. As will be seen, far from being simple lyrical outpourings as expected from their titles, they are the contrary, composed of obscure images that must be approached obliquely They are good examples of de la Mare's symbolic mode because the structural organization does not come from the rhetorical thrust of the speakers' voices but from these patterns of imagery. "The Song of the Mad Prince" is a justly famous instance Consisting of a list of ambiguous questions, it itself is a puzzle

Who said, 'Peacock Pie'?
  The old King to the sparrow
Who said, 'Crops are ripe'?
  Rust to the harrow
Who said, 'Where sleeps she now?

Where rests she now her head,
Bathed in eve's loveliness'?
That's what I said.

Who said,'Ay, mum's the word'?
Sexton to willow:
Who said, 'Green dusk for dreams,
Moss for a pillow'?
Who said,'All Time's delight
Hath she for narrow bed,
Life's troubled bubble broken'?
That's what I said. (*CP* 187)

As mentioned above, the pattern of imagery provides the key to this puzzle. If the mad prince's questions are set aside for a moment, three short quizzes are left. The first places Peacock Pie, an old King, and a sparrow into a relation which is not immediately apparent, except that as in the nursery rhyme "Sing a Song of Sixpence," sparrow pie, just like one of singing blackbirds, may not be deemed regal enough for a king's taste Peacock, a rarer and more splendid looking bird, may seem more appropriate But is there any other reason beside vanity that impels the king to hope for peacock pie? When the symbolic associations of the bird are considered, it becomes clearer. Because the bird is a Christian symbol for immortality, the king may be hoping that by eating it, he will gain eternal life (de Vries 360; Cooper 127).

The elements of the second quiz appear to have more of a connection among them. If rust is understood to be plant disease, it seems to be mocking the tool which helped plant the seeds Because the rust has destroyed the crops, they will never reach harvest. If the other meaning of rust is considered, it seems that the only evidence of the passage of time is negative, in the tool's decomposition. Both interpretations show human efforts to be frustrated by nature. The components of the fourth question appear to be in an even more distinct relation, for the grave-digger is responding with his own question to that of the symbolic graveside tree (de Vries 500) Presumably, keeping quiet about what they know refers to the identity of the person buried in the grave.

The contrasts in difficulty in answering these questions, which range from being obscure to serious punning to the relatively obvious, suggests that a relation exists between the two stanzas. It would appear that the second is a clarification of the first. Chronological movement can also be seen, for the vain hope for immortality by an aged figure in the first question gives way to an image of destruction before maturity in the second, while the the last question concerns burial. If the second stanza both clarifies and chronologically completes the first, then the mad prince's questions can be approached with the confidence that the same relation exists among them His descriptive questions in the first stanza concerning a woman sleeping in the evening evokes an image resembling a sleeping beauty figure. His longer questions in the second stanza, although disguised by their interrogative mode, are actually answers to the first set. Line 12 states that the woman rests her head on moss or perhaps a moss-covered rock. "Narrow bed," in line 14, suggests this "pillow" is in the grave, the previous lines specifying that this grave has been dug by the sexton beside a weeping willow. The prince's final question where he metaphorically calls life a "troubled bubble" "broken" by death, gives the final answer to his own question.

Just like a puzzle or word game, "Peacock Pie" contains numerous misleading clues while the correct ones are embedded in the text Structurally, it consists of a series of parallel questions and answers This seems to suggest that the components have a correspondingly logical relationship which is not the case (Perkins 187) Moreover, there is no series of analogies being established since the relation between the king and the sparrow is not the same as that between the rust and harrow, and so on. Yet the second part of each pair is linked by rhyme. This rhyme is sustained throughout the poem, linking these quizzes and the mad prince's questions together. "sparrow," "harrow," "willow," and "pillow". These four rhyme words reproduce the chronological movement outlined above The first two, the (singing) sparrow and the tool for covering seeds, concern life, while the last two, the (weeping) willow (implying

mourning as well as the graveside) and pillow, concern eternal sleep or death. Ironically, the very way in which a harrow works resembles the act of burying someone, thereby connecting the two stanzas together. The link between the old king and (young) dead woman is also ironic. While he is vainly trying to gain immortality by hoping to eat magical food, she has become free of time the only possible way, through death.

The puzzle of who the mad prince and the dead female are still remains unsolved. It is generally accepted that the speaker is Hamlet and the girl is Ophelia, a provocative interpretation, although I do not believe it necessary to find counterparts in *Hamlet* for every figure in the poem.[4] An easier and more likely source might be the *Hamlet* inspired works in *Poems*, but only "Hamlet" itself proves useful. As mentioned in chapter two, the similarity of imagery describing Hamlet and his dilemma as "the troubled son of man," "on Time's dark waters in unearthly trouble" (*CP* 60) and the water image in the final question of the present poem is striking, suggesting that it may be a re-working of the earlier figure. This "troubled bubble" image at the same time recalls the water imagery in "Shadow" (1906), where bubbles with their delicate reflections similarly represent the transience of life and the eternity of death.

The forcefulness of the speaker of "The Song of the Mad Prince," despite his derivative origin, demonstrates the sophistication in characterization achieved in the volume. Instead of describing a figure from a distance, the character is drawn performing a typical behaviour. Here, because of his mad state, the prince's speech is bizarre, his fragmented images and associational logic demanding deciphering in order to be understood. Yet this speech is self-revealing. The puzzle game format and the allusion to the nursery rhyme world suggest a child figure, but his grief over a beloved's death which has presumably triggered his madness, is a tragic, adult predicament. Accordingly, the form can be interpreted as a defence, as the prince reverts to a familiar, child's vehicle to express his horror. The mad prince is thereby a paradoxical

figure poised between two worlds, innocent but experienced, childlike but an adult, an extension of the child figure. Similarly, the poise of the poem results from a juxtaposition of opposing qualities, playfulness with seriousness, nursery rhyme with mad song (Perkins 187-88).

As has been seen, *The Listeners* and *Peacock Pie* build on the base of the first two volumes. They reiterate that de la Mare's major concerns are neither with an unpopulated universe, nor as the key poems from *Songs of Childhood* and *Poems* might indicate, an egocentric existence. Now, the figures tend to be presented with others, living in a definite (if unexpressed) relation to nature, other people, and the supernatural. Both child and adult figures are rounded out by an emphasis on opposing aspects. In terms of the four-world poetic universe, the apparent dichotomy of the first two volumes is broken. There the child is depicted as being able to move freely between this world and the other world but the adult is shown being restricted to this world. Now both child and adult are potentially able to grapple with the otherworldly dimension, "The Listeners" demonstrating how an adult can achieve a kind of communication with the supernatural. Paradoxically, the mundane aspects of the child world are stressed at the same time as the child's acute perceptive and imaginative sensitivity is extended. The child is thereby made more believable and lifelike. For instance, in "Alas, Alack!" a small child is doing the cooking, thereby being firmly grounded in every-day life at the same time as she is imaginatively transforming the event.

Both the child and adult figures are further vitalized by then being characterized only by essential features. This increase in particularity and selective power, along with the clarifying of focus and shift to symbolic imagery as the primary design, marks these volumes as mature. Indeed, *Peacock Pie's* polished perfection with respect to this technique used with the child figure can be seen as the end of a phase, for the child image disappears as a central symbol in the poetry. In the next volumes,

Motley (1918) and *The Veil* (1921), the emphasis shifts exclusively onto the adult. Considering the circumstances of World War I, it seems as if its horrors had overwhelmed de la Mare's belief in the power of innocence. Instead, contrast to the disillusioned adult figure is provided by the traditional type of the fool. Like the mad prince he is childlike, and his cryptic, "mad" utterances must be similarly deciphered through the images.

Chapter 4: End of the First Period: *Motley* (1918), *Poems (1901-1918)*, *Story and Rhyme* (1921), *The Veil* (1921) and *Down-Adown-Derry* (1922)

As World War I drew to a close, de la Mare resumed work on his poetry, collecting previous works in *Poems (1901-1918)* and composing new poems which appeared in *Motley* (1918) and *The Veil* (1921).[1] He also produced editions of his works ostensibly for children, *Story and Rhyme* (1921), which is a collection of prose fiction and poems, and *Down-Adown-Derry* (1922), a collection of "fairy" poems. Both contain a few new poems but they do not appreciably extend the presentation of the child world. "The Little Creature" in this latter volume should be noted, however, since its perversion of a happy, active, assertive child into a helpless victim of evil can be seen as symbolizing de la Mare's perspective on innocence in a war-torn world. Apart from these instances, the child figure disappears for a long period from his poetry.[2]

By excluding the child world but exploring the adult figure in relation to both this world and the other world, the poetic universe of the major volumes, *Motley* and *The Veil*, is thereby a contracted version of that in *The Listeners*. They articulate the perspective of the limited adult trying to come to terms with existence and searching for a way to alleviate temporarily his painful isolation. Their prevailing style is the dense symbolic technique perfected in *The Listeners*, the pattern of imagery providing the controlling design and capable of overriding the logic of the grammatical structure. But, at the same time, in *The Veil*, signs of strain in this method are beginning to become noticeable. For these reasons, *Motley* and *The Veil* mark the end of de la Mare's first period.

Motley contains a key exception to the focus on the typical adult, this being the figure of the fool in the title poem and in "The Fool's Song." He remains childlike in his adult years, retaining the key delamarean child characteristics of a clear perception, powerful imagination, and a spontaneous empathy with all living things.[3]

This positive character is, however, flawed by insanity, as if the stress of war had overcome the power of innocence to cause this mental reversal. The fool is an ironic figure through whose voice de la Mare can freely and indirectly convey his disgust of the War without fear of being labelled unpatriotic.[4] Because it is indirect, "Motley" is more successful than the other war poems in the volume, "Happy England" and "The Marionettes," but by using a persona encountered by most readers in Shakespeare, Motley is put into an unfavourable comparison with Touchstone and the Fool in *King Lear*. Unlike the mad prince in *Peacock Pie*, "Motley" does not evoke associations with any play; rather, he is a generalized, traditional figure of divine madness (Welsford 75, 243). And as we have seen previously, de la Mare tends to be weaker when dealing with generalities.

The poem begins with the fool gathering around him an audience of personified abstractions of death, innocence, love, and pity. This specified audience is formed of an unlikely mix of opposites, but the unspecified audience, although clearly different, is more ambiguous. In the course of the poem, it becomes apparent that mankind, the subject of the work, is also the ultimate audience. Thereby, de la Mare intends to jolt the reader with the realization that the "hideous listener" Motley fears will indiscriminately spread his "dark" "secrets" is not death but ourselves. By describing death as lacking sense organs, ("no ears hath") Motley suggests that it does not possess the means to initiate or implement mass destruction but is only mankind's gruesome agent.

"Motley" defines innocence and evil in de la Mare's universe by contrasting men at war with the figure of the fool. Motley's visionary song portrays the soldiers in the trenches; these men are effectively depersonalized by the diction since they are referred to as the bodies they will become:

> They are all at war!--
> Yes, yes, their bodies go
> 'Neath burning sun and icy star

To chaunted songs of woe,
Dragging cold cannon through a mire
Of rain and blood and spouting fire,
The new moon glinting hard on eyes
Wide with insanities! (*CP* 208)

The stark contrast of the tactile and visual images: hot, cold, day, and night suggest by compression both the duration and inhumanity of war, since the soldiers drag their bodies through the mud the same way they do the cannon. Nevertheless, by attempting to elevate this picture through generalized terms and archaic language, any graphic impact is blurred.

Somewhat more effective is Motley's detailed description of madness which is an attempt to explain why humanity is behaving in such a barbarous way:

Nay, but a dream I had
Of a world all mad
Not simple happy mad like me,
Who am mad like an empty scene
Of water and willow tree,
Where the wind hath been;
But that foul Satan-mad,
Who rots in his own head,
And counts the dead,
Not honest one--and two--
But for the ghosts they were,
Brave, faithful, true,
When, head in air,
In Earth's clear green and blue
Heaven they did share
With beauty who bade them there .. (*CP* 209)

The pattern of contrast established when the audience was divided into two camps now becomes the organizing principle as the fool sets his kind of innocent madness against the Satan-madness of war. The fool's own madness, which he likens to a tranquil pastoral scene, is simple in the medieval sense of being pure or undivisible; Satan-madness is a putrid life-in-death existence populated with ghosts. These are not just phantoms but the essence of the soldiers, their breath or spirit (Hall 148). The bitter irony is that men idealistically go to war to have their souls become the trophies of

Satan (Bonnerot 135).[5] "Motley" thereby establishes a disquieting parallelism between humanity and Satan, for when at war, we act with perverted insanity, twisting our abstract ideals and qualities of bravery, faithfulness, and truth into an obscene counting game that we cannot win.

As mentioned, the primary focus in *Motley* is on ordinary, experienced man, a typical poem featuring an adult intent not only on exploring the nature of life on earth but also gaining access to the other world. Sometimes, this double striving makes him feel he is living in "an endless war 'twixt contrarieties" ("Vain Questionings"). Other times, when in a happier, more confident mood, he can dimly sense that the interplay between opposing tendencies enables him to have a fuller appreciation of life.[6] The speaker of "Music" believes this when he listens to music, for music transforms this world into the other world. The first stanza reads:

> When music sounds, gone is the earth I know,
> And all her lovely things even lovelier grow;
> Her flowers in vision flame, her forest trees
> Lift burdened branches, stilled with ecstasies. (*CP* 199)

Specifically, the listener can mentally detach himself from everyday life, temporarily achieving unity with his pre-existent soul: "When music sounds, all that I was I am / Ere to this haunt of brooding dust I came."[7] These transporting moods enable man to experience natural beauty as it is, and not dwell, as is customary, on its transitory aspect (as in the beautiful "Linnet" or the dedicatory "Fare Well")[8]

To express this situation, the exile becomes the dominant image for the adult in *Motley* and many poems are expressions of this perspective. Because he is capable of self-analysis, the adult realizes that his spiritual situation is paradoxical: he is both a prisoner and an exile. He is a prisoner in the platonic sense of his soul being caged by the body ("The Cage"), but he is an exile because his soul is prevented by this heavy, mundane body from returning home ("The Flight"). Moreover, he understands that this personal situation is a microcosm of mankind's relation to the universe, as expressed in

the last stanza of "Nocturne":

> Lost in heaven's vague, the stars burn softly through
> The world's dark latticings, we prisoned stray
> Within its lovely labyrinth, and know
> Mute seraphs guard the way
> Even from silence unto speech, from love
> To that self's self it still is dreaming of. (*CP* 201)

Appropriately, the fullest and most powerful expression of this theme occurs in "The Exile:"

> 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.
>
> Oh, from wide circuit, shall at length I see
> Pure daybreak lighten again on Eden's tree?
> Loosed from remorse and hope and love's distress,
> Enrobe me again in my lost nakedness?
> No more with worldless grief a loved one grieve,
> But to Heaven's nothingness re-welcome Eve? (*CP* 201)

When set against the brief "Exile" in *The Listeners*, analysed in chapter three, the sophistication and self-conscious awareness of the speaker of "The Exile" becomes apparent. Both poems recount the same expulsion myth, but within different contexts, the former using generalized terms while the latter is specifically Biblical. Unlike the immature speaker of the first poem, Adam accepts responsibility for his fall, for instead of vaguely blaming the gods, he recapitulates the expulsion clearly and succinctly. Nor, unlike the other figure, does he accept his fate passively. Rather than allowing memory to make him miserable, he tries not to dwell on the past or on his present condition but imaginatively projects himself forward to a time when he will be able to retrieve his lost innocence. By expressing this position and by showing loving forgiveness for his partner, Adam demonstrates that he has achieved a measure of wisdom. His realization that he must wait for God's grace to re-enter Eden indicates

additional knowlec . Even the balanced form in which his speech is presented suggests that although he may never regain paradise, the symmetrical beauty of the expression of his hope can serve as a sustaining force in itself.

The clean formal opposition of the sestet adds dignity to Adam's speech, the first stanza chronologically presenting his account of a "paradise lost," while the second stanza similarly describes a hypothetical "paradise regained." The verbal shifts emphasize this contrast. The statement of fact in the first stanza is presented in natural order to parallel Adam's active role in the fall. The speculations are in inverted order appropriate to the interrogative mode, but they also indicate his inability to free himself from his conflicting emotions. Only God, the unnamed doer, can perform this.

While the speaker of "The Exile" is the biblical Adam, he is also modern man, as the switch to the present tense at the end of the first stanza indicates: "Betrayed and fugitive, I still must roam / A world where sin, and beauty, whisper of Home." This double identification is reinforced by his modern diction and sophisticated manner of talking which addresses a contemporary reader at an equal level. At the same time, Adam's speech reveals his own personality, for he uses language with a full awareness of its denotative and connotative aspects. For example, by describing Eve as "piteous," he refers to both her crucial act of succumbing to the snake and her need for pity. By calling the angel's trumpetings "brazen," ironically he suggests not only the instrument's harsh sound, but also, by transferring the adjective onto the angel, implies he detects impudence on its part. Adam thereby reveals his imperfections, for he still resents the harsh way they were expelled.

Adam's speech also indicates a tendency to metaphysical wit. As seen above, he plays with the various levels of meanings of words, turning description into symbols. Appropriately, this occurs more in the second stanza where he is imagining a return home. In the undressing and dressing images, he uses paradox to suggest a physical

taking-off of worldly, experienced feelings, so he is left covered only by original, simple innocence (Bonnerot 411-412). When this paradoxical state has been achieved by God's grace (for in Heaven there are no opposites, just unity), Adam will be able to stand with God and greet his beloved.

Adam's depiction of their current state, however, is provocative and ambiguous. While the version in *Complete Poems* is based on the *Collected Poems* of 1942, the first edition of the poem reads "wordless grief" (31). Both terms signify different aspects of de la Mare's thought. While the first version, "wordless," ties in with his belief that deep emotions or profound thoughts defy verbal expression, the revised "worldless" encapsulates both the state of exile and the return. Paradoxically, Adam and Eve will continue to belong to no world. Even if they do achieve a return "home" it will not be to their former Eden but to a formless heaven, a "nothingness." Both versions are effective, the original is a poignant expression emphasizing the distress of the exiles, the revision is more interesting intellectually, showing the extent of Adam's awareness that their hypothetical return would be to an altered existence.

As can be seen, "The Exile" expands de la Mare's treatment of humanity. Formerly, the focus had been on a solitary being, now it shifts to man in conjunction with another, usually his beloved. Indeed, the lover is the other main image for experienced man in *Motley*. This figure is significant because it presents the main way the waking adult can break through his limited existence as a solitary wanderer and achieve a new unity with someone else. Unfortunately, in a number of these poems, de la Mare reverts to his earlier tendency to imitate literary styles, here, that of the Elizabethan and Metaphysical love poems. In "Alone," for instance, the conventions of Elizabethan love song are used, for in a nonce stanza form the lover complains that his world has died because his beloved is absent. Or the lover may use the conventions of a Petrarchan lover, speaking of a "secret world" of two ("Moonlight"). As Richard Smith notes, in "Life," a Donne-like phrase, "Love's infidel" is used (96).

Fortunately, this derivative tendency is undercut by the more positive one toward a more naturalized, modern tone and diction. This has been seen in "The Exile," where modern language couches an ancient myth. Similarly, in "The Unchanging," simple, direct language is placed in an unusual relation to create an exquisite love poem:

> After the songless rose of evening,
> Night quiet, dark, still,
> In nodding cavalcade advancing
> Starred the deep hill:
> You, in the valley standing,
> In your quiet wonder took
> All that glamour, peace, and mystery
> In one grave look
> Beauty hid your naked body,
> Time dreamed in your bright hair,
> In your eyes the constellations
> Burned far and fair (*CP* 201-02)

"The Unchanging" can be seen as an answer to the questions posed in "The Exile" about when Adam and Eve will be re-welcomed home. By coming immediately after the previous poem and by using the same unusual detail of nakedness, it seems plausible that the speaker is Adam and the subject, addressee, and audience is Eve. "The Unchanging" captures the moment of quiet after making love when the couple is "enrobed" only in their nakedness. Paradoxically, their sexual relation enables them to know eternal love, to fleetingly capture absolute peace and unity. This possibility of recapturing primal innocence is also suggested by the terms used to depict the woman looking at the night: "quiet wonder" and a "grave look," these phrases usually being reserved to describe the innocent apprehension of children.[9]

Of course, "The Unchanging" can just as well be spoken by any man to his lover when their love-making has momentarily transformed the woman into an incarnation of beauty. Because the quiet, gentle tone of the poem is itself a caress, the speaker does not have to address the woman as beloved. Moreover, though the past tense indicates this moment of transformation has passed, by presenting the nude woman in the

context of the nocturnal cycle, the repeatability of the state is implied. This provides hope for mankind that although love-making is transient, love itself can be continuous.

All the components of the poem work together to create a unified impression. Just as the speaker transforms his mortal lover into a timeless symbol, the imagery, structure, and versification fuse contraries together, defying logic, perspective, time, and space. The poem begins with an evocative description of approaching night, the opening metaphor "songless rose" expressing both the colour of the sunset and the fleeting beauty of the world.[10] "Nodding cavalcade advancing," in line 3, moves beyond conventional symbols to suggest by compression three ideas at once: the gradual coming out of the stars, the dignified movement of a procession of horses, and the action of falling off asleep (Kirkham 118). In the next lines, the imagery ceases to be literally descriptive as it is depicting physical impossibilities. How can night star a hill, and would the woman not be completely dwarfed by the valley? In the first, the context establishes that "hill" stands for the "sky" or the eternal heavens, therefore, just as hill and valley are opposites, valley must represent earth or mortal existence as in the biblical sense "valley of the shadow of death" (R. Smith 98). The second statement is not so immediately clear.

The second half of the poem joins the small, concrete, mortal woman with the immense, abstract, and timeless. The speaker revivifies the traditional, fantastic comparisons that the lover makes about his beloved through the originality of his expression. "I took / All that glamour, peace, and mystery / In one grave look" (ll.6-8) encompasses both the active idea of "captured" or taking possession of and "took in" in the passive sense of being the receiver of sense impressions. The parallel structure of the prepositional phrases, all beginning with "in," suggests plural interpretations of the ambiguous ninth line "Beauty hid your naked body." Just as in the previous lines, the woman has absorbed the "glamour, peace, and mystery" of the night; here, she is connected with the idea of "Beauty," but instead of taking this abstract into herself, she

is protected by it. Yet at the same time, the parallel statements also imply "hid in": that she similarly contains the abstract idea within herself (Kirkham 118). If this is so, then the other fantastic qualities could also be possessed by her, as time sleeping in her hair. Ultimately, she thereby comes to embody the beauty and far-off mystery of the constellations.

The form and versification continue to play with contraries, creating and then resolving tension into a perfect balance or poise. Presented as a twelve-line stanza, the poem is broken by punctuation into three main thoughts. This tripartite structure is reinforced by the grouping of three tetrameter lines followed by a trimeter, although interlocking rhyme prevents the poem's fracture by joining the first and second and second and third quatrains together. This unifying force is enhanced by the repeated parallel structure and by the sustained euphony of the texture.

"The Unchanging" exemplifies the height of de la Mare's symbolic mode. It is a self-contained poetic universe in that it re-defines the symbolic associations of its terms, and follows the logic of the accumulation of imagery rather than the syntax. Moreover, its poise seems effortless, achieved by a marrying of contraries or identification of opposites in both small and large aspects (Kirkham 115, 119, 122). At the same time, the smooth transition from literal to symbolic account, whereby the scene and the woman appear to be at once actual and representational, and the more ordinary diction suggest new stylistic directions in de la Mare's poetry. Similarly, the focus has moved. Although poems featuring the fantastic for its own sake will occasionally appear, the emphasis has shifted permanently onto humanity and the world we inhabit.

(11)

The Veil

In contrast to the exiled figure in *Motley*, who could still imagine a return to

paradise and even approximate the state under certain conditions, as making love or listening to music, in *The Veil*, the exile has lost any freedom of movement beyond this world. The former four-world poetic universe has thereby shrivelled to two. The adult figures exist in bleak, isolated circumstances; music now only brings powerful, painful memories of lost love, and hope of an otherworldly counterpart now seems to be an illusion ("Music," The Monologue"). Sleep, in innocence a visionary state and later a welcome release, now eludes him. In "Gallias," for instance, the experienced but unwise exiled speaker asks the futile question of how he will recognize sleep before it has come. But if sleep does come and the exile dreams, he is only baffled by his aborted visit to the other world ("The Unfinished Dream"). Because of this severely contracted universe and the bleakness in the perspective of the experienced figure, *The Veil* forms an apt conclusion to de la Mare's early period

Among these experienced figures mentioned above, the poet begins to emerge as a central focus, although in the negative light of a blocked writer. Many times these presentations have an urgent, personalized slant, as if de la Mare is sharing his own feelings and worries The first two poems of the volume, "The Imp Within" and "The Old Angler," set the tone. The former dramatizes an uneven relationship between the poet and his daemon, for the otherworldly voice that speaks the poem, instead of providing inspiration, cruelly mocks the poet about his creative sterility and his futile attempts to write. "The Old Angler" is an allegory about an even bleaker predicament, for when the old fisherman is fooled by the Naiad into letting her go free, he is left, "insensate, even of hope forsook" with the sound of "mocking, icy, inhuman" laughter echoing in his ears (*CP* 228)

This new theme of loss of visionary power is elaborated in different ways. In "The Familiar," the poet and his daemon are confined to contrasting worlds or levels of existence, thick clouds and rain squalls preventing any effective communication between them (CP 250). "Awake" is the fullest articulation of the poet's dilemma and

is from the perspective of the earth-bound figure. Despite its archaisms, it powerfully describes the speaker's desperation about his condition:

> Why hath the rose faded and fallen, yet these eyes have not seen?
> Why hath the bird sung shrill in the tree--and this mind deaf
> and cold?
> Why have the rains of summer veiled her flowers with their sheen
> And this black heart untold?
>
> Here is calm Autumn now, the woodlands quake,
> And, where this splendour of death lies under the tread,
> The spectre of frost will stalk, and a silence make,
> And snow's white shroud be spread
>
> O self! O self! Wake from thy common sleep!
> Fling off the destroyer's net He hath blinded and bound thee.
> In nakedness sit, pierce thy stagnation, and weep;
> Or corrupt in thy grave--all Heaven around thee. (*CP* 240)

After two rather pedestrian stanzas, the poet-speaker rouses himself to make a stinging self-appraisal. By labelling his state "common sleep," he ascribes his inner lethargy, which has shut out not only sensory impressions but also emotional reactions, to his conventional, habitualized way of responding to nature. Feeling trapped in a death-in-life state, he likewise believes himself cut off from the natural regenerative cycle. He realizes that ultimately his torpor will lead to death.

The violence with which the speaker utters his self-ultimatum conveys the urgency of his plight. He believes that somehow he has to cut through his cloak of lethargy to his naked self in order to feel anything fully again He also is afraid that if he cannot achieve this complete purging, he will rot "Corrupt" is an apt compression, conveying several ideas at once: the physical putrefaction of a body, the mental decomposition of perceptive power, and finally the concomitant loss of poetic ability.

By ordering himself to sit "in nakedness," the speaker is trying to regain full use of his senses, emotions, and talent This application of the term differs from that in *Motley* in that it now has a narrower meaning. Previously, primal innocence was achieved through sexual love; now, it is solely a mental state. In all instances it is the

antithesis of corruption, signifying purity, simplicity, and vitality, attributes earlier identified with childhood.

When de la Mare moves away from this new personalized approach to attempt impersonal, "realistic" topics, his bleakness of view and loss of poetic confidence cause several complete failures. "In the Dock," "The Suicide," and "Drugged" all deal with social issues, the first and third displaying a shocking lack of sensitivity.[11] The title poem, "The Veil," is equally dreadful for different reasons. Considering the bleakness of the volume as a whole, the title seems to be a platonic expression of what has happened to de la Mare's poetic gift, and indeed is stated elsewhere in the volume by the same image, whereby the poet figure is separated from his source of inspiration by "Stygian veils of fog" ("Fog", *CP* 242). Contrariwise, the poem itself is a flippant little piece about a woman wearing a veiled hat. It is trivial, but even worse, it is ponderous with a forced flirtatiousness. Its inappropriateness and its defeating of expectations in this crude way tends to reduce the reader's sympathy for the poet-figure's plight which de la Mare so painfully, and sometimes unsuccessfully, describes elsewhere.

A third kind of failure stems from this loss of poetic confidence and fear of blockage. Poetry of statement, which had begun to creep into *Motley* in "The Vacant Day," where the speaker's futile wish for God's presence undercuts any power caused by the descriptive details, now becomes more prominent. "A Riddle," for example, features a self-conscious speaker trapped within the arguing coils of his thought, but he tries to resolve this by settling for a simple, trite solution. The device of answering one unanswerable question with another, similarly destroys the specificity of the natural description. Unfortunately, when de la Mare tries to assume the uncongenial role of a philosopher, he only appears simplistic and hackneyed (R. Smith 104, 106-07).

Despite these problems, *The Veil* also exhibits positive tendencies. As mentioned, a new personalized stance is beginning to emerge, a brave position, for the self-portrait is not at all flattering. (For more of this type of poem see "The

Catechism," "Soto Voce," "Futility," and "The Wanderer.") Perhaps as a result of these sobering self-assessments, a new poise, distanced, ironic, but yet compassionate, is beginning to appear. "Hospital" is a good example of this kind of poem:[12]

> Welcome! Enter! This is the Inn at the Cross Roads,
> Sign of the *Rising Sun*, of the *World's End*:
> Ay, O Wanderer, footsore, weary, forsaken,
> Knock, and we will open unto thee--Friend
>
> Gloomy our stairs of stone, obscure the portal;
> Burdened the air with a breath from the further shore;
> Yet in our courtyard plays an invisible fountain,
> Ever flowers unfading nod at the door.
>
> Ours is much company, and yet none is lonely,
> Some with a smile may pay and some with a sigh,
> So all be healed, restored, contented--it is no matter,
> So all be happy at heart to bid good-bye
>
> But know, our clocks are the world's, Night's wings are leaden,
> Pain languidly sports with the hours, have courage, sir!
> We wake but to bring thee slumber, our drowsy syrups
> Sleep beyond dreams on the weary will confer
>
> Ghosts may be ours, but gaze thou not too closely
> If haply in chill of the dark thou rouse to see
> One silent of foot, hooded, and hollow of visage,
> Pause, with secret eyes, to peer out at thee.
>
> He is the Ancient Tapster of this Hostel,
> To him at length even we all keys must resign,
> And if he beckon, Stranger, thou too must follow--
> Love and all peace be thine (*CP* 237)

Because "Hospital" shares features of both the early symbolic style as well as the later conversational method, it may be viewed as a "Cross Roads" in de la Mare's career. Moreover, it is an effective experiment in combining strains elsewhere deployed with only partial success. It evokes the medieval period by using an allegorical setting and addressing an "everyman" pilgrim figure. The poem is a dramatic monologue by a "Hospital" worker to everyone who comes by, but instead of revealing himself, the speaker remains as anonymous as the listener. The focus remains on the place itself. The poem defines hospital in a new way by conflating both

ancient and modern meanings of the term, thereby, both an inn or hostel where travellers stay and a place for sick people to receive care. Its location at the "Cross Roads" and its allegorical sign of the *"Rising Sun, of the World's End"* suggest it is on the border between this world and the other world, life and death.[13]

The speaker begins by focusing on the otherworldly aspects of the inn. In stanza two, he mentions its frightening or negative qualities, for it is dark, gloomy, and smells of death. This is balanced by a description of the eternal flowers and invisible fountain outside in the courtyard. It appears then, that as an inn or hostel it combines the contrary characteristics of the other world, for it can be either terrifying or peaceful. Yet the inn is also a temporal hospital where the patient must endure the slow passing of time when suffering from pain and be wakened only to be given sleeping medicine. But these "drowsy syrups" have ambiguous qualities, the patient may attain a deep, dreamless sleep, but this sleep may also be death.

The conventional characterization of Death in the last two quatrains of the poem receives a slight twist in the final stanza. By personifying it as the "Ancient Tapster" or barkeeper/owner of the inn, the original meaning of hospital is emphasized. By informing the "wanderer" that Death takes all (room) keys indiscriminately, the audience is expanded to include the speaker and the reader. This image of Death as the holder of keys recalls that in "The Keys of Morning" (1912), where a child sees death in a shadow holding two golden keys in his hand. These images in turn recall the Biblical idea of the keys of death being the means to enter the Kingdom of Heaven (Fulghum 142). This allusion thereby reinforces the depiction earlier in the poem of a gloomy inside leading to a protected courtyard outside, where the frightening interior is only a passage to paradise.

The formal features of "Hospital" are all integrated toward its total effect. The persona is maintained with apparent effortlessness, the numerous archaisms and poeticisms reinforcing the period atmosphere. Even the inversions, which sometimes

appear habitual elsewhere in the volume, here add an archaic-sounding verisimilitude to the speaker's voice. These features of the diction, along with the figurative language, suit the poem's allegorical nature, placing it in an early time, when travellers set out on foot on pilgrimages, and in no time, the reader being included in the "everyman" wanderer to whom the poem is addressed.

The speaker is formally polite to his potential customer/patient. He keeps his distance yet offers advice in a friendly spirit, even stopping his monologue when necessary to reassure the nervous listener and including himself at the end of the speech. This final reduction of distance between the speaker and audience is appropriate to the traditional presentation of death as the "great leveller," but also characterizes the speaker as a sympathetic individual.

On the frontier of this world and the other world, life and death, temporal and eternal existence, "Hospital" locates in a physical landscape one of de la Mare's most enduring themes.[14] The figure of the weary wanderer recalls early narrative poems like "The Pilgrim" (1902) and "The Journey" (1912) where the elemental war between innocence and evil is being continually waged. The presentation here is more sophisticated, instead of a loose narrative a more compressed dramatic form suggests, not states, its literary affinities. At the same time, "Hospital" points forward to later works. The characterization of the speaker as an ordinary man will be used in later conversational poems with allegorical tendencies where de la Mare identifies himself with the speaker. The narrative thread will completely disappear, but the symbols will have a personalized allegorical slant to them. (For instance, see the "The Two Gardens" and "The Burning-Glass" 1945, the latter analysed in chapter six.) The compassionate but detached perspective of the speaker forecasts the evolution of a more ordinary-sounding voice, in "Hospital" the quiet tone being enhanced by the longer, more conversational line length. Exploiting the play between opposing tendencies within the controlling image similarly prefigures the dynamic balance

between contrary worlds which will be a feature of the mature poetry.

Although "Hospital" is in many ways a "Cross Roads" between the early and late styles, the symbolic mode has not disappeared, "Goodbye," "A Sign," and "Maerchen" all being good examples of this dense image-organized technique. "Maerchen" is especially noteworthy because it triumphantly defeats several weak tendencies. De la Mare's new heightened self-consciousness, mainly seen in its debilitating aspects in *The Veil*, is here transformed into a dazzling instrument of play. Like "The Song of the Mad Prince," it is a riddle-game. Just as with the earlier poem, a range of possible interpretations may or may not exist, ranging from the serious and profound to the silly and amusing (Perkins 182). But unlike the former poem, "Maerchen" does not recall a particular literary work; it rather points generally toward a literary world. the folk tale world with its lighter burden of associations and suggestions. Although no specific tale is implied, this normally devitalizing aspect is also transformed into an asset. Unlike "The Sleeping Beauty" in *Songs of Childhood*, (discussed in chapter two), which is simply a remote picture-book illustration, "Maerchen" evokes the mysterious essence of the folk-world:

> Soundless the moth-flit, crisp the death-watch tick,
> Crazed in her shaken arbour bird did sing,
> Slow wreathed the grease adown from soot-clogged wick:
> The Cat looked long and softly at the King.
>
> Mouse frisked and scampered, leapt, gnawed, squeaked;
> Small at the window looped cowled bat a-wing,
> The dim-lit rafters with the night-mist reeked:
> The Cat looked long and softly at the King
>
> O wondrous robe enstarred, in night dyed deep
> O air scarce-stirred with the Court's far junketing.
> O stagnant Royalty--A-swoon? Asleep?
> The Cat looked long and softly at the King (*CP* 251)

Appropriately, "Maerchen" conjures up the world of fairy tales, but the relationship between the speaker and this realm is ambiguous. At the beginning of the poem, he seems aloof from the scene, but in the last stanza he formally addresses

rhetorical questions to the king, eliminating the distance between himself and his subject. The question then arises of whom this voice belongs to: is he an overly-involved reader trying to enter the fairy tale world, or is he part of the scene itself?

The imagery forms a pattern of opposition and contrast, intense, overladen images of mortality in the first two stanzas being set against a suggestion of eternity in the last (Kirkham 119). Natural imagery dominates over the artificial, each type being powerfully evoked by a single sensuous detail, be it visual, auditory, olfactory, or tactile. Each particular is juxtaposed with the next to form an alternating pattern of motion and sound being contrasted with stillness and quiet. This accumulation in the first two stanzas is overpowering and disturbing, so overdone that the suspicion arises that it is deliberately so, the "creepiness" enjoyable and to be relished for its own sake (Kirkham 120).

Moreover, the emphasis on certain of the natural images raises questions about the speaker's perspective. Why do a bird, mouse, and bat all warrant a full line of description each? Moreover, why do they lack definite articles, unlike the moth or death-watch beetle, as if they were being named? The refrain contains the solution to this puzzle. At first it appears to be only partly related to the body of the work, the presence of the king explaining the setting. But the presence of the cat is not obvious, nor is the elevation of both words by capitals. It seems then, that the common adage about ordinary people versus royalty is unconnected, joined primarily by the "logic" of the rhyme. As will be seen, on the contrary, the refrain is actually a powerful unifying force.

In opposition to the imagery in the body of "Maerchen," the cat and king are always still and quiet. The mortality images of the first part of the poem suggest one set of interpretations, raising the possibility that the king is either asleep or dead. Is the cat thereby the murderer or is it just about to spring? Indeed, the shift in syntax from primarily inverted order to natural order in the last stanza could reinforce this

horrific interpretation, the gradual unwinding suggesting the movement of the cat. Moreover, if this line of speculation is followed, how can the final stanza be understood? Because the king's robe blends into the night sky, is he a symbol for the god of night, even God himself? Does the cat thereby represent the ordinary mortal, and does this murderous act have any political or religious overtones? It is apparent that these ever-expanding symbolic interpretations ultimately become ludicrous.[15]

Remembering fairy tales and common lore will stop this tendency. In this world, cats are of great benefit to all mankind. Although not "maerchen," in that they are not of German origin, several common folk tales like "Puss in Boots" and "Dick Wittington" feature magical cats who help their masters improve their lot in life.[16] If the speaker of this poem is identified with such a cat, all the ever-expanding convolutions of interpretation will collapse, and the unusual emphasis on the natural images and the overladen atmosphere will be explained. If the poem is read as being from the cat's perspective, it is only expected that his natural prey--birds, mice, and bats--be given special emphasis. This magical cat may be able to perform heroic feats for his owner, while always keeping a protective eye on him, but he is still an animal with acute senses and instincts. Because he is an animal, he is therefore innocent of man's ways, so he wonders about the trappings and behaviour of royalty, accounting for what Kirkham calls the "breathless yearning" of the apostrophes (120). Similarly, this innocent interpretation resolves certain nagging problems with the diction. "Junketing" and "stagnant" in the third stanza, which are incongruous in a serious interpretation, now become appropriate to the voice of a detached and articulate feline balladeer.

If this interpretation is followed, and the poem seen as being from the perspective of such a cat, it effectively evokes the heightened, simplistic world of the fairy tale, although it may be a bit overblown and unsophisticated for adult tastes. It seems that such a sophisticated reader has been deliberately fooled in "Maerchen," for

he has been given a false set of clues to explore, so he ultimately makes an absurd interpretation. By implication, an innocent reader would not have noticed these but taken the poem at face value and come directly to the same interpretation that the experienced one must acquire circuitously.

This self-conscious use of diction, the self-awareness of the simple refrain, and the imitative quality of the metre in the opening line all indicate an amused awareness by the poet of the overladen effects he is presenting (Kirkham 120). Indeed, this self-reflexive aspect of the technique makes it a subtle commentary on the fairy tale scene it presents. By exploiting a self-awareness of his craft to the degree that he can manipulate a reader's interpretations, de la Mare shows he is able to turn around the negative tide of his self-consciousness. By directing it toward an innocent world, he provides himself with a possible means to extricate himself from the coils of his warring thoughts and feelings and perhaps once again create an expansive poetic universe.

Accordingly, the next phase of the poetry, *The Fleeting* (1933) and *Memory* (1938), will explore various ways to reconnect with childhood innocence and with the spontaneous imaginative activity associated with it. The contrast between the two ways of reading "Maerchen," whereby the sophisticated reader must labour to discover a straightforward interpretation, now symbolizes two irreconcilable approaches to life in de la Mare's self-pitying times, as expressed in "In a Library." But fortunately these regressive, self-indulgent moments are rare. Rather, he becomes progressively more interested in the paradoxical means by which an experienced, alert, and self-aware adult can learn from childhood and children how to mature even more. While he is doing so, de la Mare is also experimenting with new vehicles of expression to replace the intense symbolic mode. The poems of this transitional period are the result of these honest and sometimes profound self-explorations.

Chapter 5: Transitional Period: *Poems for Children* (1930), *The Fleeting*(1933), *Poems 1919-1934* (1935), and *Memory* (1938).

Between the publication of *The Veil* (1921) and *The Fleeting* (1933), de la Mare published only miscellaneous poems, with the exception of an experiment in combining short stories and poetry in *Ding Dong Bell* (1924) and in composing nonsense verse in *Stuff and Nonsense* (1927). For the most part, he was turning his attention to other facets of his literary career, especially the short stories and nonfiction. In the 1930s he returned to his poetry, in addition to all his other activities as an esteemed man of letters. He produced collected editions of his previous works containing a few new poems each, *Poems for Children* (1930) and *Poems 1919-1934* (1935), but the major volumes of the period are *The Fleeting* (1933) and *Memory* (1938). They mark a transitional phase in the poetry because they result from de la Mare's search for an effective medium to replace the symbolic mode that he now felt uncomfortable with. As a result, these volumes contain extremes of form, some very long narrative or essayistic pieces and some extremely brief descriptive works, and exhibit a tendency to talk about experience instead of re-creating it (Kirkham 124; R. Smith 319). Despite these problems, both volumes provide a clear record of how an unemotional, self-aware, experienced adult can again expand his universe beyond this world and regain access to spontaneous imaginative activity by reforging a link with lost childhood innocence. Sometimes this preoccupation frees de la Mare from the tendency to overwrite, so he can assume a more natural-sounding persona.

The emphasis on an intellectual and spiritual quest forces the adult figure in *The Fleeting* to mature beyond the presentation in *Motley* and *The Veil*. Although he still exists solely in a state of "wild banishment" ("The Visionary"), he no longer blames anyone else, as did Adam in "The Exile," or makes frantic ultimatums about his state, as did the speaker of "Awake." He is still occasionally self-pitying, dwelling on his

situation somewhat. But he is clearly beginning to learn from his experiences, questioning his selfish actions ("The Captive"), taking responsibility for his behaviour, and realizing that he has the ability to determine whether his life will be positive or negative ("Self to Self"). By starting to take control of his own life, the adult figure gains the ability to look more objectively at himself and to realize that anxiety is a neurosis which saps all his energy, preventing him from regaining harmony with nature ("Dreams").

Because the adult is more accepting of his condition and therefore less egocentric, he can now turn to other aspects of life. Nature becomes a release from selfhood, as the adult contemplates the "universal innocence" of the sky ("The Fleeting"), tries to understand and share the essence of a flower ("The Snowdrop"), or enjoys the beauty of nature in all its aspects ("The Spark") Usually it is the tiny and ordinary, not the gigantic and unusual, that draws the figure's attention. The better poems capture the essence of the microcosm in a few, brief strokes, as in the conclusion to "A Robin:"

> Changeling and solitary,
> Secret and sharp and small,
> Flits he from tree to tree,
> Calling on all. (*CP* 318)

Just as frequently as he is found alone in nature, the adult is placed with other people, not just close family members but friends (as in "To K.M.") and strangers ("The Railway Station"). The gaze remains outward as in the nature poems, the self being considered only in context with them. A new maturity is apparent from the speaker's perspective, for he does not smugly judge the other people or compare himself to them but simply observes and reflects. As a result, the adult can once again pursue quiet, solitary means to re-enter the other world as dreaming and being with children. The detachment with which these avenues are explored in the poems suggests that de la Mare has a theoretical as well as personal interest in these subjects.

Indeed, he considered these two to be the major means of access to the other world, composing in this period two critical anthologies, *Early One Morning* (1935) about children and *Behold, This Dreamer* (1939) about the imagination

Unfortunately, there is a sharp discrepancy between those poems written in a child voice as opposed to those with a child as subject. Two examples of the former, "Peeping Tom" and "Tom's Angel," have a new laboured quality to the speaker's voices that makes them sound precious. It is as if the self-consciousness that crippled numerous poems in *The Veil* prevents a complete assumption of the child mask. In "Peeping Tom" the sexual innuendo of the title is inappropriate and distasteful since the speaker is clearly a small child, even though the opening line "I was there--by the curtains" does suggest an unhealthy, vicarious interaction with life. Rather, the poem concerns the recurring theme of an innocent child watching a manifestation of death and not understanding it.

Those poems about children filtered through an adult perspective, "A Slum Child," "Lucy," "A Young Girl," and "The Glance," all have more natural sounding speakers. "A Young Girl" presents an adult and child together, the speaker highlighting their contrast:

> I search in vain your childlike face to see
> The thoughts that hide behind the words you say;
> I hear them singing, but close-shut from me
> Dream the enchanted woods through which they stray.
> Cheek, lip, and brow--I glance from each to each,
> And watch that light-winged Mercury, your hand;
> And sometimes when brief silence falls on speech
> I seem your hidden self to understand.
>
> Mine a dark fate. Behind his iron bars
> The captive broods, with ear and heart a-strain
> For jangle of key, for glimpse of moon or stars,
> Grey shaft of daylight, sighing of the rain.
> Life built these walls Past all my dull surmise
> Must burn the inward innocence of your eyes. (*CP* 306)

Unlike the earlier pompous sonnet imitations in *Poems* (1906), in "A Young

Girl" the tendencies to archaic or poetic language and grammatical inversion are brought under control. They are no longer used for picturesque effects, but serve distinct functions within the poem. The first becomes a means to characterize the speaker. Because he becomes slightly emotional when he talks about the girl, he makes a hyperbole about the speed with which she gesticulates when talking, calling her hand a "light-winged Mercury." Similarly, he gets carried away when he talks about his own state, poetically seeing himself as a captive "a-strain" against bars. Inversion is used for contrast. In the octave about the child, the main clauses are in natural order, inversions being used for emphasis in the dependent clauses to suggest the separateness of her world from the speaker's. In the sestet on the adult, the main clauses are inverted, their tortuousness causing a slowing of elocution to reflect his plight.

The poem indicates a mastering of the sonnet by the unobtrusive way the formal constraints are exploited, so the overall impression is of immediate, unplanned thought (Fussell 30, 120, 128). Throughout, medial caesuras and enjambment loosen the flow of the lines to infuse an informal movement within the strict shape. In the first stanza, the unpredictable placement of the caesura approximates the pattern of speech, while the flowing movement parallels the freedom of the child's imaginative world. In the second stanza, the predictability of the medial caesura chops up the line, making them even more laborious to read, reproducing the action of the prisoner. The structural imbalance between the octave and sestet reflects the relative importance of the two subjects, the final couplet forcing the slightly self-indulgent speaker to return to the main topic of the child. In this way, the speaker incorporates the sonnet's formal constraints into his thought process, ultimately using the rigours of the shape as a self-corrective for his emotional speech.

To underscore the opposing worlds of the child and adult, contrast is the controlling design, as platonic images of free/captive and light/dark are used to

describe their respective states. These express key beliefs of de la Mare about the nature of childhood and the limitations of speech, as well as providing an unflattering portrait of the adult speaker.[1] In the octave, the conventional depiction of childhood freedom is turned into an account of the adult's frustrations in trying to understand the child's talk. Because she inhabits an innocent world which he can no longer enter, her speech paradoxically seems to hide, not reveal, her true self. The adult hears only the sounds of her words but cannot interpret them. Conversely, he feels that he comes closest to understanding her when she is silent and he can use his intuition.[2] Successful silent communion between equals has been seen in "The Unchanging," (analysed in chapter four), but now the impossible effort of bridging the gap between an innocent child and experienced adult is being drawn. Like the adult speaker of "The Snowdrop" who vainly attempts to share the consciousness of a flower, this too must fail, but the supreme effort by the speaker momentarily takes him out of his self-preoccupation.

In the sestet, the adult describes his life, elaborating the platonic image of the captive at some length, to present a depressed, stressful, futile existence of sensory deprivation-- the opposite of the child's. The speaker's relatively elaborate detail indicates his self-pity. Furthermore, by providing specific images of his own existence but using only generalizations about the child's, he reveals the extent of his egocentricity. At the same time, the rather insipid conventional generalizations referring to the child illustrate his forthcoming point about being restricted to "dull surmise" about the child world.

The stringencies of the sonnet form force the speaker to leave his itemizing of his impoverished existence to provide a summary of both figures at the end of the poem. This is composed of two statements. The first is a generalization that balances the one opening the sestet. "Life built these walls" thereby parallels syntactically, by the medial full stops, "Mine a dark fate," their succinctness and terseness unemotionally expressing man's condition. More importantly, the latter indicates an

acceptance of the limitations of adult life. Moreover, because these statements envelop the self-pitying interval, they somewhat contain it, reducing its effect. The second part of the couplet is more stringent as the necessary brevity forces an encapsulated contrast between the two figures. The pun on "dull" sets off the private vitalism of childhood which cannot be encroached upon by speculating adults. By ending with a dynamic image of the child alone, without reference to himself, the speaker suggests that the forced intellectualization demanded by the sonnet form has proved self-corrective.

"Dreams," which concludes *The Fleeting*, is the stylistic opposite of "A Young Girl." It is the most sustained of a group of experiments in very long poems which occur at the end of the volume, the other two, "Heresy" and "The Owl," using dramatic and narrative forms respectively. It expresses key beliefs but in a somewhat rambling, digressive manner better suited to prose. Nevertheless, the final stanzas express these convictions in different ways. "Dreams" stresses the equal importance of the two alternate worlds of this world and the other world, as in "A Young Girl" locating the latter within the human being: "Two worlds have we, without; within." Although dichotomous, the components of these worlds, the senses, emotions, and spirit must work together in harmony to create an integrated self. The recurring platonic image of the imprisoned "timeless self" likewise appears. The knowledge it seeks is not the dichotomous knowledge of good and evil, but rather the unifying, purifying power of divine love, the poem suggesting that the dream state may enable man to gain this wisdom. The final stanza states what was only implied in the image of the burning eyes of the child in "A Young Girl:"

> When then in memory I look back
> To childhood's visioned hours I see
> What now my anxious soul doth lack
> Is energy in peace to be
> At one with nature's mystery:... (*CP* 353)

Although less powerful an expression, the pushing of the idea of the difference between child and adult to a logical conclusion indicates a new maturity in de la Mare's thought. The phrases combine Wordsworthian platonism with psychological insight, for by pinpointing the difference between anxious movement and peaceful energy, they reveal a subtle understanding of modern neurosis. The speaker's detached, analytical perspective indicates a new posture for the adult which likewise forecasts a new poise. In the stronger poems from this point on, this detached, almost clinical objectivity will be maintained whether the subject is personal or impersonal.

A group of different stylistic experiments are situated at the beginning of *The Fleeting*. These are attempts to extend the range of topics to encompass the tough and realistic, but fortunately, the callous perspective of "Drugged" and "In the Dock" from *The Veil* are not repeated. They either concern death or criticize the Grundyism of middle-class society, (the latter theme first appearing in "Mrs. Grundy" in *Motley*). Typically, the poems tend to be stronger when indirect, although in "Episodes" the ellipticism is carried so far that the relation between the stanzas is quite unclear. Two poems covertly expressing both themes are the most striking of the group: "The Feckless Dinner Party" and "In the Garden."

The first particularizes and modernizes the Vanity Fair theme, and is for the most part an effective, savage indictment of society life. The bulk of the work is carried by scraps of overheard frivolous conversation among the guests. It begins as follows:

> 'Who are we waiting for?' '*Soup* burnt?'...'Eight--'
> 'Only the tiniest party. --Us!'
> 'Darling! Divine!' 'Ten minutes late--'
> 'And my digest--' 'I'm *ravenous*!'
> '"Toomes"?'--'Oh, he's new.' 'Looks crazed, I guess.'
> '"Married"-- *Again*! 'Well; more or less!'
>
> 'Dinner is *served*!' '"Dinner is served"!'
> 'Is served?' 'Is served.' 'Ah, yes.'

Appropriate to its allegorical nature, the characters are types rather than individuals: Blanche Ogleton, Dr. Mallus, Delia Seek. Halfway through, what was supposed to be a dinner procession is revealed to be a descent into Hell:

> *'This* way?'...
>
> 'No, sir; straight on, please.' 'I'd have vowed!--
> I came the other...' ' It's queer; I'm, sure...'
> 'What frightful pictures!' 'Fiends!' 'The *crowd*!'
> 'Such nudes!' 'I can't endure...'
>
> 'Yes, *there* they go.' Heavens! *Are* we right?'
> 'Follow up closer!' '"Prout"?--sand-blind!'
> 'This endless ..' 'Who's turned down the light?'
> 'Keep calm! They're close behind.'
>
> 'Oh! Dr Mallus, what dismal stairs!'
> 'I hate these old Victor...' 'Dry rot!'
> 'Darker and darker!' 'Fog!' 'The air's . '
> 'Scarce breathable!' 'Hell!' *'What*?' .. .
>
> 'Sir Nathan!' *At*!' 'I *say*! *Toomes*!' Prout!'
> 'Where? 'Where?' ' Our silks and fine array". .'
> She's mad.' ' I'm dying!' 'Oh, Let me *out*!'
> 'My God! We've lost our way!'... (*CP* 281-82)

Unfortunately, the dramatic impact of these cleverly constructed conversational fragments is undercut by the conclusion. As if beset by insecurity with this elliptical form, de la Mare does not leave the poem at the effective climax with the guests realizing their fate, but appends a descriptive, explanatory stanza in the narrative voice of an observer.

"In the Garden" by contrast, is completely unified. A far gentler indictment of middle-class life, it is spoken by one of the participants, his diction suggesting that he is the minister of the group. The account of this polite parish gathering appears superficial but for the symbolic associations. On the one hand, the poem is a period vignette of genteel, English country life, on the other, it presents the elemental battle between man and nature, life and death:

A mild parochial talk was ours;
The air of afternoon was sweet
With burthen of the sun-parched flowers;
His fiery beams in fury beat
From out the O of space, and made,
Wherever leaves his glare let through,
Circlets of brilliance in the shade
Of his unfathomable blue.

Old Dr. Salmon sat pensive and grey,
And Archie's tongue was never still,
While dear Miss Arbuthnot fanned away
The stress of walking up the hill
And little Bertha?--how bony a cheek!
How ghast an eye! Poor mite. ..That pause--
When not even tactful tongues could speak!...
The drowsy Cat pushed out her claws.

A bland, unvexing talk was ours--
Sharing that gentle gilded cage--
Manners and morals its two brief hours
Proffered alike to youth and age.
Why break so pleasing a truce?--forfend!
Why on such sweetness and light intrude?
Why bid the child, 'Cough, *"Ah!"'* -- and end
Our complaisance; her solitude? (*CP* 275)

The tension between the surface and symbolic levels indicates the title is ironic, for man's feeble attempt to create an artificial paradise through society is undercut by the powerful cruelty of nature (Kirkham 129). One world is set off against the other. In the first stanza, a combination of tactile, olfactory, and visual imagery etch the fragile societal oasis being encroached upon by the fiery rays of the sun, the sun forcing its way through the protective foliage of the trees to cast circular impressions of itself on the ground. The bright sun and vivid blue sky are contrasted with the colourlessness of the humans in the second stanza: the grey Dr. Salmon and the child with her unnatural pallor.[3] For its part, the cat's actions of lazily pushing out its claws suggests the hidden power and potential destructiveness of amoral nature. The human group is thereby encroached upon from two fronts, from without, by the sun, and from within, by the pet.

In the third and final stanza, the speaker returns to and comments upon the

"parochial talk." By describing it as a "gentle gilded cage" full of "sweetness and light," he makes a pun out of the word. On the literal level he is referring to parish business, but the platonic image and echoing of Victorian idealism suggest that he is also using the term to describe the unacknowledged limitations of humanity. "Truce" thereby, while referring to the conventional opposition between old and young, also describes the eternal war between mankind and nature. The return creates a cyclic form, thus reinforcing and echoing the repeated circles of the first stanza respecting the sun. Again, two levels of interpretation are suggested: the closed world of parish society, but also the battle formation of a small group desperately warding off a superior enemy. Ironically, as noted, the circles made by nature symbolize its eternity and perfection, throwing the limited, flawed society of man into cruel relief.

In the final four lines of the poem, the narrator turns to plead directly with an unspecified audience. Who is being questioned is tantalizingly ambiguous. At first it seems that the speaker is addressing mankind, specifically the members of the group who feel impelled to destroy the fragile equanimity between the young and old. Then, it seems that the reader is being addressed, the shift of tense from the past to present drawing us into the poem as fellow adult intruders on the child. Yet the archaic "forfend," although not completely out of character for the precise but perhaps slightly fussy speaker, remains puzzling. Whom is he trying to ward off? Could it be God in his destructive natural manifestation as death? This would account for the archaism as well as for the ambiguous pronouns in the first stanza where, before any noun has been specified, the possessive personal pronoun "his" appears three times. As these can be assumed to be deliberate since the speaker is necessarily an educated man, an all-encompassing noun is needed of which the sun and sky are aspects: nature. Moreover, that this is nature in its cruel aspect is indicated by the detail of the dying flowers in line 3. That they are described biblically as "burthen" suggests that they are an oracle of doom. Similarly, the "unfathomable" blue gains power to imply man's limited

knowledge of all that lies beyond his narrow sphere.

If the speaker is the minister making an afternoon social visit, his final statements are ironic. He alone of the group has a fuller awareness of man's limitations as well as appreciating the absurdity of participating in "manners and morals" in two hours. As mentioned, his diction and form of address to the beyond suggest that he is speaking to God, nature and death being simply manifestations of his incomprehensible power. Rather than being blasphemous though, the minister's pleading questions are poignant. Although privileged in that he has a more complete understanding of the situation, he is just as powerless as any other person to change anything, making the inevitable acceptance more difficult.

The persona of "In the Garden" forecasts that of later works as he is an intelligent, self-aware individual who speaks in a low-keyed, conversational manner. This kind of speaker appears ordinary but retains a keen sensitivity both to external stimuli and to the emotional atmosphere, qualities formerly associated with children. A shift in de la Mare's attitude is thereby indicated toward the experienced figure. The adult can now be a positive force; although forced to accept life as it is, he has the self-awareness to understand the complexity of existence and the courage to assert himself. Additionally, the incorporation of symbolic thought into a straight-forward, conversational frame is a characteristic of the late style. The realistic surface can be easily related to, but it is imbued throughout with symbolic overtones.

(ii)

Memory

Memory continues several major trends begun in *The Fleeting*. The mature adult figures which dominate the volume by their voices and perspectives are completely normalized. Often the speaker seems close to de la Mare himself: an older man, a poet, studying aspects of the world around that interest him and reflecting on

them. When the speaker considers himself as a poetic subject, he does so with the detachment age brings, and rarely does self-pity intrude on his thought.

As indicated by the title, *Memory* is less concerned with observed life than with recalled life. But this apparently backward-looking focus does not seem regressive to the speaker. Rather, he considers it to be an inward looking gaze, the direction and solitary nature of its activity being natural features of old age. Memory is considered to be a selective preservation process of images and emotions:

> 'Twill keep enshrined the tiniest flies--
> Instants of childhood, fresh as when
> My virgin sense perceived them then--
> Daisy, or rainbow, a look, a kiss,
> As safe as if Eternity's;
> And can, with probe as keen, restore
> Some fear, or woe, when I was four. (*CP* 373)

But ultimately its highlighting improves its subject, in retrospect the "flowers" being "ev'n fairer to the eye / Than those of actuality." (*CP* 375) Memory is thereby seen as more than an intellectual recollection, or a bringing back into one's thoughts, for it uses inward focusing sense organs in its re-creations, the Wordsworthian "inward eye" and an inward ear ("The Last Chapter," "Solitude").[4] These inner organs are understood in relation to the outer sense organs. They complement one another; the latter are delicately responsive but limited to perceiving stimuli: "Delicate, subtle senses, instant fleet!– / But oh, how near the verge at which they fail!" The former can detect silent and emotional communication: "Nimbler than air-borne music, heart may call / A speechless message to the inward ear" (*CP* 367)

This romantic labelling of the structures of the inner world is offset by a psychologically oriented interest in consciousness which is less personal than in the previous volume. Whereas "Self to Self," in *The Fleeting*, explores the power of the self to forge either a positive or negative existence, "Evening," in *Memory*, presents a depersonalized view, the interest lying in the relation between the world and our

perception of it:

> For space
> Than time itself's no less confined:
> Its only being is what has place
> At pin-point moment in the mind. (*CP* 371)

The transitoriness of existence is now noted, but not dwelled upon. Rather, the interest lies in the paradox of the mental image, at once fragile but all-powerful, and on the interdependence of contrary worlds, the immense without and the minute within. As seen, this objective interest causes some prosiness, but generally the standard is higher than in *The Fleeting* (Kirkham 124). Because the garrulousness is better controlled, the ideas are given a more compressed expression, causing segments of poems to stand alone by their precision of phrasing.

One reason this poetry of statement is stronger may be that de la Mare has temporarily given up experimenting with long poems, perhaps as a self-corrective exercise working with the opposite extreme. Unfortunately, although the short poem was congenial to his former symbolic mode, now many seem contrived. The images are no longer dense interconnected patterns, as in "The Song of the Mad Prince" and "The Unchanging," but random lists forced together by the formal constraints, as in "The Daisy" and "An Abandoned Church." As Richard Smith notes, "all the pressure to give [the poem] meaning, to visualize what it only hints at, is on the reader" (315). For example, in "An Abandoned Church," a landscape scene is squeezed into five lines, overcrowding the tiny frame:

> Roofless and eyeless, weed-sodden, dank, old, cold--
> Fickly the sunset glimmered through the rain,
> Gilded the gravestones--faded out again;
> A storm-cock shrilled its aeon-old refrain,
> Lambs bleated from their fold. (*CP* 370)

It is obvious that a chiaroscuro effect of glowing and fading light on the ruin is being attempted. Unfortunately, the structure overwhelms the tiny form, creating a dizzying

effect.

Fortunately not all the short poems are unbalanced. In "Clavichord" and "Sallie's Musical Box," the tinyness of the form is perfectly suited to the small, fragile objects being presented. Both concern music, which, as expressed earlier in "Music" (1918), has the potential power to transport the listener out of himself and experience the transformation of the mundane into the extraordinary. The poems are as follows:

"Clavichord"

Hearken! Tiny, clear, discrete:
The listener within deems solely his,
A music so remote and sweet
It all but lovely as silence is. (*CP* 375)

"Sallie's Musical Box"

Once it made music, tiny, frail, yet sweet--
Bead-note of bird where earth and elfland meet.
Now its thin tinkling stirs no more, since she
Whose toy it was, has gone; and taken the key. (*CP* 382)

Unlike "The Abandoned Church," these poems attempt to capture only the essential feature of their subjects, here the interrelated depiction of the quality of the sound that these objects produced and the speaker's response to it. This is lightly sketched in, the formal constraints clarifying the narrow range of emphasis.

"Clavichord" combines the recurring notion of man possessing inner sensory organs ("the listener within") which paradoxically can interpret silence, with an attempted unification of opposites. Elsewhere in the volume, in "The Cherry Trees" for example, white blossoms on a tree are mentally turned into an opposite image, snow-filled boughs, for the viewer's double delight in the contrast. In the present poem, music is compared to its inverse, silence, as if in epitome a thing can only be compared to its contrary.

"Sallie's Musical Box" indirectly returns to the old theme of childhood, the qualities of the toy's music evoking both the little girl herself and the state of

childhood, when this world and the other world are equally accessible. By describing the music box's sounds as being on the frontier between these contraries, it is suggested that the music itself also provides the entry point. The bald statement in the second half of the poem about the child having left suggests the plight of the adult. He is doubly bereft; in addition to no longer having the child's company, he also has no means to play the toy's music. The slight work gains power by its unexpressed emotion, the caesuras of the last line causing a jerky movement suggesting grief that balance ironically against those of the first line, where the tiny, discrete adjectives describe and imitate the pattern of the musical notes.

In *Memory*, thankfully, perhaps because of the predominance of a more natural sounding persona, de la Mare does not feel obliged to use the child voice to explore the significance of childhood. Instead, it forms the subject in a number of poems, where the earlier symbolic associations of innocence, spontaneity, and clarity of perspective are further modified. Sometimes an intimate voice is used, like that of a (grand)father watching a sleeping child ("A Child Sleep"), but only rarely does the speaker indulge in self-pity, regretting the loss of childhood powers ("In A Library"). Usually, some distance is maintained between the speaker and his child subject, reflecting the detached perspective. "Dry August Burned" and "A Sunday" demonstrate two different means of achieving such a viewpoint. "Dry August Burned" is an impartial account by an anonymous observer of a little girl's exposure to bloodshed and death:

> Dry August burned. A harvest hare
> Limp on the kitchen table lay,
> Its fur blood-blubbered, eyes astare,
> While a small child that stood near by
> Wept out her heart to see it there.
>
> Sharp came the *clop* of hoofs, the clang
> Of dangling chain, voices that rang.
> Out like a leveret she ran,
> To feast her glistening bird-clear eyes
> On a team of field artillery,

Gay, to manoeuvres, thudding by.
Spur and gun and limber plate
Flashed in the sun. Alert, elate,
Noble horses, foam at lip,
Harness, stirrup, holster, whip,
She watched the sun-tanned soldiery,
Till dust-white hedge had hidden away--
Its din into a rumour thinned--
The laughing, jolting, wild array:
And then--the wonder and tumult gone--
Stood nibbling a green leaf, alone,
Her dark eyes, dreaming....She turned, and ran,
Elf-like, into the house again.
The hare had vanished....'Mother,' she said,
Her tear-stained cheek now flushed with red,
'Please, may I go and see it skinned?' (*CP* 365)

Despite the speaker's poetical expression, (he uses archaisms, poeticisms, and figurative speech), his detailed account of the child's behaviour is so detached that it approaches the clinical. The poem shows the depth of psychological insight that de la Mare could bring to his study of children. Because he believes, provided it is daytime, curiosity reigns over all emotions, a child could be repelled but fascinated by something at the same time (*Early* 262; McCrosson 65).[5] In "Dry August Burned" this understanding of the child's response is necessarily presented chronologically. She thereby abruptly and apparently with no motivation switches from empathizing totally with the dead hare to being consumed with a bloodthirsty excitement at the prospect of seeing it skinned.

The poem is more than a poetical expression of psychological insight, however, for it can also be interpreted as exploring the child's response to wild life outside the protection of her house and garden (Kirkham 126). As mentioned, the poem traces chronologically the process whereby the girl's contradictory emotions take place by showing her responses to different types of wild life. Although presented as two quatrains, syntactically the long second quatrain breaks into two, a long central section about the artillery outside and a short section about the aftermath when the child returns indoors. These final five lines of the poem balance the five-line stanza opening

the poem since they express the contradictory responses to the hare. The final lines are thereby an inversion of the first; originally, the bleeding carcass caused her empathetic outburst, at the end, the body has been removed, but the child wants to see more of the butchery process.

This opposition suggests that the key to the child's behaviour may lie in the central section about the artillery, implying that by watching them she becomes disassociated from the animal. In doing so, the speaker, through his figurative speech, first links the girl with the hare and then separates them. Lines 6-11 introduce the horses and soldiers and describe the child's reaction to them. Appropriately, they are heard before they are seen; the strident sounds of the metal hooves and bridles are emphasized by the alliteration of "cl" and consonance of "g" as well as the "clang"/"rang" rhyme. In describing her immediate curious response, the speaker compares the child to a young hare herself, implying not only her fleet-footedness, but also her vulnerability, the latter being slyly suggested by the commonplace expression of feasting one's eyes on something. While the child watches the progress, she is compared to another wild creature, a bird.

Lines 12-19 give a precise visual account of the artillery at close range as they ride past the child. They are identified with the sun, their gear shines, and the men themselves are sun-tanned. The horses are being pushed to a wild excitement since they are "alert, elate" but with foam on their mouths. The soldiers are similarly in a state of excitement and disorder, the phrase "Laughing, jolting, wild array" beginning by describing the men, but ending to portray both the men and animals. This unity between them is further enhanced by the "plate"/"elate" rhyme, joining the soldiers' armour with the horses' excitement.

Lines 21-22 express the child's response. In contrast to the soldiers' and horses' barely contained wild energy, she is passive, apparently mesmerized by them as she watches safely behind her hedge. But through parallelism, the speaker suggests the

child and artillery are joined by the simple phrase, "the wonder and tumult gone." Moreover, it suggests not only her emotion and their commotion, but her internal upheaval. This phrase can also be seen as the bridge to the final section. It suggests that her total absorption in the group has exorcised her earlier tumult about the dead animal. She can thereby return to the original stimulus with a different emotional response. The ironic detail of the child nibbling a leaf reforges the connection between her and the dead rabbit, so the ensuing conclusion will be even more shocking.

As mentioned, the conclusion records the child's new "scientific" interest in the hare. Now the speaker no longer identifies the child with any natural creature but with the alternate non-human being of an elf (Kirkham 126). It seems that the child has absorbed some of the wildness of the soldiers and horses so she has become other than human. The description of her face at the end of the poem, where "her tear-stained cheek [is] now flushed with red" connects her with the amoral wildness outside her garden (Kirkham 126). The little girl now seems to contain the burning August sun within her, with its indifferent cruelty.

By contrast, the detachment of the speaker of "A Sunday" is as different from the clinical, psychological perspective of "Dry August Burned" as is the behaviour of the child portrayed. This poem is an indirectly expressed, exquisite memory from the speaker's childhood, the voice sounding so natural that it appears to be de la Mare's himself. The diction is colloquial, with the exception of the literary "morrow," no archaisms and poeticisms are allowed to mar the quiet, gentle flow of the reminiscence:

> A child in the Sabbath peace, there--
> Down by the full-bosomed river,
> Sun on the tide-way, flutter of wind.
> Water-cluck-- *Ever. . for ever. .*
>
> Time itself seemed to cease there--
> The domed, hushed city behind me;
> Home how distant! The morrow would come--
> But here, no trouble could find me.

A respite, a solacing, deep as the sea,
Was mine. Will it come again?...Never?...
Shut in the past is that Sabbath peace, there--
Down by the full-bosomed river. (*CP* 359)

Although "A Sunday" turns out to be a memory, the detailed observation of the first stanza makes it at first difficult to determine whether there is an actual child by an actual river, or if the images of the child and river exist only in the speaker's mind, or if both alternatives are valid. This fusion of actuality and memory is achieved by omitting the verbs in the first stanza, so the images of child and river appear to stand alone, apart from time. In keeping with the delicacy of the memory, the scene is lightly sketched (Bonnerot 271; Kirkham 125). A definite perspective is created, however, of the broad expanse of the river and small person in the foreground and London itself in the background, this in turn contributing to the impression of the former's isolation and timelessness. The child and river thereby contain the sensations that the speaker experienced when a child and which are expressed in the second stanza. Although he states in the final quatrain that these sensations are "shut in the past," the unattached quality of the imagery and the formal presentation suggest that the act of memory contained in the poem itself may be a medium for reconnection.

In the first stanza, the brightness and motion of the river imagery combine to envelop and soothe the child as a mother would. Even its sounds reinforce this maternal feeling, the child listener interpreting them as a promise of eternity. The second stanza records the child's response to this promise of timelessness. He thinks analogically; because he feels separate from the city and his home, he feels correspondingly apart from all his troubles. Yet the past tense and conditional mode, along with the literary "morrow," indicate that the adult is thinking. The past child thereby joins with the present adult, the speaker outlining his thoughts and impressions as lightly but clearly as he does the scene.

In the third stanza, the speaker moves to disengage himself from the image of

the past child so he can think about the absolute "Sabbath peace" he had experienced. It can be inferred that his present state is not peaceful because he is concerned about the possibility of repeating the former sensations. Although he concludes on a wistful note, stating that the deep peace is shut away forever, the interrogative mode of the negative, "Never?" tentatively expresses his hope that the situation be otherwise.

In form, "A Sunday" looks like a conventional ballad, but the metrics are altered in such a way that the speaker's regretful statement is modified. Pyrrhic substitution turns the long initial tetrameter lines of the first two stanzas (ll.1 and 5) into trimeter This lends a lightness of movement to them which not only impels them along but imitates the triple rhythm of the river's soothing sounds. In the third stanza, the speaker's jerky, hesitant worries in line 10 are presented in the same light, triple time, the repetition of the soothing rhythm suggesting the accessibility of the peaceful memory.

Similarly, the rhyme scheme serves to further modulate the speaker's logic. Lines 2 and 12 are exactly the same, emphasizing the river scene; lines 1 and 11 are partial repetitions, the last shifting the focus away from the child to the Sabbath peace the speaker had known as that child. Because the abcb rhyme of the ballad is modified to become a complex interlocked rhyme, abcb, aded, dbab, the first and second, second and third, and third and first stanzas are joined together to form a cyclic shape. The repetition of the rhymed key words "there," "river," and "me" is such that the d rhyme, the "me," is contained within the central stanza surrounded by the ab rhymes, "there"/"river," in the first and third stanzas. This enveloping reinforces the maternal security experienced by the child.

Since the "me" is the present aged speaker, as well as the past child, the repeatability of the memory as implied by the cyclic shape suggests that a similar profound "solacing" may be experienced by reflecting on it. As a result, the speaker's negative answer to his own question is modified by its presentation. The cyclic shape

encapsulates the "instant of childhood" recorded in the memory and keeps it safe ("Memory," *CP* 373). Although it is "shut in the past," paradoxically the act of memory required in constructing the poem allows the speaker access to the images and the corresponding emotions.

Despite a general tendency to the opposite, the better poems selected from *The Fleeting* and *Memory* demonstrate the positive direction de la Mare's experimentation could take by their mature, normalized personae who speak with low-keyed, detached, and articulate voices. These poems come to terms with and utilize to their advantage the experienced adult figure who is able to observe keenly and make astute but sympathetic observations about those around him. The poetic universe has begun to re-expand since the adult figures are exploring intellectual, and thereby inward directed, means of achieving access to the other world as by meditating, dreaming, and remembering. These poems also indicate a partial return to the child image although the perspective is unremittingly that of the adult onlooker.

In the following volumes, *Bells and Grass* (1941) and *The Burning-Glass* (1945), the positive directions of *The Fleeting* and *Memory* achieve a powerful culmination. De la Mare will continue to incorporate with dramatic success aspects of his symbolic style into a relaxed conversational mode. In *Bells and Grass* a wide range of personae, child and adult, mundane and supernatural, will be gracefully assumed. "The Song of Seven" and "Under the Rose," for instance, will rival the songs in *Peacock Pie* in their playful obscurity while creating a clear image of the singer sharing his personal feelings. In *The Burning-Glass* the adult figure intensifies his search for the other world and achieves a successful resolution. "The Secret" and "The Burning-Glass" move their adult speakers toward a new dimension of self-integration, the persona of the latter succeeding in stripping away all his anxiety to achieve the peace earlier figures had only dreamt about.

Chapter 6: Late Peak: *Bells and Grass* (1941) and *The Burning-Glass* (1945)

Despite de la Mare's old age, for he turned seventy in 1943, and despite the stress of living in war-time Britain, *Bells and Grass* (1941) and *The Burning-Glass* (1945) exhibit such a resurgence of poetic power that they form a second peak of maturity rivalling that of the pre-World War I volumes, *The Listeners* (1912) and *Peacock Pie* (1913). In these late volumes, however, the dense pattern of imagery has now become imperceptibly integrated into a relaxed, "conversational" voice, thereby completing the process begun in transitional poems like "In the Garden" and "A Sunday." While the symbolic pattern provides a key to the interpretation of a poem, the overall impression is often of a "reflective" speaker sharing his thoughts.[1] Unlike the poems of the early peak, these works appear to be less puzzles or riddle games than personal revelations by the various speakers. The quiet tone and self-possessed poise of the adult speakers stem from their having successfully regained access to the other world through memory, dream, and imaginative vision, their four-world universe thereby being once again complete. Some of the child personae with their more excited voices similarly convey a sense of momentous discovery although they lack the self-aware critical faculty to analyse its significance. All these voices speak from the perspective of self-unification. The child voices are once again apparently effortlessly and completely assumed, while the adult voices now speak as though they had rediscovered the "energy in peace to be / At one with nature's mystery" (*CP* 253).

Bells and Grass zestfully returns to the child world but with a self-awareness that comes from a retrospective view. In his longish introduction, de la Mare expresses his high respect for children as readers, --"I know well that only the rarest kind of best in anything is good enough for the young." As well, he provides a rare commentary on his own work. He states that his perspective is of one who has temporarily rediscovered the power of childhood vision and sensations:

> I know too, that in later life it is just (if only just) possible now and again to recover fleetingly the intense delight, the untellable joy and happiness and fear and grief and pain of our early years, of an all-but-forgotten childhood. I have, in a flash, in a momentary glimpse, seen again a horse, an oak, a daisy just as I saw them in those early years, as if with that heart with those senses. It was a revelation. (11)

He believes that Blake, Vaughan, and Traherne successfully transmit this visionary experience by "a language within a language" (11-12). By interpreting these poets' technique in this way, de la Mare also describes his own method whereby symbolism is a concentric structure. In his poetry, a concrete image from the outer world suggests (and thereby provides an inlet to) a mysterious, hidden world, the other world of the supernatural, or, as is more common in the later work, the inner mental world of the unconscious.[2]

In his introduction, de la Mare also explains how he comes to be writing a children's volume of poetry in the midst of war. Finding an old commonplace book containing poems he had written thirty-five years before, he re-reads them. Feeling himself to be carried back to his "earlier self," he is inspired to write new ones in the same spirit (7, 9). He interprets this ability to vindicate his belief that the inner self is consistent, remaining essentially the same no matter the lessons and effects of maturity (10). Interestingly, he also defends his apparently personal-sounding personae, perhaps in partial retaliation to critical misreading of his work:

> As with those [poems] in the earlier books, some of them tell of actual and personal memories. Most of them, whether fanciful or not, are concerned with the imagined and the imaginary. The 'I' in a rhyme is not necessarily 'me.' (12)

He then goes on to list some of the child and adult voices used in the volume, clearly separating them from himself. Indeed, in *Bells and Grass* a range of unusual personae is again smoothly and apparently unselfconsciously assumed, a remarkable feat considering the painful changes the poetry has been through. Ultimately, however, it is tempting to interpret this disclaimer made at such a late stage in his career as a

protective gesture for the emergence of the low-keyed personal voice which has been emerging in the adult speakers.

Many poems in *Bells and Grass* have a luminous intensity to them supporting de la Mare's claim of having undergone the revelatory experience of recovering fleetingly childhood's power of sensory awareness and emotional response. But the title also suggests the detachment and contextualization of the reflective process by its sly allusion to the garden of Eden myth. Although the phrase "bells and grass" pleasantly evokes the image of a spring meadow appropriate to a children's volume, it is also a recurring phrase in Ralph Hodgson's poem "Eve" which de la Mare had included in the children's anthology of poetry, *Come Hither* (465), and which recasts Eve's temptation by and succumbing to the snake as a naive woman being successfully seduced by a practised roué. Although this religious context at first appears unlikely, one poem in *Bells and Grass*, "All the Way," is itself a retelling of the Fall for children, stressing the paradox of Christianity that Eden is both very long ago and in the present. The poem concludes on the latter note,

> But those fountains still are spouting,
> And the Serpent twines the bough,
> And lovely Eve is sleeping
> In our orchard, *now*. (*CP* 431)

These points suggest that the individual poems of the volumes symbolize separate facets of the pre-lapsian world, as well as describing a wide range of aspects in a child's life.

The subtitle of *Bells and Grass*, like *Peacock Pie*, is a "Book of Rhymes," and again the nursery rhyme world is incorporated into a number of the poems. On the one hand, nursery rhyme characters form the subject of two poems: "The Feather" and "Gone." On the surface, these poems present a literal reading of literature as if it is actual existence, a confusion of worlds common to little children. At the same time, these poems are also invocations of an idealized world lost to the adult reader. On the

other hand, the rare poem indirectly recalls the folk world of nursery rhymes by re-creating its atmosphere. Previously, "Old Shellover" in *Peacock Pie* sketched in miniature the archetypal world of ogres and innocents through a tiny dialogue between two snails (Perkins 182):

> 'Come!' said Old Shellover.
> 'What?' says Creep.
> 'The horny old Gardener's fast asleep;
> The fat cock Thrush
> To his nest has gone;
> And the dew shines bright
> In the rising Moon;
> Old Sallie Worm from her hole doth peep:
> Come!' said Old Shellover.
> 'Ay!' said Creep. (*CP* 141)

Similarly, "Eeeka Neeka" in *Bells and Grass*, in an equally small space, evokes the nursery rhyme world by utilizing its essential elements of nonsense logic:

> *Eeka, Neeka, Leeka, Lee--*
> Here's a lock without a key;
> Bring a lantern, bring a candle,
> Here's a door without a handle,
> Shine, shine, you old thief Moon,
> Here's a door without a room;
> Not a whisper, moth or mouse,
> Key--lock--door--room: where's the house?
>
> Say nothing, creep away,
> And live to knock another day! (*CP* 445)

Structurally, "Eeeka Neeka" consists of three parts, a nonsense chant introducing the poem, a central section which contains the child speaker's discoveries and the generalization deduced from such evidence, and a conclusion which is set apart as a miniature coda interpreting the preceding events. The nonsense words of the first line set the poem's tone and pace as well as providing a key to its structural logic, the sound of the word "Eeka" suggesting the voice of an excited child coming across an unusual discovery. At the same time, the euphony of the line recalls traditional counting rhymes as "eena, meena, deina, duss," or its many variants, this

suggestion of the numbers one to four lending an impression of serial order to the itemized discovery to follow.[3] The sense of this organization, as will be seen, is reinforced by the grammatical structure of the body of the poem. Moreover, "Eeka, Neeka, Leeka, Lee's" strong trochaic tetrameter beat sets the fast speed of the relation, a pace which is only broken by the coda forming the conclusion of the poem. Even the very qualities of the sounds themselves are reminiscent of the nonsense logic of nursery rhymes. The insistent "k" and "l" alliteration of the first line is reproduced in the key words of the following two lines, "lock," "key," "lantern," "candle," so that originally it seems that the sounds alone provided the impetus for the content.

As mentioned, the body of the poem contains the child speaker's discoveries. A series of rhyming couplets, they break down structurally into three separate pairs of items followed by a general statement to fulfil the four part numerical pattern suggested by the nonsense chant. Although the strong auditory effects--the insistent rhyme, assonance, alliteration mentioned above, and the rigid parallel structure itself,--make the nouns appear "plugged" in to fit the sound pattern, this is not the case. Lines 2, 4 and 6 contain the child speaker's discoveries of a lock and door. Since he knows what items are associated with one another, in his presentation he supplies the other missing details. Ultimately, he arranges his findings and the corresponding missing details into the expected four part pattern. In doing so, his listing in a dizzying, increasing spatial order that suggests his excitement also suggests a tracing of the four walls of the non-existent room and non-existent house.

Lines 3, 5, and 7 contain the second half of the itemizations and are the child adventurer's commentary on his discoveries although they are unrelated to the objects themselves. The first two are a series of requests for more light for the adventurer: "lantern," "candle," "moon." The last is a description of the complete absence of expected night sounds at the scene, as apparently no other life is stirring. This unusual situation will form the focus for the coda.

As mentioned, the final two lines are another rhymed couplet set apart from the rest of the poem. They introduce a new chant with a gentler rhythm that suggest they are spoken by another child. This second voice contrasts with the excited voice of the first to emerge as a more cautious figure who exerts a restraining influence on the former. The ominousness of the last line, however, raises the question of whether the children have stumbled across something dangerous, although the lilting tetrameter iambs balance the driving trochees of the first line. By specifying knocking, an eerie light is cast over the scene, suggesting that the children have encountered a door with its lock standing magically upright in the dark night. The first child's mention of unusual silence thereby becomes portentous, and the scene potentially dangerous for the children. The second child's prudence at suggesting silent and careful withdrawal therefore becomes essential, although its chant-like form transforms their retreat into a positive act, with the promise of future adventures.

Going out to play at night unaccompanied by an adult is not typical of most children's lives; rather it is a feature of the nursery rhyme world, as in "Evening Ditty" which begins, "Girls and boys come out to play, / The moon doth shine as bright as day..." (Iona and Peter Opie, *Dict. Nursery Rhymes* 99). In "The Shadow," like the children in "Eeka Neeka," the boy speaker has sneaked out of the house to behave like a nursery rhyme character and play in the dark. The poem is his relation of his play with his shadow:

> When the last of gloaming's gone,
> When the world is drowned in Night,
> Then swims up the great round Moon,
> Washing with her borrowed light
> Twig, stone, grass-blade--pin-point bright--
> Every tiniest thing in sight.
>
> Then, on tiptoe,
> Off go I
> To a white-washed
> Wall near by,
> Where, for secret
> Company

My small shadow
Waits for me.

Still and stark,
Or stirring–*so*,
All I'm doing
He'll do too.
Quieter than
A cat he mocks
My walk, my gestures,
Clothes and looks.

I twist and turn,
I creep, I prowl,
Likewise does he,
The crafty soul,
The Moon for lamp,
And for music, owl.

'Sst' I whisper,
'Shadow, come!'
No answer:
He is blind and dumb--
Blind and dumb.
And when I go,
The wall will stand empty,
White as snow. (*CP* 413)

A typical delamarean child, the boy speaker of "The Shadow" is happily playing by himself. His account of the various actions he performs: walking, gesturing, twisting, turning, and so on, indicate that he is experimenting with different types of movement as in dance or mime. This joy in discovering movement has been a feature of the active child from the early volumes, as seen in the little girl dancing by herself in "The Buckle." Now it is combined with the idea of a double, first seen in a negative manner in "Myself." Here the shadow has only positive connotations, at no time is the earlier idea of a shadow "haunting" life with "a dark and livelong hint of death" present ("The Shadow.") (All three early poems are analyzed in chapter two.) On the contrary, the apparent permanence of this twin or other-self delights the child. The shadow's mocking or mimicking behaviour fascinates him, causing him to impute intelligence to it, calling it a "crafty soul." Yet at the end of their play sessions, he is puzzled by its nonresponse, for it can neither talk nor see, nor can it leave its restricted

location of the wall. Instead, it seems to disappear magically when the boy does.

The child speaker's acceptance of his shadow friend as an equal indicates his self-acceptance, for he has no need to feel superior to it. Although he does not realize it, his nightly ritualistic dance is allowing him to grow in self-mastery and in self-reliance. His maturity contrasts sharply with the boy speaker of a similar poem by Robert Louis Stevenson, in *A Child's Garden of Verses* called "My Shadow," who needs to disparage his shadow friend:

> I have a little shadow that goes in and out with me,
> And what can be the use of him is more than I can see.
> He is very, very like me from the heels up to the head;
> And I see him jump before me, when I jump into my bed.
>
> The funniest thing about him is the way he likes to grow--
> Not at all like proper children, which is always very slow;
> For he sometimes shoots up taller like an india-rubber ball,
> And he sometimes gets so little that there's none of him at all.
>
> He hasn't got a notion of how children ought to play,
> And can only make a fool of me in every sort of way.
> He stays so close beside me, he's a coward you can see;
> I'd think shame to stick to nursie as that shadow sticks to me!
>
> One morning, very early, before the sun was up,
> I rose and found the shiny dew on every buttercup;
> But my lazy little shadow, like an arrant sleepy-head,
> Had stayed at home behind me and was fast asleep in bed. (371-2)[4]

Stevenson seems to be using the child's voice ironically, the child naively revealing his fears and weaknesses by his projection onto his shadow figure. "My Shadow" is thereby a portrait of a fearful child who is already suffering from the adult neurosis of anxiety, worrying about how he appears to others and about whether he is upholding his society's code of conduct. In the third stanza he interprets the imitative actions of his shadow the opposite way the delamarean child does, considering it a mark of stupidity, the phrase "makes a fool of me" actually revealing his own insecurity. Even more pathetic are the following lines where the child disdainfully imputes timidity onto his double. By contrast, the innocent fun of the boy in "The Shadow" becomes even more appealing through the timelessness of his actions and

thoughts.

"The Shadow" illustrates the key delamarean child characteristics of innocent perception and innate creativity, their power being demonstrated by the clarity of the contrasting pattern of the visual and kinesthetic imagery. In the first stanza, the longer tetrameter lines precisely set the time of the event when the moonlight seems to whitewash every object to a sparkling brightness. Against this whiteness, the boy's shadow creates a vivid, if unexpressed, contrast. As the child states, the moonlight is of such a high intensity that every tiny detail is pinpointed. Consequently, as indicated in the third stanza, the boy's shadow reproduces the fine particulars of his clothing and facial features. By the kinesthetic imagery of the third and fourth stanzas, the child speaker carefully describes his actions as precisely as he had formerly set the scene. This wealth of movement in the enumerated verbs makes, by contrast, the stillness of the blank wall appear poignant.

What distinguishes "The Shadow" from early child voice poems like "The Buckle" and "John Mouldy" is not the persona itself which appears effortlessly assumed, transparent, and natural sounding but rather the complex structure and versification of the poem. Unusually, the ballad form is not used; the poem is divided into two uneven parts, a sestet introduction of tetrameter lines, followed by a series of long stanzas (three octaves and one sestet) in duple metre. Despite the contrast in line length, the poem does not fracture into two parts due to rhetorical devices. As a result, despite the punctuation, the first two stanzas form a single thought, the first stanza presenting a series of parallel adverb clauses (introduced by "when" and "then") which are continued and completed in the second stanza. The rest of the poem is a chronological account of the child's nightly activity, the repeatability of the activity which is stated in the clauses being reinforced by the dominance of the present tense. The italics in lines 16 and 29 suggest that the child is so involved in his telling of the occurrence that occasionally he even demonstrates certain actions and sounds. In the

final lines, his immersion becomes complete, the boy entering the narrative and shifting to the future tense. These details delightfully characterize the child speaker as being totally engrossed in his nightly ritual.

The sparing but ingenious use of interlocking rhyme and other interconnecting features like assonance and consonance also subtly prevent the poem from fracturing. Very unusually, there is no conventional rhyme scheme although the repetition of the b rhyme of stanza one, ("night," "light," "bright, "sight") is continued in the second stanza as medial rhyme ("white") to provide an auditory link. By this means, the contrasting dark and light imagery are joined together, the latter completely overwhelming the former to emphasize the moon's irradiation of the scene. The rest of the poem is less overtly interlinked, but a combination of double and single rhyme highlights the boy's fusion and then separation from his shadow self: "tiptoe," "shadow" (st.2), "so" (st.3), "go," "snow" (st.5). The third stanza has no rhyme at all, localized "st" alliteration in the beginning of the stanza ("still," "stark," "stirring") echoes the "bright" of the first stanza to emphasize the illumination. The approximate repetition of the end consonance in "mocks" and "looks" creates a kind of rhyme in a minor key appropriate to the emphasis on the non-human shadow.

The strong, short, duple metre tightly links the boy and shadow together throughout the entire description of their dance. Its vigorous motion is suggested by the quick beat and the stress on action verbs as in stanza four ("twist," "turn," "creep," "prowl"). This short energetic line is moreover reminiscent of nursery rhymes, as in "One, two, / Buckle my shoe," to subtly remind the reader that the boy is behaving with the absolute freedom of a character from a rhyme.

In his introduction to *Bells and Grass*, de la Mare states that his continuing love of fairy tales, nursery rhymes, and other traditional literature has been one of the major links between his youth and age (9). This has been instanced in both of the poems examined in this chapter and continues to be manifested in a different form in

the two magical songs of the volume: "The Song of Seven" and "Under the Rose." Not only do they deal obliquely with profound themes as do the series of songs at the end of *Peacock Pie*, but their themes and imagery seem to deliberately recall two of these early poems, respectively "A Song of Enchantment" and "The Song of Finis." All four employ allusions to traditional literature which must be fully explored before their obscurity is clarified.

The first pair, "The Song of Seven" from *Bells and Grass* (*CP* 438) and "A Song Of Enchantment" from *Peacock Pie*, (*CP* 186) are remarkably alike by the respective speaker's presentation of his dilemma whereby forgetting the words of a magical song due to his age separates him from an enchanted world Both use allusions to the natural cycle to convey the passing of time, setting the daily and seasonal processes of regeneration against man's linear time. In both, the singer-speaker attempts to hold on to or regain his memory by enacting a magic pattern of "widdershins," or going in a reverse cycle against the movement of the sun, but he cannot stop his irreversible progression into old age (Bonnerot 349, 351; LeVay "Song of Enchantment," 32-33). The close similarly between both of these obscure works proves mutually clarifying to the degree that it appears that the later one was written as a deliberate companion piece to elaborate on the first.

The second pair of poems, "Under the Rose: The Song of the Wanderer" from *Bells and Grass* and "The Song of Finis" from *Peacock Pie*, are even more intriguing by their elliptical presentations of the traveller figure at either end of his quest. Together, these poems form a microcosm of the long poem *The Traveller* (1945) but are more effective because they are stripped to essentials. The early poem, "The Song of Finis," is as follows:

At the edge of All the Ages
  A Knight sate on his steed,
His armour red and thin with rust,
  His soul from sorrow freed;
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.

No Bird above that steep of time
Sang of a livelong quest;
No wind breathed,
Rest:
'Lone for an end!' cried Knight to steed,
Loosed an eager rein--
Charged with his challenge into Space:
And quiet did quiet remain. (*CP* 188)

This extremely bleak work is a startling choice to conclude the predominantly light-hearted volume of *Peacock Pie*, although as seen in chapter three, some poems, like "Nobody Knows" and "The Song of The Mad Prince," do not hesitate to explore serious preoccupations. The skeletal figure of the old knight in rusted armour quixotically tilting off into empty space in pursuit of a lifelong quest, regardless of the personal consequences, appears disturbingly self-destructive. Yet the eagerness with which he utters his challenge and then charges off suggests that paradoxically this final act may be only the beginning of a new kind of exploration in a new dimension. The poem can thereby be seen as symbolizing de la Mare's state of mind at the time he was coming into his own as an acknowledged writer, when he reached the sober realization that he was completely committed to a relentless metaphysical quest despite his appearance and fame as a "fairy" poet. It could even be said that perhaps this realization of his audience and his popularity combined to force him to seek indirect means of expressing his underlying concerns.

In contrast, the later "Under the Rose," from *Bells and Grass*, symbolizes de la Mare's delight, described in the introduction to the volume, at having fleetingly regained access to childhood powers of perception and feeling. It is a celebratory song by the traveller about his successful completion of his otherworldly quest:

Nobody, nobody told me
What nobody, nobody knows:
But now I know where the Rainbow ends,
I know where there grows
A Tree that's called the Tree of Life,
I know where there flows
The River of All-Forgottenness,
And where the Lotus blows,
And I--I've trodden the forest, where
In flames of gold and rose,
To burn, and then arise again,
The Phoenix goes.

Nobody, nobody told me
What nobody, nobody knows:
Hide thy face in a veil of light,
Put on thy silver shoes,
Thou art the Stranger I know best,
Thou art the sweet heart, who
Came from the Land between Wake and Dream,
Cold with the morning dew. (*CP* 450)

Rejuvenated by this success, the old fragile figure of the knight has been transformed into a miniature, childlike wanderer. Emotional closeness is lent to the account by having this figure speak the poem. His vibrancy and vitality are conveyed by his bragging of his triumph and his believing that his marvellous feat dispels all the general, negative wisdom he has been told.

"Under the Rose" works indirectly, presenting numerous, apparently unrelated images whose relation must be deduced from their symbolic connotations and from their structural relation to one another. Unlike the early symbolic poems which also rely on a similar patterning of imagery, the images here are not densely packed together but placed in a series. While previously the simple listing of images has proven to be a drawback, as seen in "The Abandoned Church" and "The Daisy" in *Memory* (1938), here the parallel presentation clearly separates each item so they do not become jumbled together. Moreover, instead of being a random list of items, these discrete units will be seen to work cumulatively.

The first stanza describes an otherworldly place containing the most commonly known symbols of eternity or resurrection, each new item of the list adding another

aspect of sky or earth, flora and fauna, until a complete suprahuman world has been sketched in. The second stanza pinpoints the exact location of this other world and introduces a miniature female figure who has crossed back to this world with the wanderer. By situating this paradise between "Wake and Sleep," all the previous concrete images are synthesized paradoxically into the "nowhere" land of the unconscious mind.[5] Accordingly, a figure from such a world can only be described by paradoxes--she is a beloved stranger who must hide her face with light. The details of her clothing, this veil of light and then the silver shoes, are suggestive symbolically. They present her as a wise, pure, bridal figure bringing new life to her beloved, as well as the latter also hinting at magical powers (de Vries 486; 121, 421-22). The speaker's shift of focus away from himself to his bride in the second stanza thereby turns his bragging song into a miniature pre-nuptial celebration.

As has been seen, the symbols shift from being traditional icons to personal images, whose meaning can only be deduced from considering the application of conventional connotations in the strict context of the poem itself. The beginning image of the rainbow and the final image of the dew connect the other world being described to this world, their similarity of function lending a somewhat cyclic shape to the poem. Traditionally, the former symbolizes the bridge between heaven and earth (de Vries 380; Cooper 136). The latter, is appropriate symbolically for the pure, bridal figure (de Vries 134); but, as we are reminded by the poem, is seen usually in the early morning, at the transition time between night and day, sleep and wake. Thereby, both are natural images from this world that signify the frontier between contrary worlds or states of existence. This cyclic form suggests repeatability, that access may be achieved to paradise under certain special conditions although these are not commonly known.

The speaker of "Under the Rose" appears childlike because his song is a literal overturning of the (dismissive) adult phrase which forms the refrain. He is delighted

by his triumph, relishing in the puns "no" and "know" to upset the negative with the positive. His youthful verve and simplicity are enhanced by his direct manner, his predominantly simple diction, and his obvious problems in remembering difficult names. The speaker's colloquial manner shifts to the more formal in the second stanza when he addresses his otherworldly bride, the archaisms emphasizing her differentness, while the familiar form of the personal pronouns indicate the intimacy that exists between the mortal speaker and his immortal bride.[6] Despite this, the childlike voice is maintained, the speaker's mentioning of his bride's silver shoes recalling similar magic details from fairy tales.

The child wanderer's assertion of individual knowledge over traditional wisdom is repeatedly emphasized by "knows" forming the key rhyme of the first stanza. The vitality of the following rhymes: "grows," "flows," "blows," "rose," and "goes" is enhanced by their being mainly verbs, while the assonance of the long "o" is emphasized by the parallel structure of lines 3, 4 and 6 being formed around the key term itself. By contrast, in the second stanza, the refrain is not incorporated into the structure at all, appropriate to the shift of emphasis away from the speaker onto his otherworldly beloved. The assonance of the end rhymes "who" and "dew" with "shoes" with their softer double "o" sound all serve to define a softer feminine figure. Her separateness, her otherworldliness, is emphasized by the archaic addresses and descriptions being arranged in their own parallel forms.

This miniature wanderer can be seen as the child still living within de la Mare the old man, the child who, as he says in the introduction to *Bells and Grass*, is the young self enabling him to write children's poems (9). Because the poet has succeeded in re-integrating himself with the perceptive and emotional power of childhood, he can achieve a true retrospective view. The key poems in *The Burning-Glass* similarly concern the successful completion of this quest for self-unification but directly express the more intellectual perspective of the self-analytical adult. Earlier personae of the

lover and dreamer are used as well as that of the poet to explore various ramifications of this intellectual, emotional, and spiritual completion.

(ii)

The Burning-Glass

The Burning-Glass is as obviously a product of war as *Motley* was. The war poems are better realized, however, because de la Mare does not seem to feel compelled to assume bizarre personae or attempt archaic techniques in order to express his disgust, horror, and worry about humanity. Instead, as in "Israfel" where a blackbird singing of the spring is set against the backdrop of war-torn London, he says exactly what he feels. The last two stanzas contain his statement:

> Not that this singer eased the less
> A human heart surcharged with care--
> Merely a blackbird, London-bred,
> Warbling of Spring in Connaught Square!
>
> It was the contrast with a world
> Of darkness, horror, grief, despair,
> Had edged with an irony so sharp
> That rapturous song in Connaught Square. (*CP* 460)

Death is becoming more of a reality, both on the global level, against which he rebels, and on the personal level, which he pragmatically accepts as an inevitable feature of old age (as in "The Gnomon"). But paradoxically, this means of access to the other world is becoming less important thematically, de la Mare returning to the other inlets of love, dreams, and imagination as in the volumes of the early period, *The Listeners* and *Motley*. Overwhelmingly though, this world dominates over the other world, the heightened awareness of life being created by the contrast of the inexorable presence of the shadow of death. "The Rapids" expresses this poignant realization:

> Grieve must my heart. Age hastens by.

No longing can stay Time's torrent now.
Once would the sun in eastern sky
Pause on the solemn mountain's brow.
Rare flowers he still to bloom may bring,
But day approaches evening;
And ah, how swift their withering!

The birds, that used to sing, sang then
As if in an eternal day;
Ev'n sweeter yet their grace notes, when
Farewell...farewell is theirs to say.
Yet, as a thorn its drop of dew
Treasures in shadow, crystal clear,
All that I loved I love anew,
Now parting draweth near. (*CP* 455)

In its personal perspective and close attention to external detail as a correspondence to an inner world, "The Rapids" is a typical poem of the volume. The speaker is an old person, apparently de la Mare himself, observing nature and reflecting on his reaction to it, comparing his youthful response to his present one. Despite his statement of grief, the dignified expression and evenness of voice suggests a serene outlook by the speaker, the poignancy of his present response fascinating him due to the sharpness of the contrast. His utter acceptance of his lot suggests a reunification with his earlier self through memory and a continued keen response to natural beauty.

The retrospective perspective of old age is articulated in "A Portrait" and "A Dull Boy," both poems maintaining that there is a continuity between childhood and age. Both use longer pentameter lines to accommodate the more relaxed, winding movement of a reflective, speaking voice. Some distance from the obvious self-portrait is achieved in the first poem by the use of the third person, but in the second no subterfuge is employed, the speaker using the personal "I" and appearing to express his private thoughts, fears, and doubts. Rather, the needed emotional distance is provided by the dignified form of the elegy itself and by the poem's rarefied setting, as the poet-speaker imagines himself to be at Judgement Day. "A Dull Boy" is the speaker's defence of what he does in response to God's question, ironically the same one as on

an application form:

> 'Work?' Well, not *work* -- this stubborn desperate quest
> To conjure life, love, wonder into words;
> Far happier songs than any me have blest
> Were sung, at ease, this daybreak by the birds.
>
> I watch with breathless envy in her glass
> The dreamlike beauty of the silent swan;
> As mute a marvel is the bladed grass
> Springing to life again, June's sickle gone.
>
> What music could be mine compared with that
> The idling wind woos from the sand-dune's bent?
> What meaning deeper than the smile whereat
> A burning heart conceives the loved intent?
>
> 'And what did'st *thou*' ... I see the vaulted throng,
> The listening heavens in that dread array
> Fronting the Judge to whom all dooms belong:--
> Will the lost child in me cry bravely, 'Play'? (*CP* 456)

"A Dull Boy" is effective because the immediacy of the speaker's voice energizes the usual still, retrospective attitude of the elegiac form. The same ruthless self-scrutiny, which was so painful at times in the poems of the transitional period, still operates here, but now it has been transformed into a detached probing. In lines 1 and 2, the speaker reveals his idealistic nature by defining his activity as humanly impossible, for true conjuring or changing one form of life into another is feasible only by superhumans. Following this definition of the unexpressed term "poetry," he does not proceed logically, giving particulars of his all-consuming search but rather provides images of natural activities which he implicitly contrasts with his limited, artificial constructs. All these illustrations are figures in motion to contrast the vitality of life with the stasis of words. But in doing so, the speaker is also providing concrete examples of his own craft. He presents these various images without comment, allowing the reader to play the role of judge along with the expressed audience of God and his heavenly array.

This pattern of kinetic images proves significant as it progresses from obvious

and trite examples to the more subtle and original For instance, in stanzas two and three, the fine distinction between two kinds of grass, the pliable, bladed grass which grows back silently after being cut and the stiff-stemmed grass ("bent") which rustles in the wind, encapsulates more effectively than the singing birds or mute swan the contrast between silence and music in nature. Equally powerful is the portrayal of the profound communion possible between lovers in their silent, emotional exchange in stanza three. The "burning heart" not only emblemizes the intensity of their private communication, but also, in the context of the volume as a whole, suggests the potentially purifying power of love.

The tension between contraries, natural and artificial, motion and stasis, is heightened by the structure and versification. By placing "work" and "play" at opposite ends of the poem, the poem itself becomes the means by which the first is turned into its opposite, the legerdemain reproducing the poet's impossible task. But by surprisingly placing "play" in the terminal position, it becomes the term ultimately defined by the poem, not "work" as is requested. Play is elevated, for by calling it a "desperate quest," the apparently trivial behaviour of children is transformed into a necessity for the adult poet; the initial "quest"/"blest" rhyme bringing out the religious overtones of this vocation. That the second appears in an apparently ungrammatical clause "me have blest" gives it additional emphasis. If this inversion is understood to be a loose contraction for "than any that have blest me," then the idea of the poet being impelled to write is suggested as well as the divine impetus. The final rhyme in the poem "array"/"play" heightens the shock impact of the unexpected last word. By offsetting a child's activity against the heavenly throng, it also suggests that their actions are of equal importance in their respective spheres.

By moving from the indicative mode in the first half of the defence to the interrogative in the second half, the poet-speaker forces himself to come to terms with his personal history, although in a somewhat tentative manner suited to his timid

nature. Yet in doing so, he shows true bravery, for he affirms the presence of his early self, gaining a sense of continuity in his life. The phrase "lost child" suggests the image of a child returning home as well as suggesting the Romantic symbol for the integrated self (Coveney 282-84), thereby returning neatly to the quest idea of the first line. This return lends a cyclic shape to the poem, the continuousness of form paralleling the continuity which the poet will re-discover in his own life if he takes up the challenge of the final, self-directed question. Despite the tentativeness of the response, the absoluteness of the formal presentation can be seen as a positive answer.

As a self-reflexive elegy, the title "A Dull Boy" comments on the dramatic confrontation between God and the speaker by suggesting their relation is that of a stringent schoolmaster and a slow pupil. At the same time, it is the poet-speaker's own self-deprecating epitaph commenting on his circuitous defence, a defence so rambling that God has to rephrase his question in the last stanza in an attempt to receive a direct answer. Because the speaker requires the entire course of the poem to work out even a tentative definition of the nature of his vocation, he is indeed dull. Presumably, if the child within him had not somehow become lost, the upturning of terms would have been instantaneous.

The formal dignity of the elegy underlines the detachment with which the poet-speaker can view his life work. As the frame of a projected trial in heaven suggests, he has succeeded in imaginatively regaining access to the other world, while the body of the poem charts a reunification with his past self. Numerous other poems in *The Burning-Glass* chart a similar successful imaginative resolution to this quest, the speaker leaving the mundane world to enter into a spiritual realm through dreams, as in "Thou art My Long-Lost Peace," mental imagery, as in "Two Gardens," memories of love, as in "The Secret," or memories of childhood, as in "Once." In the last-named poem the speaker reflects on a childhood experience when he felt he had fused with eternity:

Once would the early sun steal in through my eastern
window,
A sea of time ago;
Tracing a stealthy trellis of shadow across the pictures
With his gilding trembling glow;
Brimming my mind with rapture, as though of some
alien spirit,
In those eternal hours
I spent with my self as a child; alone, in a world of
wonder--
Air, and light and flowers;
Tenderness, longing, grief, intermingling with bodiless
beings
Shared else with none
How would desire flame up in my soul; with what
passionate yearning
As the rays stole soundlessly on!--
Rays such as Rembrandt adored, such as dwell on the
faces of seraphs,
Wings-folded, solemn head,
Piercing the mortal with sorrow past all
comprehension....

Little of that I read
In those shadowy runes in my bedroom. But one wild
notion
Made my heart with tears overflow--
The knowledge that love unsought, unspoken,
unshared, unbetokened,
Had mastered me through and through:
And yet-- the children we are!--that naught of its
ardour and beauty
Even the loved should know. (*CP* 472)

The careful, precise rendering of the child watching the rays of the sun process across his room and the recording of their effect on him seems to be a domestic illustration of Wordsworth's generalization beginning the "Intimation Ode":

There was a time when meadow, grove,
and stream,
The earth, and every common sight
To me did seem
Apparelled in celestial light,....(460; lines 1-4)

Indeed, the adult speaker's distinction in "Once" between his earlier limited knowledge compared with his present intellectual understanding suggests that he is reflecting with the maturity of a "philosophic mind" (462;190). But because the mature speaker is

completely engrossed in re-creating the scene and emotions of his distant memory and modulating them with an adult interpretation, no regret about loss of visionary power is allowed to intrude. Rather, as a product of a mature mind reflecting on a pivotal child experience, "Once" demonstrates the correspondence or linkage of the contrary worlds of child and adult, past and present, inner and outer, mundane and spiritual essential to de la Mare.

The first half of the poem (ll.1-12) stresses the prime significance of the occurrence in the child's life. The awkward parallel structure of the inverted lines enveloping the section, "Once would the early sun steal in through my eastern window," (l.1) and "How would desire flame up in my soul; ..." (l.11) draw attention not only to the distance of the past but also to the customary nature of the event. From the first, the boy and sun have a symbolic correspondence, the rising sun occupying a similar position in the diurnal cycle as the child in man's life cycle. Through parallel structure, this correspondence is reinforced by connecting the action of the sun with the boy's response, in the previously mentioned lines as well as in "Tracing a stealthy trellis .." (l.3) and "brimming my mind with rapture" (l.5). The inverted construction uses auxiliaries to express the past time, freeing the main verbs so they can appear in the present or present progressive form. "Steal," "flame;" "tracing," "brimming" thereby suggest the intensity of the child's experience within the frame of the past. This is further enhanced by the verbals describing both the motions of the "gilding," "trembling" (l.4) sun and the boy's "intermingling," "yearning" (ll.8,11) feelings. The total effect is of a child's vision transmitted through the intellect and voice of the articulate adult. This has long been a de la Mare trademark, as in the early "The Sleeper," although now instead of being an invisible, omniscient narrator, the adult speaker forms an integral part of the action. Now, the focus is shared between the past child and present sophisticated adult persona.

The second half of the poem shifts away from the childhood memory to the

present adult intellectualizing about the quality of the rays (ll.13-15) and the limited understanding of children (ll.16-17). The second stanza is mainly a reflection on the lasting significance of the childhood experience. Although the idea of far past is contained in the pluperfect of the "had mastered" (l.20), the time is somewhat blurred by the indefinite past of the other verbs, "I read" (l.16) and "Made my heart" (l.18). Thereby, the possibility is raised that the "wild notion" which caused the speaker's "heart with tears [to] overflow" is undergone by both the past child and the present adult, the inversion recalling those of the first part. Accordingly, the child and adult both seem to be possessed by divine love although neither is able to recognize and appreciate it. The concluding "should" contrasts nicely with the beginning "would" to distinguish the human's single, negative state of ignorance with the repeated positive actions of the sun. At the same time, the religious interpretation of the event is emphasized by its recalling of the Christian dogma that imperfect man cannot directly know God.

Despite this intellectual limitation, the child's experience as a means of divine knowledge is validated by the pattern of imagery. A correspondence is established between the child's perception of the outer natural world, as manifesting the eternal, and his inner world. The parallel phrases mentioned earlier: "tracing a stealthy trellis" and "brimming my mind with wonder," set up this alignment between the two worlds which is reinforced by parallel lists of triple items: "air, light, and flowers" (l.8) and "Tenderness, longing, grief" (l.9), denoting respectively the components of the natural world and the child's inner emotions. Their joining is overtly expressed in the description of the child's feelings "intermingling with bodiless beings" (l.9). That this relation is one of cause and effect is expressed by lines 11 and 12, where the child's spiritual flames of desire are connected to the passing of the rays of the sun.

Although the physical separation between the two stanzas separates the past child from the present adult, the grammatical structure, as has been seen, undercuts

this. This tension but final resolution between the two figures is reproduced in the unconventional, selective rhyme of the poem. In the first stanza, two pairs of alternate rhymes link the child's natural world with eternity: "hours"/"flowers" (ll.6,8) and "beings"/"yearnings" (ll.9,11). Three sets of rhyme connect the two stanzas together, two alternate rhymes focusing on the reflective adult apart from the child, "head"/"read" (ll.14,16) and the rather jarring combination "comprehension"/"notion" (ll.15,17). Yet this intellectual separation is undercut by the final set of rhymes, the major interlocked rhyme of the poem. This is established in the first line describing the streaming in of the sunshine, enforced in the following few lines, "window,"/ "ago,"/" glow"(ll.1,2,4) and reappears near the end of the poem. "Overflow" (l.18) and the final "know" refer to the fused image of the child and adult, thereby ultimately stressing their unity within the context of the long ago memory.

Like "Once," "The Secret" is also a distant memory of achieving unity with the other world that re-creates the experience through its presentation. Unlike the former, though, it is flawed from overgeneralizing and from too heavy a reliance on stock images. Despite these drawbacks, it elaborates on the important theme introduced in "The Unchanging" (1918; analyzed in chapter four) of the silent, profound communion possible between lovers. It explores the idea latent in the earlier poem by trying to describe the paradoxical moment when the lovers momentarily achieve divine fusion, thus "The Secret" of the title. In addition, it, like the brilliant "The Burning-Glass" to be examined next, grapples with the issue of the limitations of human speech and tries to express an apprehension of Divinity:

> I bless the hand that once held mine,
> The lips that said:
> 'No heart, though kiss were Circe's wine,
> Can long be comforted.'
>
> Ay, though we talked the long day out
> Of all life marvels at,
> One thing the soul can utter not,
> Or self to self relate.

We gazed, enravished, you and I,
Like children at a flower;
But speechless stayed, past even a sigh...
Not even Babel Tower

Heard language strange and close enough
To tell that moment's peace,
Where broods the Phoenix, timeless Love,
And divine silence is. (*CP* 458)

Unlike "The Unchanging," this love affair does not necessarily involve the sexual, the woman's odd, unpassionate remarks about the transience of physical love-making introducing the idea, elaborated in the next stanza, that this may be an intellectual association, based largely on talk.[7] Because the limitation of human speech forms part of the theme of the poem, her cold words can be interpreted as an essential structural tool for they are an expression of human constraints. Similarly, the artificiality of the synecdoches in the first stanza ("hand," "lips," and "heart") are integral structurally as they emphasize only the physical aspects of love. These are replaced in the second stanza with images of union ("we"), spirituality ("soul"), wholeness ("self"), and finally transfiguration of the union ("we," "enravished") in the third stanza.

The final stanza grapples with the paradox of the lovers' union when their mortal love becomes divine. Here, the imagery moves beyond its previously limited range. By describing the divine language as "close," their intimacy, whether sexual or not, is economically conveyed. It also suggests, in view of the title, the need for a special, secret form of communication suited to the divine apprehension. The figure of the brooding Phoenix, hovering in the peaceful instant of the lovers' union, effectively conveys the idea of the possible regeneration of their love by its resurrection symbolism as well as imparting a religious dignity to it (de Vries 364).

Strategic use of inversion adds structural dignity to the speaker's commentary as they regularly disrupt the natural flow of his recollection in the third line of each stanza. Enhanced by rhyme and terminal consonance, these inversions draw attention

to the key paradoxes of the poem. The first two express negative facets of human love, specifically, the transience of carnal love and the limitations of speech. The third paradox refers to this negative state of "speechlessness," but the fourth inversion moves beyond being a simple opposite to present a transcendent image of the transformation of the mortal into the divine.

The speaker's shifts in tense from present to past and back to the present connect this reflective act with its substance. The final shift suggests that he is reliving the experience in his memory while he is recounting it. At the same time, he articulates the paradox of the timelessness of the "momentary peace" he and his lover had achieved. The cyclic shape these time shifts suggest conveys both the idea of perfection which is described as well as the repeatability of the state. Through entering completely into his memory, the speaker can gain access to the world of eternity as long as he possesses the ability to fully and clearly remember the secret they shared.

The passionate tone of the title poem "The Burning-Glass" at first seems to contradict the generalizations made about the volume as a whole, but actually demonstrates why and how the serene, retrospective voice can occur. It is a powerful tracing of the process by which a human can strive to reunify with God by reconnecting with childhood. This painful purification, this "burning" away of all dross, leaves only the essential, passionate outpouring of the Christian:

> No map shows my Jerusalem,
> No history my Christ;
> Another language tells of them,
> A hidden evangelist.
>
> Words may create rare images
> Within their narrow bound;
> 'Twas speechless childhood brought me these,
> As music may, in sound.
>
> Yet not the loveliest song that ever
> Died on the evening air
> Could from my inmost heart dissever

What life had hidden there.

It is the blest reminder of
What earth in shuddering bliss
Nailed on a cross--that deathless Love--
Through all the eternities

I am the Judas whose perfidy
Sold what no eye hath seen,
The rabble in dark Gethsemane,
And Mary Magdalene.

To very God who day and night
Tells me my sands out-run,
I cry in misery infinite,
'I am thy long-lost son.' (*CP* 463-64)

"The Burning-Glass" demonstrates how de la Mare can work through formal conventions to create a unique vision and voice. Just as the imagery draws upon the New Testament to express an individual belief, the structure is based on the meditation, and the form on the hymn, but both elements are transformed and combined so they forge an original method. The image contained in the title of a lens that concentrates the rays of the sun on an object with such intensity that it finally bursts into flame is a brilliant emblem for the poem. It not only emblemizes the progression of the ideas but also the poetic procedure by which layers are progressively stripped away until only the naked core remains. All these techniques fuse contrasting formal elements together to create an integrated, inspired whole.

As if the purifying fire of the burning-glass has stripped away all mannerisms from the speaker's diction, his speech is simple, direct, and intimate with only the rare inversion or archaism. At the beginning, he contemplates his personalized Christianity, the hymn form tidily containing his logical, controlled thoughts, while the present tense records the immediacy of his ponderings. Half-way through, his tone becomes much more emotional as he recounts Christ's sacrifice, to become passionate in the fifth stanza where he identifies with both the agents of Christ's destruction and the repentant sinner who first saw the resurrected Christ. In the last stanza, this

identification with the repentant sinner becomes absolute, the speaker imaginatively becoming one with the Prodigal Son of Christ's parable. At the same time, the inverted syntax of "I cry in misery infinite" suggests that the speaker is expressing more than a personal position, seeing himself as the representative of fallen man who, near death, cries out to God for atonement.

As mentioned in the discussion of the previous poem, "The Secret," "The Burning-Glass" successfully conveys a perception of the Divine, thereby using words as the medium to carry something beyond their "narrow bound." Typically, contrast forms the controlling pattern of the imagery, but one of the major differences between the two poems is that in "The Burning-Glass" the conventional images are not only all drawn from a single powerful source, the New Testament, but also trace a tripartite formative event of Christianity. Moreover, these images are inextricably linked with personal images to express powerfully an individual understanding of the topic. In contrast to "The Secret," too, the progression within the images leads to a visionary culmination fulfilling the process suggested by the title.

In the first half of "The Burning-Glass," a delicate balance is established between the different pairs of contraries. In stanza one, the visual images containing the public expression of belief, "map" and "history," are set against auditory images expressing a private, "hidden" language. Stanza two elaborates on both opposites. On the one hand, language is described as possessing unusual image-forming power within its severely circumscribed limits. On the other hand, the range of non-verbal communication is understood to resemble that of music which appears to have no boundaries. This secret, "speechless" voice conveys the inarticulate but powerful vision of childhood. In the third stanza, even music is shown to be limited by its transiency, although its message has been absorbed into the essential feelings of the speaker.

The second half of the poem attempts to fuse these contraries together to express through the public medium of verbal images the speaker's private belief. By

this means, the articulate, mature figure can thereby transmit his "speechless" ingrained understanding of the Crucifixion. Because in the final two stanzas the speaker imagines himself fused with archetypal, biblical figures, he transforms the ancient story into a present reality. His rising emotional tone indicates that he is becoming progressively more involved with these identifications, until a culmination is reached with a direct address to God.

The united contraries and rising action are beautifully contained within the unique methodology of "The Burning-Glass" which, as mentioned, is a modification of the hymn form combined with a modification of the meditational structure. The short or common metre, with alternating iambic tetrameter and trimeter lines, provides a spare, rigorous frame disallowing any tendency to emotional self-indulgence by the speaker (Fussell 142). But by shifting between the conventional alternate rhyme and one set of moving rhyme pairs per stanza, as well as by using approximate or visual rhyme, the natural sound of the speaking voice is enhanced. These variations allow the speaker's main ideas, the contrasts within the stanzas, to be emphasized. For instance, in the second stanza, the sole rhyming trimeter pair, "bound" "sound," brings out the latent idea of the latter being apparently boundless. In the final stanza, the alternate rhyme of the first stanza does not reappear, as might be expected, to lend a cyclic unity to the expression. Instead, the approximate sound of the terminal consonance "night"/"infinite" of the second and fourth lines, clashes with the rhyme pair of the first and third lines, "run"/"son," to contrast effectively the ragged emotions of the exiled speaker with the possible perfection of the reunited state.

As mentioned, the emotional tone of "The Burning-Glass" changes from that of initial detachment, when the the speaker is analysing and describing the roots of his personal religious belief, to that of rising passion, while he recounts the Crucifixion and Resurrection of Christ through progressively more intense identifications with key sinners in the story. At the end, he fuses completely with the repentant Prodigal Son

figure to confront God directly as if he were his own son. In achieving the last, he has passed through the phases of claiming identity with Christ's traitor, the witnesses of the betrayal, and paradoxically, the repentant sinner who witnessed his Resurrection. This progression from knowing a history to acting it out demonstrates a full understanding of "evangelist" in the first stanza, for the term indicates both a writer of the gospel, which is a history of Christ, and a person who emphasizes the atonement of Christ by becoming one with the history.

The tripartite structure of the speakers's account recalls that of the meditation method as adapted by the Metaphysical Poets Donne and Herbert, where the speaker moves through the three stages of composition, analysis, and colloquy in order to resolve a particular problem (Martz 38). Although "The Burning-Glass" does not follow this arrangement exactly, formal aspects of each stage are present. The speaker begins with an intellectual truth as he understands it, which corresponds to the analysis portion of the meditation, but personalizes it in a modern way by relating it to his own childhood. After stating the subject of his account, the Crucifixion, he rapidly lists crucial moments before and after the event, identifying with these agents, beginning with Judas, in such a way that he seems to be imagining himself present at Gethsemame. This mental act is essential to the composition of place. Thirdly, and most strikingly reminiscent of the meditation is the speaker's projected, impassioned exchange with God at the end of the poem. But the conventional order is reversed, for instead of the speaker addressing God and receiving a soothing response, as in Herbert's "The Collar" (153-54), the emotional rise continues to the end. The speaker responds to an apparently rigid, time-keeper God who is reminding him that his life is over with the "misery infinite" (the sole inversion) of the returning exile.[8] This ultimate individual application of the meditation structure not only charges the speaker's last words with the highest emotion, but also demonstrates de la Mare to be brilliantly fusing the archetype of the Prodigal Son with his own dominant figure of the exiled

wanderer. The final cry is thereby that of the traveller at the point of returning home. By leaving the exile there and not responding to his plea, the poem dramatically breaks off at its climax, the conclusion of the tale being understood.

The relation of the title and body of "The Burning-Glass" to one another is similarly a modification of another technique applied by the Metaphysical Poets. As in Herbert's "The Pulley" (159-60), the emblematic title does not appear in the poem as a figure but informs the whole structure of the work itself (Freeman 168). Unlike "The Pulley" though, the image of the burning-glass does not become clear until the poem has been read, the painful progress that the speaker undergoes explicating the title. By this means, the title becomes an emblem of the purifying process by which the speaker progressively strips himself bare. Only then, when he has once again recovered his "lost nakedness" (*CP* 201), something he could only previously dream about, can the wandering exile return home and face God.

As seen, the power of "The Burning-Glass" lies partly in its transformation of conventional characters and patterns into a unique vision. By connecting the recurring image of the exiled wanderer with that of the Prodigal Son, mythic depth is attached to de la Mare's figure. Because it is understood that the wanderer is joyfully welcomed home, de la Mare concisely and dramatically completes his traveller's quest without having to diminish the impact of the final, climactic confrontation. "The Burning-Glass," therefore, in my opinion, expresses the conclusion of the traveller's quest far more effectively than the long *The Traveller* on which he was working at the same time.

As will be seen in the last chapter, *The Traveller*, while displaying considerable inventiveness in its depiction of a barren, symbolic landscape and in its attempted psychological sketch of the wanderer, loses its power through discursiveness and explicitness, making it a tedious anticlimax to the unified power of "The Burning-Glass." I therefore place it slightly out of chronological order with the writings of the

final phase of de la Mare's career, the extremely long *Winged Chariot*, and the collections of short poems, *Inward Companion* (1950) and *O Lovely England* (1953). The poems of this period indicate that he continued to be committed to the poetic process by experimenting with new ideas and forms, although the weaker efforts are diffuse. The stronger works indicate a continuing interest in strengthening the direct voice so triumphantly yet painfully regained in the second peak of maturity. At the same time, this apparently direct conversational record continues to be built around a symbolic core of imagery. For the most part, the adult speakers achieve a progressively detached perspective due to their increasingly inward, psychologically oriented focus.

Chapter 7:. The Long Poetical Experiments and the Final Collections: *The Traveller* (1945,1946),[1] *Winged Chariot* (1951), *Inward Companion* (1950), *O Lovely England* (1953)

For convenience, these four volumes are grouped stylistically rather than chronologically. *The Traveller* (1945, 1946) and *Winged Chariot* (1951) are de la Mare's most sustained attempts in the naturally uncongenial long poem, while *Inward Companion* (1950) and *O Lovely England* (1953) are his final collections of short poems. The first two are obviously intended to be ultimate expressions of two major recurring themes in his work, respectively, that of the exile pursuing his quest and that of the transience of life. Unfortunately, this burden of intent creates a belaboured attention to detail which devitalizes them. Their major significance rests in their revelation that even at this late date, he was still interested in experimenting with different formal techniques. In contrast to these ambitious failures, the last two volumes are modest successes. Although the former, being composed mainly of recent poems, is a more accurate reflection of de la Mare's late interests and technique, the key poems in both volumes are fine examples of his pared-down "reflectively conversational" style, while indicating an increasingly inward directed, psychologically oriented perspective on life. The adult speakers of these poems, because their four-world universe is once again unified, can, on occasion, internalize the otherworldly within themselves.

The Traveller is a long narrative poem about a man and horse on a perilous and ultimately self-destructive quest. Although the romantic figures are familiar, first appearing in "The Listeners," the extreme length, bizarre landscape, and inward focus indicate an ambitious attempt to document the spiritual pilgrimage completely. The horse, rider, and landscape are all to be read symbolically, so the features of the setting are significant as well as the location of the two figures against it. Although

this terrain appears mysterious, subtle clues as to its nature are inserted from the beginning. These hints first appear in the guiding epitaphs, but by the end, the controlling metaphor of the earth being a living being with a gigantic eye is distinctly stated (Endicott 113). As de la Mare explains himself, the poem is a stage-by-stage progression over the eye, where the traveller, once having descended from the eyebrow onto the cornea, moves with ever-increasing difficulty and privation until he reaches the pupil itself and dies (Brain 114).

Because this quest represents a spiritual process, as the traveller becomes increasingly more decrepit physically, his inner world becomes progressively more dominant. On the last night, he completely overcomes his bodily limitations to experience the otherworldly beauty of the terrain and see in a vision his predecessors who have spent themselves in their quest for the ultimate, and failed. Although he too knows he must fail, he is spiritually fortified by their company. As a result, he can gaze directly into the pupil of the earth next day and believe a presence gazes back. Rejoined with this primal source of life, he dies celebrating his successful completion of his quest.

The Traveller thereby attempts to elaborate on the process of spiritual purification without referring to traditional Christian archetypes. Unfortunately, in his search for personal symbols, de la Mare eschews using the powerful contractive force of an emblem as in "The Burning-Glass" but chooses the one dimensional device of the simple narrative allegory. Extending his earlier successful literary precedents of the wanderer on his quest is potentially a strong idea (R. Smith 325-8), but only in weak early poems as "The Pilgrim" (1902) and "The Journey" (1912) does he employ the tenuous narrative device of the journey. By contrast, in the several highly effective symbolic poems on this theme, the traveller is shown performing a significant gesture--vainly knocking on a door of a mysterious house in "The Listeners," hurtling with a prophetic challenge into space in "The Song of Finis," or in the persona of the Prodigal

Son, pleading to be allowed to return home in "The Burning-Glass." By freezing the figure at this moment, no sense of duration of time is allowed to intrude and dispel any of the drama of the gesture or the density of the images. Unfortunately, in *The Traveller* the necessarily linear structure of the journey does both. Even the traveller's final climactic scene is reduced to another action in a long series of episodes. The prolonged elaboration of the unusual landscape which is inextricably bound to this narrative structure thereby undermines itself. Although initially effective when obscure and providing a tremendous contrast in perspective with the tiny figures of the horse and rider, the landscape becomes ultimately a mechanical rendering of an analogy for no apparent purpose. *The Traveller* fails perhaps because it is the product of a self-conscious attempt by de la Mare to leave a legacy for his readers expressing his eternal quest for the "Ultimate Real" (Sackville-West 30).

Winged Chariot, is three times as long as *The Traveller*. It is a series of lyrics about time spoken by the ruminating, natural-sounding voice of an old man who appears close to the poet himself. Although, as suggested by the allusion to Andrew Marvell's "To a Coy Mistress" in the title, the "carpe diem" theme is present, the poem ranges over various aspects of time from various human perspectives, to suggest that our perception is ultimately subjective. These ruminations do not follow any logical path nor do they achieve any conclusion. The poem is a series of monorhyme, iambic pentameter lines arranged in stanzas ranging from three to seven lines each, a nonce form which enhances the discontinuous, epigrammatic quality of the voice. Anecdotes, narratives, descriptions, abstract discussions, and quotations are incorporated into the lines, the last seeming to provide general headings breaking the work into more manageable lyric units.

In its strengths and weaknesses, *Winged Chariot* is a representative late work. Its extreme length and meandering structure leads one to question if in his old age de la Mare had lost the ability to select and prune his poetry, for apparently, (there is no

introductory note to suggest otherwise) this was the last volume he edited himself. As Kirkham and LeVay both note, for the most part it is a summary of favorite images and situations (130; "De La Mare's Poetic Landscape" 33) But portions of the poem, especially those describing childhood memories, do possess considerable energy. They seem autobiographical, as if at this late date de la Mare had dropped all his masks so the "I" is now "me." In one, the speaker describes an encounter with the mysterious aspect of Nature:

> Yet there was mystery too: those steps of stone--
> In the green paddock where I played alone--
> Cracked, weed-grown,
> Which often allured my hesitant footsteps down
>
> To an old sun-stained key-holed door that stood,
> The guardian of an inner solitude,
> Whereon I longed but dreaded to intrude;
> Peering and listening as quietly as I could.
>
> There, as I knew, in brooding darkness lay
> The waters of a reservoir. But why--
> In deadly earnest, though I feigned, in play--
> Used I to stone those doors; then run away,
> Listening enthralled in the hot summer day
>
> To echo and rumour; and that distant sigh,
> As if some friend profaned had made reply,--
> When merely a child was I? (*CP* 558)

This interaction between the child and the reservoir, the boy deliberately stoning its doors and the reservoir responding as if deeply hurt, recalls Wordsworth's similar accounts in Book I of *The Prelude* of boyish pranks of stealing trapped woodcocks or rowing across a lake in a stolen boat and feeling Nature is intervening to reprimand him (lines 318-25, 357-86). Yet de la Mare's formative childhood memory is characteristically his own, for in the typical manner of his late poems, the tangible object, the reservoir, is transformed into a symbol for a spiritual state. The reservoir is then both a distinct physical entity and a correlation for the child's inner world. Because of his youthfulness, the boy cannot understand this connection, only dimly

understanding that his play is a pretence covering a deep need and that his action has harmed something. Each of these stanzas is in a new monorhyme which seems to enhance the separateness of the details contained in them. In the long seven line stanza, the sustained repetition adds another dimension to the description, suggesting the measured passing of time as by a metronome. Its relentless movement thereby underlines the temporal distance between the event the boy experienced and the old speaker who is recounting it.

The loose, speculative fabric of *Winged Chariot*, although sometimes irritating, is on the whole self-revealing. As Russell Brain's *Tea With Walter de la Mare* indicates, a delight in the speculative process itself, as well as a quick-shifting progress through a wide range of subjects having only a relation through association, was similarly a feature of his conversation in old age.[2] At its best, then, despite the excessive length, *Winged Chariot* reproduces both the wide range of interests exhibited in de la Mare's talk, while displaying the same paradoxical qualities of his voice-- at once keenly interested and humorously detached.

(ii)

The Final Collections: *Inward Companion* and *O Lovely England*

As mentioned, the strong poems in *Inward Companion* reflect an ongoing process of stripping away excess verbiage and naturalizing sentence structure which was to continue to the end of de la Mare's career (Auden Introduction 387). Two perspectives are presented. On the one hand, numerous poems give careful attention to the external world, illustrating what was expressed in "The Rapids" in *The Burning-Glass*: that as death approaches, the slightest detail of natural beauty gains added significance. On the other hand, as the title indicates, the corresponding inner world is becoming even more important to the perceiver. "Martins" delicately expresses the visual acuity achieved by the first focus:

'Chelidon urbica urbica!'
I cried on the little bird,
Meticulously enunciating each syllable of each word;
'Chelidon urbica urbica!'
Listen to me, I plead!
There are swallows all snug in the hayloft,
I have all that your nestlings can need--
Shadow and sunshine and sweet shallow water--
Come, build in my eaves, and breed!

Fly high, my love! My love, fly low!
I watched the sweet pretty creatures go--
Floating, skimming, and wheeling so
Swiftly and softly--like flakes of snow,
'Gainst the dark of the cedar-boughs, to and fro:...
But no!
But no!
'Chelidon urbica urbica!'
None paid me the faintest heed. (*CP* 518)

"Martins" presents an insignificant incident which, at the same time, encapsulates man's relation to nature. Its apparent simplicity is caused by the unusual spareness of the images and by their almost ritualistic placement within the straightforward chronological structure. This placement highlights a pattern of contrast in the natural description that suggests a possible symbolic interpretation. The predominantly visual imagery thereby opposes the protected but static world of human habitations in the first stanza with the wild birds' world of uncontained movement in the second. When this pattern of contrast is considered in conjunction with the action of the piece, where the birds ignore the human's address to them, two interrelated symbolic interpretations arise. As mentioned, the idea of man's world being comfortable but restricted is suggested. Secondly, because the free, wild creatures repeatedly ignore the speaker's attempts to call them, the notion of man's isolation in the universe is expressed. Ironically, no matter how learned a human may be, no matter what language he uses, he cannot communicate with another order of being. The beauty of "Martins" is that although it contains these recurring themes, a symbolic interpretation is not necessary to enjoy the poem.

Examination of the formal features of the poem reveals that a complex

structure underlies its apparent simplicity. The relation of the refrain to the body is intriguing. Even without understanding the Latin, it is apparent that "Chelidon urbica urbica" controls the rhythm and line length of the work much the same way a nonsense refrain as "Hickory, dickory, dock" does in the nursery rhyme. After translating the phrase (city swallows) the refrain becomes a definition of the house-martin, of which the poem is a description. Whether the lines follow or break the quick triple metre and trimeter line length of the refrain forms a pattern of contrast that connects to the pattern of opposing imagery.

In stanza one, the rhythm, line length, and structure of images accords with the triple nature of the refrain. Only the third line describing the speaker slowly and carefully enunciating the Latin syllables breaks this pattern. This ponderous sounding line nicely characterizes the speaker as being concerned with reproducing the finest details of language. His precision is apparent throughout, not only in the particulars of what he can offer the birds (l.8), but also in his physical description of their movements (ll.12-13). The first enumeration, "Shadow and sunshine and sweet shallow water," while it retains the triple time, breaks into a tetrameter line, but the parallel structure and alliteration of the items stress the triple quality associated with the birds. Similarly, the next line, "Come, build in my eaves, and breed," is tetrameter, but the syntax moulds the words into a tripartite shape.

In contrast, the second stanza is organized primarily by doubles, either duple or tetrameter metre, and is mainly iambic or trochaic. As in the previous stanza, the first line sets the rhythm and metre. "Fly high, my love! My love, fly low!" expresses the speaker's rigid interpretation of the birds' free, wheeling flight, the balanced form of the line reproducing the rigidity of his thought. Yet in the course of the stanza, this tidy structure is destroyed by the insistent triple time associated with the birds. For example, the description of their movement, "Floating, skimming, and wheeling so / Swiftly and softly--like flakes of snow" (ll.12-13) has triple parallel lists reminiscent of

the first stanza and an anapest meter, while the three key words are highlighted by the "s" alliteration. At the end of the poem, after the speaker has expressed his failure, the refrain appears again to underline by its light, triple movement the contrast between the freedom of the wild birds with the rigid, limited world of man.

This contrast is similarly reinforced by the unusual rhyme scheme. The two nine-line stanzas are held together by the refrain and by the birds' non-response to the speaker's plea. The details of the latter ironically rhyme with those enumerating what the speaker can provide the birds: "plead," "need," "breed" in the first stanza and "heed" in the second. This tenuous interlocked rhyme is ,moreover, undermined by the bulk of the second stanza itself. Unusually, the first seven lines describing the birds' movements are in monorhyme. This is based on a rhyme not found in the first stanza: "go," "so," "snow," "fro," "no" and "no." As in the previously discussed excerpt from *Winged Chariot*, the effect is neither monotonous nor comic as might be expected (Fussell 139, 141). Rather, the varying line lengths with their differing punctuation reproduce the shape of the speaker's voice as he makes exclamations and runs his thoughts into one another. Ultimately, the effect of the repetition is used against itself, for the speaker breaks off his mesmerizing description of the birds' movement with a sudden ejaculation to return to the original refrain. This thereby reproduces both the effect of the birds on the speaker and his realization of his failure to attract them.

The very end of the poem reverts to the swift triple time associated with the birds. This shift of tempo underscores the light tone of the self-deprecating voice while reducing the impact of his ironic perspective. Although his learned incantation has failed to work its magic, the speaker still possesses the ability to pronounce the words By his art of weaving the structure of the poem around them, he thereby conveys some of the wild birds' beauty and freedom.

As the title indicates, *Inward Companion* is largely concerned with the nature of the inner world. The term "inward" appears fairly frequently but does not, as

previously, depict only those inner sensory features corresponding to outer organs as the inner eye or inner ear. Now, the adjective accompanies a range of terms denoting human responses to the range of life. At the same time, the term also applies to the inner self as a separate but interconnected entity capable of providing infallible guidance so one can become "Dead-calm 'mid inward vortices, / When little else but danger is" ("Blondin").

This increased incidence of the term and concern for the range of inner existence suggest that de la Mare may be attempting to preserve something he feels he is in danger of losing. This is expressed in only a few poems, but their placement together in the middle of the volume makes them a cumulative expression of despair over loss of vision. "The Bombed House," "Pride Hath its Fruits Also," "Incomprehensible," "'See, Here's the Warrant!'" and "Lost World" establish a parallel between the scarred post-war world and the speaker's sterile imaginative vision. The last two are sometimes effective expressions of loss of power, the second, despite its title, ultimately suggesting a means for possible renewal of inner vision.

"'See, Here's the Warrant!'" has the typical characteristics of a late poem in its uncluttered diction, reflective voice, conversational tone, and natural ordering. This directness and the compelling analogy between the speaker's doused creative spark and an empty, "cold-chimmneyed" house effectively express his sense of emptiness. The alliterative final lines convey the elusiveness and otherworldly energy of creativity better than any laboured analysis does: "No cock, all earth for ear, will ever crow / Its witching wildfire back" (*CP* 533).

"Lost World" continues this exploration by shifting to the poet-speaker's plight now that he has lost his inner visionary impetus. It follows his emotional progression from self-pity to acceptance to ultimately suggest self-awareness. The first half of the poem wallows in bleak imagery, as the speaker denigrates his "inward companion" by comparing his anguish to a "trickle of rancid water that oozes and veers, / Picking its

sluggish course though slag and refuse, / Down at length to the all-oblivion ocean." This unsavory image is matched by the description of himself as "Derelict, drear, with skeleton arms to heaven, / Wheels broken, abandoned, greenless, vacant, silent," the adjectives piling up on one another apparently without any control.

In contrast, the second half of the poem suggests that the above images have enabled the speaker to purge himself emotionally. As a result, he begins to move toward a more mature attitude. He accepts responsibility for what has happened although he continues to rant at his inner self, considering him an irritating reminder of what has been lost. What the speaker does not realize is that by complaining about this continuing presence, he is also asserting the indestructibility of his inner self. The shift in the final line "Or nearer draw to your heartsick infidel" suggests his dawning realization that part of his loss of vision may not have been the lack of power itself but his lack of belief in its existence (*CP* 534).

My interpretation of "Lost World" as ultimately being a record of reconnecting with the "inward companion" is reinforced by the tone of acceptance of the speakers' of the volume as a whole. In particular, "The House" represents a regaining of inner vision since the body of the poem is a memory "seen" by the speaker's inner eye:

> The rusty gate had been chained and padlocked
> Against the grass-grown path,
> Leading no-whither as I knew well,
> In a twilight still as death.
>
> Once, one came to an old stone house there,
> Wheels crunched in those scarce-seen ruts;
> A porch with jasmine, a stone-fringed garden--
> Lad's-love, forget-me-nots.
>
> A happy house in that long-gone sunshine;
> And a face in the glass-bright moon,
> And a voice at which even memory falters,
> Now that the speaker's gone.
>
> I watch that image as I look at the pathway--
> My once accustomed zest,
> As the painted gate on its hinges opened,
> Now locked against the past!

A true face too, yet scant of the future--
A book that I never read...
Nor shall now, since I soon must be going
To another old house instead. (*CP* 522)

In "The House" an old man looks at the spot where his home formerly stood and reminisces about it. His tone is appropriately quiet and gentle, his direct expression and generally plain vocabulary heightening the sense of a conversational voice. Only the sole archaism, "no-whither," in the first stanza, indicates that the forthcoming scene is imagined. Although the poem begins and ends with intimations of his approaching death, the speaker is matter-of-fact about his situation. His concern is with his memory of the house and with his reactions to this internal image as he implicitly contrasts his old self with his young self just as he contrasts the present desolate scene with the past vibrant one.

Through the act of remembering, the speaker transforms the former into the latter, turning the "rusty," "chained and padlocked" gate into a "painted" one. Although now apparently "locked against the past," just as it is locked "against the grass-grown path," this ability to visualize clearly the earlier scene enables him to mentally open the hinges, so, in his memory, the boy he was can zestfully return home. The speaker's progress into this transformation process is subtly indicated by the shift of pronouns and an accompanying shift in perspective. In the second stanza, sketching in the outside of the house, he uses the impersonal, noncommittal "one" to indicate only that the former house was visited. By the fourth stanza, the repeated personal pronouns indicate a rising action. The speaker is so engrossed in watching his inner sight that he spontaneously enters the scene effecting the "magical" transformation stated.

As in all good de la Mare poems, the interlocking of the formal elements in "The House" creates a cohesive whole and typically, the controlling design is contrast. A fine balance is achieved between the past and present, the stillness and quiet of the old man's world offsetting the motion and sound of the child's--the details of the voice

of a beloved figure and the crunching wheels adding three-dimensional touches to the memory. The visual details in this memory at first seem solely descriptive, but the relative emphasis on the traditional flowers in stanza two raises the possibility that they are also symbolic. As suggested by the country or common names used for the last named plant, the forget-me-not, the jasmine and lad's love also carry associations of true, young love: timidity, modesty, and faithfulness (Ernst and Johanna Lehner 117, 119, 125). Thereby, the figure of a young boy coming to see a beloved figure is indirectly expressed, although at this point the speaker's internal focus is on the former house and garden.

The fourth stanza is particularly interesting both for the psychological sketch of the speaker mentioned above, and the application of the term "image." The line "I watch that image as I look at the pathway" suggests the speaker's two levels of mental operation, his actual physical perception of the overgrown path and his memoried, inner perception of the house and garden. The coordinate conjunction "as" and the repetition of the personal pronoun "I" suggest that he is superimposing the latter onto the former. Consequently, he visualizes the past house with its inhabitants while he is gazing at the over-grown path. As mentioned, he becomes so engrossed by this memory that he animates it, imagining that he sees the child he once was rushing up to the gate as it formerly was and opening it in order to return home.

The conclusion adds an ironic twist to the depiction of the house. It contrasts the past image of the child returning home with the future image of the old man going to his grave, the finality of the latter association being emphasized by the rhyme "read"/"instead" (if the former is in the past tense) which would make them the only true rhyme pair of the work. This ironic echoing of return in the last stanza thereby returns to the simile of death in the first, lending a cyclic shape to the work.

By making "The House" an internal, mental impression rather than a physical entity, de la Mare inverts a key recurring image in his poetry. In early works like

"Haunted," "The Phantom" (1902), and "The Old Stone House" (1913) the houses are old, vacant buildings which the speakers of the poems consider haunted. Whether these supernatural beings are deemed friendly or not by the innocent speakers depends on the perceivers' self-confidence and whether they are active or passive. At the same time, in "The Listeners" and "The Old House" (1913) haunted houses begin to assume symbolic functions, in the first, signifying a possible means of gaining access to the other world and in the second, signifying the grave. In later poems as "The Old Summerhouse" (1938), paralleling the gradual trend of the poetry to shift inward, man's buildings also come to be analogies for man's physical makeup. Here, the decaying summerhouse can be seen to represent the physical decrepitude of the aging speaker-observer. As has been seen, this analogy is clearly stated in "'See, Here's the Warrant!'" in the present volume, where the poet-speaker considers himself as an empty shell, "his house of life to let" (*CP* 533).

In "This House" this internalization process has become complete, for now the house exists only in memory. Yet this imagined building has paradoxical symbolism, signifying both the speaker's happy childhood home and the grave. His action in the poem of watching the image of the house thereby enables him to observe himself and reflect on his life. There is the suggestion that by imaging the past in the present and by projecting himself into the future, the speaker is coming to terms with the continuity of his existence, the device of the house accommodating all three personal times of the speaker. His pilgrimage to his former home thereby enables him to gain a balanced perspective on life.

O Lovely England

As de la Mare observes in the "Author's Note" ([p.7]), this volume is comprised of poems written throughout his poetic career and arranged by his son Richard. I am interested only in those works which appear recent, those which by their diction and

structure seem to illustrate de la Mare's continual paring down of his expression or those which thematically elaborate obviously recent concerns. Sometimes the precise, almost technical diction suggests a work is a late poem, as in "The Reflection" where "mask" is used in almost a critical sense. There are also late self-portraits; "Second Childhood" continues that of "A Portrait" from *The Burning-Glass* but is bravely presented in the second person as an internal address, and "Deadalive" returns to the spiritual dilemma articulated in "Lost World" from *Inward Companion* concerning the agonizing feeling that the creative spark has been extinguished.

Some apparently late poems are pedestrian efforts resulting from what Richard Smith calls mechanical writing (318). That de la Mare is aware of this is apparent in "Second Thoughts" which ends with:

> Oh, what mischief pen can make,
> Scribbling on for scribbling's sake!
> How such vanity condone?
> Peacock shimmering in the sun!
>
> The Muse, if ever present, gone! (*CP* 604)

Two poems which could not be charged with this fault are "The Reflection" and "De Profundis." The former is an exquisite yet homely depiction of the familiar experience of looking out a window onto the night but only seeing a reflected face:

> Empty and cold is the night without.
> From this fire-lit room I peer through the pane.
> Of starry assurance the dark breathes not;
> My own face only peers back again.
>
> I know those eyes, that brow, that mouth--
> Mask, or mirror, the all I have,
> But if *there* lay the Ocean and mine were the ship,
> Not such for its Master would then I crave:
>
> But a close friend rather; since love's clear rays
> Are the light that alone makes man's dust divine,
> And like his, the Unseen's -- whose compassionate gaze
> May not even yet have abandoned mine. (*CP* 611)

"The Reflection" is a gently witty exploration of the term, the speaker moving through various levels of meaning in the course of the poem. Beginning with a literal reflection in the first stanza, he mulls over what it represents in the second, ultimately to reach a spiritual interpretation. The delicate poise of the poem is achieved through incorporating a relaxed speaking voice into a complex rhetorical structure. The imagery is paradoxically both simple and complex, for although the speaker uses contemporary diction, he has a metaphoric way of thinking that turns images into symbols. From the beginning, he turns the absence of star-light into a symbol, interpreting the unremitting darkness as a sign of uncertainty in life. Because of this lack of guarantee, it seems to him that he sees nothing outside the window; only his face is reflected back.

The spiritual overtones of the outer darkness and cold are emphasized in the second stanza. "Mask or mirror, the all I have." (l.6), in addition to expressing a philosophy of self-sufficiency and self-reliance, also articulates a psychological observation with critical overtones. This dichotomy states that the reflected facial features are either a disguise for the inner self or an accurate image. Yet considering de la Mare's awareness of his skill at adopting unusual personae, he could also be using this term in the literary sense which would dissolve the "or." If this is taken in conjunction with his expressed belief in late conversations that poetry is a kind of spiritual autobiography (Brain 81), these opposing terms can be combined. It is only because the mask covers the poet's face that he can feel free to disclose his inmost self.

The analogy in the second part of the stanza, as well as its expression, initially proves problematical: "But if *there* lay the Ocean and mine were the ship, / Not such for its Master would then I crave." The speaker's odd way of referring to himself as an object suggests that the "fire-lit" room represents his world, the comfortable domestic world of man, which he sets against the immense, unknown world of the night. The

speaker's frightening task is to sail out onto this ominous vastness without even the guidance of the constellations. Accordingly, he must search for a suitable "master" or ship's captain to guide him, by extension, the capitalized term also suggesting God's patriarchal position to man.

The qualifications of the last stanza, where this uneven relation is rephrased to become one between equals, express the platonic notion of Caritas, whereby true human love is understood to be a reflection of the Divine. By calling God the "Unseen," the original image of the night is evoked, suggesting a cyclic shape. But now the formerly ominous image has been transformed into a comforting one, since God's "compassionate gaze" could provide the spiritual "assurance" the night did not.

As mentioned, the poem is controlled by the complex structuring of the speaking voice. Each stanza has a shift in structure that parallels the course of the speaker's reflections. The first stanza is a good example of deliberate use of inverted sentence structure as it provides emphasis through parallelism. Because in every line the predicate is placed before the subject, the speaker's action of gazing out a window to see only his reflection is underlined. In the second stanza, because he is thinking about a single subject, appropriately, natural order is used. The idea of duality being expressed is echoed in the parallel form of the compound sentences, the speaker's coordinate conjunctions "or" and "but" marking his dilemma

The unusual sentence structure of the third stanza suggests another kind of contrast. Although not actually inverted, the words are arranged so the emphasis falls on the midpoint of the lines, an effect further enhanced by the medial caesuras in lines 9 and 11. This lends a rather ceremonial flow to the stanza which is fitting to a discussion of God and contrasts nicely with the conversational ease of the previous stanza. The idea of balance within the lines moreover evokes that achieved between the speaker and his "close friend," which resolves the original separation of contraries.

The varying rhyme of "The Reflection," all within the range of the ballad form,

similarly reproduces this movement from tension or conflict to resolution that the speaker undergoes. In the first stanza, only one pair of rhyme is used. "Pane"/"again" thereby highlight the speaker's single vision where he can see only his reflection. The other potential rhyme pair, however, jar, the harshness of the terminal consonance of "without"/ "not" reinforcing the separation and potential conflict between the speaker and the night. In the second stanza, this contrast is emphasized through lack of rhyme. The single pair of approximate rhymes "have"/"crave," moreover, suggest the speaker's emotional tension. By contrast, the third stanza is in alternate rhyme, "rays"/"gaze" and "divine"/"mine succinctly resolving the tension of separation that the speaker initially feels between himself and the beyond. The completeness of these final balanced rhymes ultimately suggest a confidence that the hesitant speaker could not openly express, turning his guarded hope that God may still be interested in him into a certainty. These rhymes thereby reinforce and complete the "assurance" that the speaker seeks.

"De Profundis" similarly provides assurance, but of a contrary nature to that achieved in "The Reflection." Because "De Profundis" is an imaginative projection by the speaker of what it would be like in the grave, he assures his auditor of absolute absence after death. By its stark pragmatism and spare delineation of death as negation of life, it is horrific without being gruesome. Indeed, its horror rests in the very ordinariness of the things denied:

> The metallic weight of iron;
> The glaze of glass;
> The inflammability of wood..
>
> You will not be cold there,
> You will not wish to see your face in a mirror,
> There will be no heaviness,
> Since you will not be able to lift a finger
>
> There will be company, but they will not heed you,
> Yours will be a journey only of two paces
> Into view of the stars again, but you will not make it

There will be no recognition;
No one, who should see you, will say--
Throughout the uncountable hours--

'Why...the last time we met, I brought you some flowers!' (*CP* 626)

The complete impersonality of the speaker's voice and his direct address to the auditor as "you" make it first appear that the reader is being confronted with "De Profundis." But the last line with its mention of flowers brings a full realization that the speaker is on his death-bed (R. Smith 328). The poem is thereby the ruminations of the dying speaker to himself as he projects forward to the state of death, the largely contemporary diction and straightforward sentence structure reinforcing the impression of a conversational voice.

The first stanza deviates from this pattern, its three phrases appearing to exist apart from the rest of the poem, unconnected by any verbs or pronouns to the speaker. These are most effective because the suggestions of the parallel fragments refer to aspects of the coffin itself, itemizing a wooden chest reinforced with metal and glazed to a high finish. Their apparent non-relation to the body of the poem disappears when the second stanza is examined, for it places a human within the object sketched above. The visual, organic, and tactile images of "cold," "mirror," "heaviness" and "finger" are all the macabre inverse (or negation) and reverse (in opposite order) of the initial images since the ideas of weight, reflection, and inflammability are all expressed in the first stanza.

The ominous repetition and parallelism of "you will not" creates an image of the speaker lecturing himself. The itemized sensations and concerns mentioned above suggest a figure on a sickbed, complaining about feeling dreadful and worrying about an altered appearance. That these tribulations will be obliterated by death makes it seem a release. The nature and presentation of these complaints suggests two voices, the actual lines being the "heard" voice of the speaker responding stringently to an unheard querulous voice contained within the spaces between each stanza. The poem

thereby becomes an internal dialectic by the dying figure to himself.

The third stanza moves beyond physical concerns to consider the dead individual in context with the surroundings. These parallel, progressively longer statements dispel any sensation of release achieved in the previous stanza. Again a form of itemization, the negations now focus on the speaker's fears and perhaps petulant comments about being bothered by visitors and his eyes being irritated by the light of the stars. The second item also ironically, and perhaps self-reflexively, compresses de la Mare's notion of the quest within its account of how the body will be close to the surface of the earth but not be able to move there. Its enjambed phrasing and slightly cacophonous vowels caused by the inverted sentence structure emphasize the metallic weight separating the body from living things.

Relentlessly, the fourth and fifth stanzas, which are joined by rhyme, return to and elaborate the point concerning people in the previous stanza. Perhaps as a response to a complaint by the second, unheard voice about visitors remarking on a ravaged appearance, the speaker ruthlessly assures his other self that he will not be bothered in the grave but be alone forever. As mentioned, the last line with its parroting of visitors' talk about flowers graphically captures the image of a sick-bed. At the same time, because people do not only bring flowers to hospitals but to funerals, paradoxically the poem returns to the original images depicting the coffin, now flower-laden since the inhabitant is within

By its placement near the end of *O Lovely England* and by its projection of being in the grave, "De Profundis" forms an apt conclusion to de la Mare's published collections of poetry The stark imagery, unusual form, and ironic tone draw attention to themselves at the same time they prevent the poem from being a pat epilogue. Its suggestion of a self-disparaging final presentation of the poet as a querulous invalid similarly punctures any authorial pretensions. "De Profundis" thereby indicates that de la Mare's detached, critical self-awareness continued until the end of his career.

(iii)

With its imaginative projection of being in the grave, "De Profundis" likewise serves as an apt point to conclude this study of Walter de la Mare's poetry. Death has formed a recurring theme throughout; briefly tracing de la Mare's treatment of death through the three phases of his career in terms of emphasis, attitude, and method of presentation will summarize the course of his poetic development. This will demonstrate that, even in the beginning, he does not turn his back on the challenges of life but directly faces the temptation to escape and resists it. It will be seen that his evolving treatment of the subject supports Auden's belief that de la Mare continues to "mature in technique and wisdom" until the end (Introduction 395).

As has been seen throughout this study, the pattern of four-world images in de la Mare's poetry presents the universe as consisting of numerous intersecting planes of existence, based on the contraries this world, the other world, the child world and the adult world. Necessarily, in this complex system, life and death form one essential pair of opposing elements, along with wake and sleep, the temporal and the eternal, and the natural and the supernatural. The close connection between life and death is first articulated in "Shadow" (1906, analysed in chapter two), where, applying Platonic ideas of mortal life as being a faint reflection of the ideal world, an object's shadow is interpreted to be an emblem of its transience:

> The loveliest thing earth hath, a shadow hath,
> A dark and livelong hint of death,
> Haunting it ever till its last faint breath ..
> Who, then, may tell
> The beauty of heaven's shadowless asphodel? (*CP* 66)

Death thereby haunts worldly existence, accompanying life as closely as a shadow does its possessor. Although bleak, the poem ends with the possibility of the paradox that the sign of mortality, the shadow, may also serve as a constant reminder of its contrary, the eternal world of a "shadowless" heaven. De la Mare, therefore, remains

curious about death throughout his career because it seems to promise a definite, although irrevocable, means of passing from this world to the other world, as described in "The Bridge" (1938):

> A Bridge, now nearing, I shall walk alone--
> One pier on earth, the other in the unknown:
> And there, a viewless wraith--
> Prince of the wreckage of the centuries,
> Yet still past thought's fixed scrutiny, heart's surmise,
> And nought but a name, yet Death. (*CP* 367)

But while de la Mare remains interested in death as a means to reach the other world, his emphasis and method of presentation vary considerably over the years.

Death is a major, if unlikely, topic in the early period (1901-1918). Although "Shadow," cited above, presents an impersonal perspective, this is rare. For the most part, fascinated by the suggestion of timeless beauty, death is treated solely as a symbol of passage, and all consideration of its actual effects tends to be ignored or dismissed. Often, de la Mare's figures adopt a self-indulgent, decadent posture, self-consciously imitating the Romantic attitude of being "half in love with easeful death"[3] But despite this temptation, in these poems, like "Bright Life" (1906), "Music Unheard" (1912), "To E.T.," "Dust to Dust" (1918), "Not that Way," and "The Imagination's Pride" (1921), the figure is shown resisting the seductiveness of death although it seems to be the easy way to achieve peace and resolve all internal conflict. As the travellers in "The Pilgrim" (1906) and "The Journey" (1912) demonstrate, the only way to complete your quest is to steadfastly resist any apparently easy route. Stoically, because no escape from life is allowed, the figures must follow the natural, difficult course unaided ("Two Worlds" 622; Bonnerot 298-300).

At the same time, death itself, when personified, is not portrayed as evil. On the contrary, in "Even in the Grave" (1906) the shadowy, regal figure is attributed with a "strange innocence"; even in "Motley" (1918, analysed in chapter four), by not possessing sense organs, death is presented as not having the capacity to create evil.

Rather, it is a simple consumer of the dead. This qualification, which at first seems solely perverse, is yet consistent with the affinity being established during the early period among innocence, the child world, and the other world. By this scheme, it is logical that in those poems presenting a child in relation to a dead figure, as in "The Funeral" (1902) or "John Mouldy" (analysed in chapter two), although the child does not understand the significance of the event, he seems unaffected or unfrightened by it. The most extreme instance of this occurs in the bizarre "The Keys of Morning" (1912). Here, when the little girl thinks she sees death beckoning to her, she, full of curiosity and without apparent qualms, is about to approach him, when all is revealed to be an illusion (Duffin 84):

> Louisa laid her lesson book
> On the cold window-sill;
> And in the sleepy sunshine house
> Went softly down, until
> She stood in the half-opened door,
> And peeped But strange to say,
> Where Death just now had sunning sat
> Only a shadow lay
> Just the tall chimney's round-topped cowl,
> And the small sun behind,
> Had with its shadow in the dust
> Called sleepy Death to mind
> But most she thought how strange it was
> Two keys that he should bear,
> And that, when beckoning, he should wag
> The littlest in the air (*CP* 106)

By comparison, in the middle period during the 1930s, death becomes much less important thematically During this transitional phase, de la Mare is exploring the various means by which a mature, self-aware individual can reforge the vital links with childhood innocence and spontaneity that would enable him to become an integrated person The personae are thereby interested in repeatable and memorable means of gaining access to the other world and achieving a balance between the diverse aspects of existence. "In the Garden" (1933, analysed in chapter five) shows an adult speaker trying to come to terms with death in context of man's society, the natural world, and

God's universe. Death comes to be seen as part of untamable, wild nature, which man ineffectively tries to limit by his "mild," "bland" societal mores, and ultimately as an agent of God himself (*CP* 275). The speaker is powerless to change this but struggles to understand the reason why.

In *Memory* (1938), the aging speakers begin to achieve more detachment, turning their attention inwards and reflecting on the course of past images and events which they have experienced. "The Last Chapter" is spoken by a writer, apparently de la Mare, who advises himself to drop his egocentricity and spend his remaining time learning from the images of his inner vision. The ideas latent in the early symbol of death as a shadow and as an amoral agent are brought out fully here, for death is presented as a "companion" who accompanies one's every action. Although, the world of death is presented as being an alternate state of existence to life with its own powerful symbols, the poem concludes with the ominous self-warning to be aware of whose servant death is, by implication, God's or Satan's.

> Pace, still, for pace with you, companion goes,
> Though now, through dulled and inattentive ear,
> No more--as when a child's--your sick heart knows
> His infinite energy and beauty near.
>
> His, too, a World, though viewless save in glimpse,
> He, too, a book of imagery bears,
> And, as your halting foot beside him limps,
> Mark you whose badge and livery he wears. (*CP* 380)

This ambivalent attitude to death is brought out graphically in "Dry August Burned" (analysed in chapter five) which employs the old device of juxtaposing an innocent child with an instance of death. If the chronological tracing of the process by which the child reverses her attitude to the dead hare is interpreted psychologically, the poem demonstrates the complexity of human emotions, for the adult, like the child, can feel conflicting emotions at the same time.

In opposition to the poems of the early period which show a surprisingly heavy

emphasis on death, the poems of the late period (1941-1953) have an unexpectedly light emphasis. Because for the most part the figures have gained self-knowledge, they are able to consider death pragmatically, as part of the scheme of life. The children's poem "Me" (1941) succinctly conveys this detached acceptance:

> As long as I live
> I shall always be
> My Self--and no other,
> Just me.
>
> Like a tree--
> Willow, elder,
> Aspen, thorn,
> Or cypress forlorn
>
> Like a flower,
> For its hour--
> Primrose, or pink,
> Or a violet--
> Sunned by the sun,
> And with dewdrops wet
>
> Always just me
> Till the day come on
> When I leave this body,
> It's all then done,
> And the spirit within it
> Is gone (*CP* 432)

This is not to say that death is always considered so dispassionately, however. By its nearness, death is a different matter to an old person than it is to a child.

In *The Burning-Glass* (1945) death produces varying responses. On the one hand, there are several poems about being severely ill where de la Mare seems to express his conflicting emotions fully and directly (Brown 93-95). In "Laid Low" the speaker is fascinated yet terrified, the poem ending with him alternately crying out to God to continue his life and wishing to be dead:

> ... My heart said,
> 'Nay, there is nought to fear'--yet shook with dread·
> Wept, 'Call him back!': groaned,'Ah! that eyeless head!'
> Impassioned by its beauty; sick with doubt:--
> 'Oh God, give life!' and, 'Would that I were dead!' (*CP* 478)

But even in these poems death is presented as an inevitable fact which must be accepted, for the most part the figures striving to maintain an unemotional attitude. On the other hand, paradoxically, the hovering presence of death in old age creates an even sharper response to life by the poignancy of the absolute and final contrast. "The Rapids" (discussed in chapter six) expresses this heightened awareness:

> The birds, that used to sing, sang then
> As if in an eternal day;
> Even sweeter yet their grace notes, when
> *Farewell . farewell* is theirs to say.
> Yet, as a thorn its drop of dew
> Treasures in shadow, crystal clear,
> All that I loved I love anew.
> Now parting draweth near (*CP* 455)

In some late poems, the detached, matter-of-fact attitude is intensified until it becomes self-deprecatingly ironic. As if to deliberately puncture his former deluded, fanciful presentation of death, in "Eureka" (1945) de la Mare allows his dreamer-speaker to visit the afterworld only to discover all his preconceived notions are fiction. Set against the nostalgic stance of the conclusion of "Shadow" where the speaker wonders about "the beauty of heaven's shadowless asphodel," jarringly, here, the speaker finds only a sterile vault. When he asks the janitor "'Is this, friend, Hell or Paradise?'" he learns these tidy oppositions are only another form of human self-delusion:

> "Terms trite as yours the ignorant
> On earth, it seems, may yet delude
> Here, "sin" and "saint" and "hierophant"
> Cha[illegible] exile with "the Good". (*CP* 479)

Although all is thankfully just a nightmare, the point is cruelly made that all our speculations are just that. Such a harshly self-critical stance toward the speaker could have never been possible in the early period, supporting McCrosson's belief that death is considered progressively more ironically in the late works (52). Regarding this

tendency, "De Profundis" can be seen as forming the ultimate and most subtle example.

As has been seen, the shifts in emphasis, attitude, and manner of presentation of death from the early period, through the middle period, and in the late period highlight key features of each. While a young man, the symbolic ramifications prove the most compelling to the extent that the ordinary human reactions tend to be repressed. Throughout the painful growing period of the transitional poems, de la Mare gradually gains a more honest and identifiable ambivalent attitude. In the late period, these self-explorations are infused with an increasingly detached approach, the accompanying increasingly ironic stance of the speakers expressing an underlying, understood acceptance. With this maturing of outlook, the speakers assume a more direct, conversational style while continuing to think metaphorically.

De la Mare's development can thereby be seen as cumulative at the same time it is a paring down. This is not as contradictory as it might appear; in his evolving thought and style he always retained the essence of his former symbolic method as the core of his work. He only stripped away the outer surface layers of excess diction, unnecessarily convoluted sentence structure, and the accompanying fanciful, immature ideas they expressed. Although the cool, self-deprecating irony of "De Profundis" appears nihilistic in contrast to the emotional outcry of the Christian in "The Burning-Glass," it does not contradict this progression but rather is the final, logical stage. Only because the poet-speaker had been spiritually welcomed home could he dispassionately engage in a such a ruthless inner dialogue.

Notes

Chapter 1

[1]Other critics holding this position include: Aldard, Burgess, Coombes, Fletcher, Garman, Jarrell, King, Larkin, and Walton.

[2]De la Mare's poetry has formed part of the subject for other book-length critical evaluations of his work: Doris Ross McCrosson's *Walter de la Mare* (1966) and Richard Smith's doctoral dissertation "Walter de la Mare (1873 to 1956)," Wales, 1980. Because they prefer the fiction, especially the short stories, over the poetry, the latter receives a somewhat cursory analysis and is not taken into full account in their respective conclusions.

[3]Critics who state that de la Mare's work is to be approached primarily on the emotional level include Hopkins, Sackville-West, Williams and, the compilers of *Books: The Journal of the National Book League: 301*. April-May 1956. Critics who consider de la Mare a static writer include Deutsch, Grigson, Lewis, Press, Van Doorn, and Walsh.

[4]Two perspicacious critics before Perkins who expressed the idea that de la Mare was aware of his use of Romanticism as both a theme and a convention, although they do not pursue it in depth, are Stanford and the anonymous *TLS* writer of "Continuing Renewal," a review of *O Lovely England*.

[5]Critics sensing an essential change at the end of de la Mare's early poetry include Fausset, Freeman, Jack, Peschmann, and Wagenknecht. Some other critics considering de la Mare to be a symbolic poet are Cecil, Fallon, and Wiley and Orel.

[6]Previous critics who have identified two opposing worlds in de la Mare's poetry are Coats, Church, Faussett, Freeman, Sansom, W.J.Smith, and the anonymous *TLS* author of "A Poet of Two Worlds: The Imagery of Mr. De La Mare."

Chapter 2

[1]De la Mare was to become an authority on traditional children's literature. Examples of his wide knowledge include his notes to *Come Hither* (1923, 1928) and his introduction to *Animal Stories* (1939). As well, he is acknowledged numerous times as a source in the *Oxford Dictionary of Nursery Rhymes* edited by Iona and Peter Opie. De la Mare also wrote critically about the major Victorian children's writers, for instance, a book review of Stevenson's letters, an essay on Christina Rossetti, and a discussion of both Lear and Carroll in an essay on Lewis Carroll.

[2]This is in contrast to the adult pilgrim who must undergo the witches' temptation of an easy way home in "The Pilgrim."

[4]In early editions (1902,1916) the syncope is not used, "whispering" appearing in full.

[5]This technique will be developed most effectively in "The Listeners" (1912) where the detailed description of what is not done eerily becomes the activity of the supernatural.

[6]Several critics, notably Madame Bonnerot, have commented on the Platonic elements in "Shadow." She observes:" dans sa vision d'un autre monde ideal, éternal et visible, dont le nôtre n'est qu'une imparfaite représentation parce qu'il le monde d'après la chute sans doute--avec cette ombre, toujours présente, qui n'est autre que la mort.(p.114) I believe "Shadow" is not truly Platonic because de la Mare ultimately assumes a speculative, interrogative stance. Intent on exploring the universe as he sees it, here he employs Platonic language much the same way elsewhere in *Poems* he appropriates modes of Renaissance literature and elements of folk and fairy literature in *Songs of Childhood*

[7]This is an example of de la Mare's psychological and educational interest in children which would culminate thirty years later in *Early One Morning* (1935), a critical anthology of

writings about children where he would call out for more enlightened educational methods in British schools.

Chapter 3

[1]In *Behold, this Dreamer*! (1939), de la Mare will use psychological terms to describe dreams as inlets to the unconscious, which is not personal, but collective. He describes the unconscious in the following way:

> It is a convenient but animating term for the reservoir of *elixir vitae* from which, throughout the working day and at every moment of dream, is being drawn up into consciousness, even though it may serve its purpose unperceived, the imagery of recognition, recollection and re-creation The submerged portion of an iceberg is the commonest metaphor for it; but that of an archipelago of humanity whose myriad island peaks are connected under the sea may be nearer the mark. Intuition in part depends on its resources; and past calculating, the faculty or poise or, rather, state of the mind which we call the Imagination.... What--in any original enterprise of mind or spirit--*can* man achieve, indeed, unaided by the reviving waters of this unplumbable well? A well lapped in darkness--and every metaphor is only a makeshift--into which we can peer only with the aid of a feeble taper, introspection (83-84 note)

[2]For discussions of this remarkable effect see Kirkham 117, Wright 130, and Gwynn and Condee item 26.

[3]Alicia Ostriker refers to "Miss T" as a nursery rhyme in *Vision and Verse in William Blake* 31.

[4]As LeVay attempts in his analysis in *The Explicator*.

Chapter 4

[1]Twenty poems which appeared in *Motley* had previously been published in a limited

edition called *The Sunken Garden* (1917) ("Bibliographical Appendix" *CP* 891).

[2]"Sam's Three Wishes" in *Story and Rhyme* re-works the fairy tale staple in a gently humorous and ironic fashion, the subtitle, "Life's Little Whirligig" using a child's toy to image a kind of eternal life. "The Double" and "The Little Creature" from *Down-Adown-Derry* return to the figure of a little girl dancing by herself. The first is a light-hearted, rollicking rendition of the other-self idea formerly bleakly presented in "Myself" (1906) combined with the celebratory dance of "The Buckle" (1902). The second is a contortion of this type of poem, as a witch's child seems compelled to perform a ritualistic dance. The beat of her whirling, convulsed action is effectively set by the grating opening: "Twinkum, twankum, twirlum and twitch, / My great grandam--She was a witch."

[3]At the same time, de la Mare is defining childlike in his criticism. In "Rupert Brooke and the Intellectual Imagination" (1919) 179 he will use some of Motley's characteristics to describe the visionary imagination which provides an intuitive and inductive understanding of life rather than a logical, deductive one.

[4]De la Mare's dedicated war-work is well-documented by Sir Stephen Tallents in "A Memory of 1917-18" in *Tribute to Walter de la Mare on his Seventy-fifth Birthday* 86-90

[5]Contrast this realistic attitude to war with the naive, sentimental one of "Keep Innocency" in *Poems (1906)*

[6]Murry 134, makes a similar comment, seeing the "incessant and conflicting interplay" between the ideal and the real as being de la Mare's main interest.

[7]Richard Smith 107 discusses de la Mare's appropriation of Platonic terms in *Motley* and *The Veil*, believing he is not a platonist but as with allusions to literary works takes whatever he finds useful as a vehicle of expression. Bonnerot 257, 409 believes that when the listener achieves this state of ecstasy, he recaptures a vision of the unfallen world and thereby

regains unity by retrieving his total humanity.

[8]De la Mare loved the last stanza of "Fare Well," and it became a motto expressing his philosophy to many of his admirers:

> Look thy last on all things lovely,
> Every hour. Let no night
> Seal thy sense in deathly slumber
> Till to delight
> Thou have paid thy utmost blessing;
> Since that all things thou wouldst praise
> Beauty took from those who loved them
> In other days (*CP* 218)

[9]For instance, see "Two Deep Clear Eyes" (1941, *CP* 422) and "Love" (1951, *CP* 529)

[10]Here, as in "I Met at Eve" and "Nod," previously discussed, the rose colour both indicates time of day and is a pun on the flower which symbolizes the transience of life

[11]Kirkham 114 remarks that the speakers' attitudes resemble that of youth to old age in "Age" in *Poems* (1906).

[12]Kirkham 124, thinks highly of this poem, by contrast Bonnerot 113 finds it painful to read because it is so poor.

[13]By the inn having the sign of the rising sun and being called the World's End, de la Mare slyly and self reflexively recalls the Inn he depicted in *Henry Brocken* (1904) 120, in the chapter inspired by *Pilgrim's Progress*. Accordingly, it possesses attributes of both earth and eternity

[14]This territory came to be considered de la Mare's own special area A typical comment is the psychological interpretation by J.B. Priestley, "There is a de la Mare world, unlike anybody else's. It exists chiefly in the twilight regions between the conscious mind of our time and the great deep of the collective unconscious..." *Tribute to Walter de la Mare on his Seventy-Fifth Birthday* p 18.

[15]Elizabeth Schneider interprets God to be dying in her explication of "Maerchen," item 29.

[16]In his introduction to his anthology of folk and fairy tales, *Animal Stories* (1939) xxvii, de la Mare will later refer to "Maerchen" as "nursery tales," which usually lead to a "scrap of worldly wisdom, a minute lesson, even to a moral," as in "The Three Little Pigs."

Chapter 5

[1]The metaphor of the inward fire to convey the power of innocence recalls a similar image at the conclusion of "The Children of Stare" *Poems* (1906) where the children's "tiny fires" are "Blown to a core of ardour / By the awful breath of God" (*CP* 63) but stripped of a religious context. While previously it signified the force and origin of their purity, now it carries the Romantic association of creative dynamism. As in "Noon and Night Flower" from *The Listeners*, the usual association of activity with outer life is inverted to suggest the vitality of the inner, creative life, as the girl's thoughts "dream" through "enchanted woods." The inward direction of the girl's gaze will reappear in *Memory* as the "inward eye," a significant image in the later poetry.

[2]De la Mare believes that complete communication between loved ones is possible only in absolute silence when a spiritual communication could occur, "Silence" (*CP* 131).

[3]De Vries, 99, states that the colour blue is associated with circles, and both signify calm perfection.

[4]William Wordsworth, "I Wandered Lonely as a Cloud," 4:21. De la Mare believes we enter our unconscious by the "inward eye," whose relation to the physical eye he expressed analogously by comparing the effect of moonlight to that of sunlight. Its power depends on the person's awareness of inner experience, but just as with external sight, it is formed by the

perceiver's impression of the play of light on an object. Unlike the outer eye, however, it neither tires nor ages but will continue to produce a clear image. Although it can be called upon again, the perceiver's gaze can only remain focused for a few instants, *Behold, This Dreamer* 80, 51, 53 notes. De la Mare would later call this inward gaze the inlet to "the little nowhere of the mind" *Nursery Rhymes for Certain Times* 10; Russell Brain, *Tea with Walter de la Mare* 15.

[5]Previously in *Early One Morning* (1935), de la Mare tells an anecdote which obviously formed the basis of "Dry August Burned "

> Some years ago a child of six was playing in the kitchen of a country cottage, in which she was spending her summer holidays, when a shot hare was brought in out of the heat of the harvest fields. At sight of it she broke into a passionate fit of weeping, and nothing would comfort her The heart having lulled at last, the head became active, and at noon, she sidled up to her mother with the half-whispered request, 'Mummie, please may I go and see the hare skinned?'" (216)

Chapter 6

[1]These terms are Michael Kirkham's, 128, 129.

[2]"Sheep" in *The Burning-Glass* refers to Blake's "double vision" where "with my inward Eye, 'tis an old Man grey, / With my outward, a Thistle across my way." "Letter," Felpham, Nov 22, 1802, *Poetical Works* 306; 27-30, and gives a recent example in the speaker's life which sparked the association. Spying from a bus window a motionless flock of sheep, the speaker sees them as shapes of stone. He comments on the process in the final two stanzas:

> The mind--that old mole--has its hidden earthworks:
> Blake's greybeard into a thistle turned,
> And, in his childhood, flocking angels
> In sun-wild foliage gleamed and burned
>
> Illusions. Yet--as my 'bus lurched onward,
> Beech trees, park-land and woodland gone,
> It was not sheep in my memory lingered
> But, strangely indwelling, those shapes of stone (*CP* 483)

[3]De la Mare, *Come Hither* 584; Iona and Peter Opie, "Introduction" *The Oxford Dictionary of Nursery Rhymes* 12; Elizabeth Sewell, *The Field of Nonsense* 67

[4]Bonnerot 211 notes the similarity of theme in the two poems

[5]In *Behold, This Dreamer* 56 67 Walter de la Mare calls this transitional state between waking and sleep "sentience," believing it is capable of producing vivid visual images which appear to have profound significance to the perceiver. Because the person is only in a state of partially suspended consciousness, he or she is thereby aware of exactly what the "inward eye" is focusing on.

[6]Bonnerot 351 makes a similar point about the early poem "A Song of Enchantment," stating that the singer uses archaisms to search for the Lost Time he cannot retrieve.

[7]I disagree with Bonnerot 143 who believes this is definitely a sexual affair, the "moment's peace" referring to the time immediately after love-making

[8]An early presentation of God in this manner appears in the flawed "The Hour-Glass" in *The Veil* (1921) which is spoken by a representative man to God

Chapter 7

[1]As Richard de la Mare explains in the bibliographical appendix to the *Complete Poems*, p 898, note 39, a somewhat shorter version of *The Traveller* appeared at the end of the American edition of *The Burning-Glass*, while a modified, fuller version appeared on its own in England in 1946.

[2]For example, one conversation begins with peace and time but becomes a discussion of the collective unconscious, p 56

[3]John Keats, "Ode to a Nightingale" 6-5

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Appendix: Walter de la Mare Criticism

The following bibliography is restricted to criticism about Walter de la Mare. Several excellent bibliographies about his own writings already exist, and are specified in Luce Bonnerot's *L'Oeuvre de Walter de la Mare. Une Aventure Spirituelle*. Paris: Didier, 1969, p. 474, the most comprehensive one still being Leonard Clark's *Walter de la Mare. A Checklist Prepared on the Occasion of an Exhibition of his Books and MSS at the National Book League*, London: Cambridge UP, 1956. Specifically, my list modifies and amplifies Bonnerot's bibliography of writings about de la Mare on pages 501-17 of her dissertation. It is a modification because the listings concern only writings about, or substantially about, de la Mare's poetry. It is an amplification because not only have I located a fair amount of criticism beyond the range of her bibliography which encompasses 1916-1967, but I have also discovered other items written within this period that she failed to mention. This list includes the criticism which I consulted as well as that cited in the course of research for the present study. For these reasons, there is a slight overlap with the preceding "Works Cited." For easy use, the items are arranged in chronological order. At the beginning, I include separate bibliographies of Walter de la Mare's writings. At the end, I include a brief note about biographical scholarship on de la Mare.

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Biography and Letters

To date, no biographical study of Walter de la Mare has been published, although Mrs. Teresa Whistler, the former wife of Rex Whistler the artist and de la Mare's close friend, was working on a manuscript several years ago. Nor, to date, have his letters been collected and edited. There are two large repositories: the Bodleian Library, Oxford, and the New York Public Library. In the latter, there are some letters in the Manuscript room, but the bulk is in the Berg Collection. There is also some correspondence in the B.B.C. archives.