Marbles and Tops

The Reputation of Walter de la Mare

by

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The reputation of Walter de la Mare represents a conundrum which, when probed, reveals much about the intertwined ventures of writer, publisher, and critic. From 1912 to the late 1920s, de la Mare had a public reputation equal to W. B. Yeats'. Like Yeats, he was a romantic and a symbolist, and he managed to embody in his work the spiritual concerns and anxieties of England in the Edwardian period and the Georgian that followed. By fusing elements from both folk and literary traditions and fully developing his extraordinary lyric gift, he found a point of coincidence between his own symbolist leanings and the demands of a reading and book-buying public, creating a singular de la Marean terrain in fiction, poetry, and criticism. He appeared in all five of the Georgian Poetry anthologies and attracted unusually large audiences to his readings. Celebrated by critics like Murry, Gosse, and Priestley, he also won the devotion of Henry Newbolt, Edward Thomas, and Rupert Brooke. When Geoffrey Faber and T. S. Eliot were forging the shape of Faber & Faber in the late 1920s, they chose de la Mare as one of their key writers, using his reputation to support a bold publishing venture. However, at this same moment, he came under attack from certain critics who demanded socially relevant literature and deplored the public preference for work that seemed to them outmoded and escapist. When I. A. Richards and F. R. Leavis effectively appropriated the evaluation of poetry as one of the functions of the academy, disenfranchising the public and condemning the poets that public celebrated, de la Mare was one of their chief targets. The pronouncements of these critics, reinforced by the development of a canon of "relevant" and innovative poets in anthologies like Michael Roberts' Faber Book of Modern Verse, hardened into a critical orthodoxy that still remains in effect, seventy years later, with regard to de la Mare. Because of the lack of widespread revaluation of de la Mare's work, an understanding of his subtle lyricism and symbolisms has been lost and the meaning of his earlier reputation effaced.
The public is very like a schoolboy.
Marbles may go out of fashion,
tops may come in.

Walter de la Mare
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Introduction

La fortune littéraire de Walter de la Mare est un phénomène curieux du point de vue de psychologie du public en général, et en particulier des spécialistes que sont les critiques, et aussi un exemple émouvant de ce que l'on pourrait appeler le destin d'un écrivain.

Luce Bonnerot

In the late 1970s, an American antiquarian bookseller came across a first edition of Broomsticks (1925), Walter de la Mare’s first collection of stories for children, in which the author had signed his name in pencil. Unfortunately, one owner of the book had thought nothing of the name and had erased the signature, leaving only the impression that the pencil had made. The bookseller wondered how to represent the book in her catalogue, but finally decided to include “signature, ‘Walter de la Mare,’ pencil, erased but legible,” and to set the book at a substantial price. De la Mare’s name, lapsing into obscurity amongst the general public, was still valued by the discerning book collector.

This anecdote reflects how the reputation of Walter de la Mare (1873-1956) represents a conundrum in literary history. In his time, he was considered one of the most distinguished of English poets, and his name was often mentioned in the same sentence as that of W. B. Yeats and Thomas Hardy. That reputation was reflected in the remarkable sales of his work from 1920 on. At present, de la Mare’s Collected Poems, Collected Rhymes and Verses, and single most successful volume of poetry, Peacock Pie, remain in print from the publisher whose name is almost synonymous with innovative twentieth-century poetry, Faber and Faber. His children’s book The Three Royal Monkeys and collections of his fairy tales are also reprinted from time to time. But in current academic discourse, de la Mare’s name and work is raised primarily in relation to
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*Georgian Poetry*, a series of anthologies rather than an aesthetic movement, but which, nevertheless, is often used to define the ground against which the figures of Imagists, Vorticists, and other rebellious but valuably innovative literary figures appeared around the time of the First World War. This study has its origin in, and takes its impetus from, the complex contradictions in de la Mare's reputation represented by these various circumstances: important and popular poet of the early twentieth-century whose name, just twenty years after his death, was on the point of disappearing from public consciousness; author of volumes much sought after by the avid book collector; romantic poet of traditional form whose work continues to be published by one of the key publishers of once-innovative twentieth-century literature; highly respected children's author; minor poet in academic representations of twentieth-century literature.

A preliminary explanation of de la Mare's fragmented reputation might focus on the nature of de la Mare's work itself. After all, he wrote poetry, short fiction, and novels for both child and adult audiences. He compiled massive anthologies about such diffuse subjects as dreams, childhood, and love. Not surprisingly, critics who survey that work are divided about the relative merits of the different modes. For instance, Michael Kirkham asserts the value of the romantic poetry against the strained gothic manner of the fiction: “The mental worlds of de la Mare’s fiction and of his verse are essentially the same, but his characteristic preoccupations receive less serious treatment in the stories than in the poems. The prose is often mannered — too ‘poetical,’ in fact — and sometimes arch and whimsical.” But Graham Greene, for one, delighted in the innovative treatment of uniquely morbid subjects in the short fiction. And Julia Briggs insists, in what is
surely a bizarrely miscalculated attempt to connect de la Mare to still-celebrated modes of symbolism, that the stories have enduring value because they "anticipate more recent poetic explorations of loneliness, silence and death, so remarkable in Beckett and Pinter, for example. Like them, [de la Mare] writes of the absurdity or total failure of communication in settings whose historical time or place are kept deliberately vague." These widely divergent evaluations seem to relate to the fact that the profusion of de la Mare’s work – in different forms, directed at child or adult audiences – offers too many ways in which his career and work can be read and critiqued. Even when faced with the opportunity to write a long study on de la Mare, the critic is forced to choose a single genre for study, or to insist on a common theme that is developed throughout the work, a filament that runs through all.

In this study I address the question of de la Mare’s reputation only partly by reference to the nature of his work. Prompted by the apparent inconsistencies I have noted above, I have defined the scope and direction of this study with a series of questions, beginning with an interrogation of publisher Otto Kyllmann’s statement that de la Mare was "the most distinguished poet of his generation." Of precisely what generation was de la Mare? What did Kyllmann mean by “distinguished,” and how could that become a liability? How did de la Mare fit into the publishing “mission” of Faber and Faber? Why did de la Mare’s work and the interests of the reading public diverge and exactly when? Rather than examining any one strand of his work, defined either in generic or thematic terms, I answer these questions by considering the literary and social context in which his work first appeared (Chapter 1), how de la Mare viewed that context, as
revealed in his extensive body of criticism (Chapter 2), and how his work was shaped, used, and ultimately defined by publishers and critics (Chapters 3, 4, & 5).

I examine the changing reputation of Walter de la Mare not just in relation to the public’s appetite for his particular kind of literature, but also with regard for the decisions of publishers about whom and what to publish, and for the critical discourses that enable or disable certain texts. For as reading theorists like Stanley Fish have argued, the reading and reception of an author’s work is only partially determined by the nature of that work. At least equally important are the dialectical relationships between the work itself, the social context in which that work is presented to the reader, and the frameworks of interpretation that enable the reading of that work with a particular meaning.

Finally, throughout these considerations of context, I want to keep in sight the decisions that de la Mare himself made with respect to the genres in which he wrote and the way that his work was presented to his readers. For de la Mare, more than many other authors, developed a deep involvement with and understanding of the publishing world over a very long career, and he worked very hard in association with his publishers and literary agents to maximize the sales of his work, to anticipate and negotiate public tastes. Wherever possible, I have quantified his success in doing so with reference to sales figures.

Born in the Victorian period, publishing his first books in the Edwardian period, coming to the height of his popularity in the reign of George V, and living well beyond the
end of World War II, Walter de la Mare's sensibility cannot be so easily placed with one generation or another. Nor can he be aligned with one particular poetic movement. He was in many ways a romantic who eschewed the accidental qualities of a particular time and place.

Even so, his means of expressing the spiritual condition of humanity was undoubtedly influenced by the general tenor of the Edwardian period, described by Samuel Hynes as "waiting for the death of the old and the birth of the new." Poets of the time seem to have been at a particular disadvantage, their personal, lyrical voices disconnected from any convincing public utterance, as Ian Hamilton has observed: "At no earlier period, it could be said, were the makers of poems required so nakedly to ask themselves: why poems? At no earlier period was the potential audience so thrillingly immense and yet (or therefore) so depressingly neglectful. At no period were the tribal bard's tribe-altering pretensions so cheerfully disdained." Thus, while de la Mare began writing with an essentially spiritual intent, this could not be represented either with reference to orthodox ideas or even through the "egotistical sublime" of romantic lyric poetry. We might say that the key problem to face de la Mare in this period was how to convey his essentially spiritual themes with reference to the concrete and the substantial, to give body to ghosts and shape to enigma, and to do so in a commercially viable form. He was after "atmosphere" but realized that it must be created through "the glamour of reality."

In Chapter 1, I look at de la Mare's earliest stories and poems to show how the development of certain enduring themes in his work and of the techniques to represent
them relate to this social and literary context of the late-Victorian and Edwardian world and, to some extent, to de la Mare's personal circumstances. In this work, he struggled to find a means of expressing his apprehension of two worlds – the mutable substance of the everyday and an immutable otherworld of which it may be an expression or emanation. In the 1890s, the examples offered by French symbolism, translated into English modes by Oscar Wilde and Richard Le Gallienne amongst others, must have seemed to him a natural avenue for his own spiritual leanings. However, he also realized the popular forms of the ghost story (as practiced by Sheridan Le Fanu, Henry James, R. L. Stevenson, and Arthur Machen) and the fairy tale (in the collections of Andrew Lang and others) offered similar possibilities. As he experimented with these various genres, he also undertook a more systematic study of English literature with the aim of finding themes, symbols, and modes that he could use in his own work. In *Songs of Childhood* (1902), for instance, he fused ghost and fairy elements with a lyricism borrowed from children's verse. Not surprisingly, then, much of this early work reveals de la Mare's struggle to reconcile these various influences in a unified vision, a unique voice, and an English idiom.

In *Introduction* 2, I consider to what extent de la Mare depended not only upon those kinds of literature that were becoming more and more the special province of childhood, but used the child's sensibility as a critical measure as well. By the time de la Mare had finished his "apprenticeship" as a writer, he not only had a powerful ability with symbolist modes, and a government grant that enabled him to leave his clerical work at Imperial Oil to become a full-time writer and reviewer, but he had also adopted his own
position on the literary issues of the day. In the extensive body of criticism he wrote for the *Times Literary Supplement* and the *Saturday Westminster Gazette* from 1908 on, he demonstrated a consistent idea of literature – of its origins, methods, and functions – as well as an engagement with the most important critical issues of the early century, most centrally with symbolist versus realist modes of representation. Many of de la Mare's earliest ideas on the question of how we perceive and decipher the world through symbols anticipate Jung's notion of archetypes. In literature, de la Mare recognised that what was required was a balance between fact and symbol, between the mundane and the transcendent. He recognised this balance in works as diverse as those of Edgar Allan Poe and Arnold Bennett, in Henry James and Anton Chekhov: "For the one the life of the world within, for the other the life of the great world without."11 The language that would embody this ideal balance could not be conventional, the literary used over and over again: he emphasised the need to continually forge meaning afresh using "bellows and furnace and sound poetic biceps."12

At the same time as de la Mare was formulating his idea of literature in his criticism, he was writing two novels and working on the poetry that would later appear in *The Listeners* (1912) and *Peacock Pie* (1913). In this poetry, the various influences evident in his earlier work had been completely melded, and the emotional dynamic of fear and consolation so important in his work was now more firmly grounded. This new direction, the anchoring of his symbolism in the concrete, was undoubtedly the result of de la Mare's friendship with Edward Thomas from 1908 until Thomas' untimely death in 1917.
Despite the maturity and confidence of this new work, de la Mare was still having trouble publishing it. The *Georgian Poetry* series (1912-1922) brought the poetry to the attention of the public and radically altered the attitude of publishers. Furthermore, de la Mare was assured of financial security from 1915 to the end of his life by a bequest of royalties from a renowned poet, killed in the First World War, who had a deep admiration for de la Mare’s work. The bequest allowed de la Mare to pursue his particular vision without undue regard for commercial success. In Chapter 3, I examine this extraordinary confluence of circumstances that made de la Mare a master of his particular technique and the most reputable, and perhaps the most wealthy, of the Georgian poets.

By the early 1920s, de la Mare was earning about twenty times the amount he had as a clerk at Imperial Oil. The “de la Mare atmosphere” was at the peak of its popularity and a number of publishers were putting out their own de la Mare titles. By this time, too, de la Mare had developed a unique insight into and involvement with the publishing trade – which he once described as “a timid, trembling edifice of apprehension founded upon hard cash”\(^\text{13}\) – an insight which translated into a very business-like approach to negotiating his contracts with those publishers hungry for his work. He had proven that he was a reliable producer of his own brand of literary goods. Now he was able to insist on the particular terms under which his work would be published. By 1921, so prodigious was his correspondence with various publishers that he found it necessary, and evidently had adequate income, to employ a secretary.

The business of publishing his work was radically simplified from about 1927 on when Faber & Faber (then known as Faber & Gwyer), a relatively new publisher at the
time, decided to depend on his reputation and his reliability to support a commercially daring and culturally incisive publishing mission. Through the direction of T. S. Eliot and Geoffrey Faber, Faber & Faber was to become the preeminent British publisher of innovative twentieth-century poetry. In Chapter 4, I consider the steps by which Faber took on more and more of de la Mare’s work, how de la Mare figured in Faber’s mission, and how this new publishing arrangement enabled de la Mare to explore new genres.

At about the same time as de la Mare was taken up by Faber & Faber, his work was becoming the focus of vigorous attacks by I. A. Richards and F. R. Leavis, who were denouncing not only his particular brand of romanticism, but also the public taste that applauded and consumed it. In Chapter 5, I consider how, in the process of demanding a new set of rigorous standards for the evaluation of poetry and of creating a new ground for reception of innovative but difficult poets like Eliot and Pound whom they considered more engaged with contemporary circumstances, these critics found it necessary to disparage the work of poets working in a traditional poetic. Indeed, it was precisely because he was both a highly skilled and popular poet that de la Mare was the natural target for such an attack. Rather than offering any extended close reading of his work, his detractors simply took the public conception about the nature of his work – that it offered the consolation of fantasy, allowing escape from the difficulties of the present – which was largely a misconception or, at best, a partial truth, and reflected it in their criticism, hardening it into a critical orthodoxy which has survived, more or less intact, to the present.
The evidence for the persistence of this view includes the almost complete neglect of critics, academic or otherwise, of de la Mare’s work in the years after his death. Aside from a biography and a handful of doctoral theses, there have been no long studies of de la Mare published in the last thirty years! It is generally accepted by both those who admire his work and those who do not that, like a comfortable but unchallenging religion, there is nothing new to discover about it, as Luce Bonnerot noted in her 1969 study: “Ainsi ceux qui, par tempérament aimaient la forme, n’étaient pas préparés à comprendre le fond, et ceux qui auraient pu comprendre le fond étaient déroutés par la forme et s’éloignaient.”

While it is not my intention to attempt an extensive probing of the depths of de la Mare’s work from the beginning to the end of his writing life, I do offer, in my first chapters, some explanation of why his complex poetic vision was encompassed in relatively conservative forms and genres. We will examine, too, why it is that the “mental worlds of de la Mare’s fiction and of his verse are essentially the same.” In the last chapter, we will see that the forms, rather than the mental worlds encompassed by them, became the obsessive focus of those detractors who undermined de la Mare’s reputation and, to a great extent, disabled serious and prolonged reading of his work by future readers.
Chapter 1: Pursuing Enigma
De la Mare at the Fin de Siècle

My inmost mind is like a book
The reader dulls with lassitude,
Wherein the same old lovely words
Sound poor and rude.

Yet through this vapid surface, I
Seem to see old time deeps; I see,
Past the dark painting of the hour,
Life’s ecstasy.

Walter de la Mare, “The Glimpse” (1906)

Walter de la Mare combined the literary propensities of the symbolist with the industry and application of a meticulous office worker. The challenge of finding a distinctively English mode of symbolism occupied him throughout his early writing career and he experimented with a variety of different possibilities: horrific, strange, and mysterious situations in his earliest work, short stories published in popular literary magazines; the themes and modes of the fairy tale, nursery rhyme, and folk ballad, combined with a delicate lyricism in his earliest published book, the collection of poems Songs of Childhood (1902); and allegory and analogy in his somber second book, Poems (1906). Furthermore, throughout this early period, he was developing his ability to depict scenes with crystallized clarity and stillness, a kind of hyperrealism that he might have taken from Keats or Tennyson, or borrowed from the paintings of certain pre-Raphaelite painters, like John Everett Millais or Edward Burne-Jones.

Until 1908, de la Mare was an office worker. He left St. Paul’s Cathedral’s choir-school and entered the working world as a junior clerk in Imperial Oil, the British offshoot of Standard Oil, a few months before his seventeenth birthday in 1890. The
year is significant because, as de la Mare toiled through a daily routine of the copying and adding of figures, the literary world of London was blooming with some very exotic flowers. The aspiring author who came of age at this time was faced with wildly divergent influences, a choice of literary allegiances, and a market that was increasing in size but was also becoming more and more fragmented.

It is a signal fact that de la Mare, who began his life as a Delamare, restored the spelling of his name to the French original, reflecting a heritage both French and Huguenot, a sensibility that combined a romantic outlook and a Protestant ethic. As de la Mare's biographer, Theresa Whistler, has noted, the Huguenot background was very much present in the household in which Walter grew up: "What we notice most about his father's family is how intensely Huguenot they remained, as late as the Woolwich generation." De la Mare reasserted this heritage. And even though he chose to publish his early works under a pseudonym, Walter Ramal, forming an anagram of his last name (which he used until after publication of his first book, *Songs of Childhood*, in 1902), the pseudonym itself seems French, and his use of a writing persona reflects again his division of sensibility. While one could argue that these two divergent strains—a cosmopolitan romanticism and a parochial Puritanism—characterized the entire Victorian world and animated its cultural productions, they were not always so closely bound as they were in de la Mare's case. De la Mare's literary success was a direct result of his ability to bridge these divisions and to produce a body of work which was distinctly English. In his earliest work, he was often overcome by the strength of his literary influences, both English and French. But by the early 1900s, he had discovered an
original voice, one that rang with the depth of English folk and literary influences, but that was also unique, intensely focused, and compelling. Even so, it was to be another decade before he was “discovered” by the public and even longer before he was fully embraced by a publisher.

There can be no doubt, of course, of the extensive influence of the French example in the late 19th century. French novelists like Zola and Balzac, and poets like Baudelaire, Mallarmé, and Verlaine, were supplying English writers with new vistas, approaches to the subject of the city with all its sordid facts and exhilarating possibilities. The poets were also reawakening an interest in elaborate verse patterns, such as the villanelle. One poet already prominent in the 1890s, Richard Le Gallienne, had faced personal and cultural challenges similar to de la Mare’s and responded much as de la Mare would. While Le Gallienne had added the “Le” to his own name, admitting a French influence on his sensibility, he published one volume of his work under the title of *English Poems* (1892) through Elkin Mathews and John Lane, who were to publish *The Yellow Book* two years later.

Despite styling himself and his work on the French influence, Le Gallienne resolutely insisted on the need to maintain a distinctively English tradition. In his address “To the Reader” at the beginning of *English Poems*, he laments the grafting of a foreign flower onto the root of things English:

Art was a palace once, things great and fair,  
And strong and holy, found a temple there:  
Now ’tis a lazaret-house of leprous men.  
O shall we hear an English song again!  
Still English larks mount in the merry mom,
And English May still brings an English thorn,
Still English daisies up and down the grass,
Still English love for English lad and lass—
Yet youngsters blush to sing an English song!

Englishness, as Le Gallienne’s song makes clear, is based in a pastoral ideal, and the
ultimate emblem of English poetic “song” is the nightingale:

Thou nightingale that for six hundred years
Sang to the world—O art thou husht at last!
For, not of thee this new voice in our ears,
Music of France that once was of the spheres;
And not of thee these strange green flowers that spring
From daisy roots and seem to bear a sting.³

Things unnatural have been grafted onto the natural, with the result that the “English
thorn” has been replaced by the French “sting.” The great tradition of English lyric
poetry, song of the nightingale and music of the spheres, has been eclipsed by a “new
voice in our ears.”

Despite his protest against this perversion of nature, Le Gallienne certainly drew
on the French example to portray some English Fleurs du Mal. In poems like “A Ballad
of London,” he draws on an extended metaphor fusing city and countryside, artifice and
nature, to characterize London:

Ah, London! London! our delight,
Great flower that opens but at night,
Great City of the Midnight Sun,
Whose day begins when day is done.

....

Upon thy petals butterflies,
But at thy root, some say, there lies
A world of weeping trodden things,
Poor worms that have not eyes or wings.⁴
Le Gallienne’s lacks the abrasive diction of Baudelaire’s poetry, and tends towards the naive pathos of Blake in the second of these stanzas. But he does follow the symbolist’s method of energizing his poem by conflating what are commonly perceived as opposites, holding them together with a regular verse pattern and a mesmerizing cadence. And although de la Mare’s dual worlds were not exactly the city and the country, the sublime and the pathetic, he, too, incorporated some of the same elements of the symbolist example into his own work in order to invoke something beyond the barren, material reality left behind in the wake of the “melancholy long, withdrawing roar” of the “Sea of Faith.”

De la Mare’s literary apprenticeship began not with poems and stories, but with acting in and writing for his neighbourhood drama society, Esperanza, which he joined in 1892 (the year of G. B. Shaw’s debut as a playwright, and a year before that of Yeats, at the Avenue Theatre). The group produced their own plays and, according to Whistler, were in constant demand at parish halls across the city. For the Christmas season of 1893, de la Mare wrote a farce for the group, *A Darling Old Villain*, which was very well received. The plot concerns a father who tries to prevent his beloved daughter from marrying her childhood friend. Simple in form and almost entirely comical in effect, this work gave very little hint of the work that was to come. He wrote a sentimental, second play, *Geoffrey*, in which he and Elfrida Ingpen, an actress in the society whom he was eventually to marry, took the lead roles, acting out a melodramatic version of their own developing relationship.
The success of these first dramatic ventures convinced de la Mare that, more than just using writing as a means of dreaming away from the daily grind, he might literally be able to support himself as a professional writer, to use "my pretty thoughts . . . for a fine to get me out of prison." He consciously set out to learn all he could about the writer's craft by examining the examples of both past writers and his contemporaries and by considering the demands of the market.

The most approachable markets available to the aspiring writer in the 1890s were undoubtedly popular literary magazines like the *Cornhill* or the *Strand*, and the most marketable product was the short story. In 1891, a revolution in the literary magazine had occurred when George Newnes began to publish the *Strand* magazine. Newnes considered the elements of successful American magazines and came up with a formula for a British equivalent. He sold his magazine at 6d., rather than the shilling demanded for most others, and supported the price by selling advertisements. He cut out serial fiction altogether, preferring complete short stories and articles in each issue.

The *Strand*'s unprecedented success – it reached sales of half a million – had two major effects. The success of the *Strand* encouraged three rivals: *Pall Mall* (1893); *Windsor* (1895); and *Royal* (1898). And demand from the *Strand* and these rivals changed the nature of fiction-writing: "the *Strand* formula created a large demand for the short story, a genre hitherto not very significant, artistically or commercially, in Britain." Thus, the writer of the 1890s was faced with the challenge of producing work that would appeal to a mass audience, in a form that had barely been developed in Britain. The most obvious precedent for the form in English was the work of Edgar Allan Poe, or the folk
traditions of myths, fables, legends, and fairy tales. But the most immediate examples were being produced by Arthur Conan Doyle, Henry James, Kipling, Wilde, and Stevenson, as well as Thomas Hardy, who was to have a considerable influence on de la Mare. But to succeed with an enthusiastic reading public, writers had to be particularly sensitive to audience expectations, as Christopher Kent has noted: "The greater immediacy of reader response provided by serial publications entailed a greater sensitivity to the sensibilities, real or imagined, of the readership."

Of course, at the same time, there was also a proliferation of "little magazines" more experimental in content and far more limited in readership. At first, de la Mare seems to have hedged about which market he was writing for. He, his future brother-in-law Roger Ingpen, and Ingpen's artist friend W. T. Horton (who was soon to start corresponding with W. B. Yeats on occultism) produced their own little magazine, _The Basilisk_, only one issue of which appeared, in January of 1895. Horton's design of the magazine and the drawings he included owed much to the influence of his former schoolmate Aubrey Beardsley, though one of the written contributions was an attack on Beardsley's "decadent" style. De la Mare contributed a story, "Kismet," as well as an "Epistle to O. W." in which he condemned Oscar Wilde's sexual immorality.

_The Basilisk_, like Esperanza, was ultimately an amateur effort, and since de la Mare was looking for the means to support himself as a writer, magazine publication of stories with popular appeal was essential. Fortunately, "Kismet" had this appeal, since English readers of the time favoured the sensational. Just as de la Mare sought to dream himself out of a dreary workaday world, his potential audience wanted forms of
entertainment that transformed and disrupted the placid domestic round. As Julia Briggs has noted, magazine readers did not want realistic reflection of their lives and living conditions, but more exotic entertainments: "The predominantly middle class audiences enjoyed romance and pictures of high life, but also liked to read of familiar settings transformed by a sudden eruption of crime, violence or the supernatural." Indeed, the ghost story was at the peak of its fashion at the fin-de-siècle: "Its remarkable success was closely connected with the growth of a reading public who consumed fictional periodicals avidly, magazines such as Blackwood's, the Cornhill, Tinsley's, Household Words, All the Year Round, Temple Bar, St. James's, Belgravia and the Strand, to name only a few." De la Mare's natural inclination toward the mystical, the unseen presences of night and countryside, was to find a popular form of expression in the ghost story. And it was the Cornhill magazine that published three of de la Mare's earliest stories in 1896 and 1897.

With the increased demand for the ghost story came more subtle and elaborate uses of the genre: the form was to have some distinguished practitioners. Earlier in the century, Sheridan Le Fanu (another writer of Huguenot descent) had used the form to give a compelling picture of the proximity of evil, and his use of multiple narrative frames added authenticity to the terrifying phantoms at their centres. Robert Louis Stevenson's The Strange Case of Dr. Jekyll and Mr. Hyde (1886) takes the cynical vision of human nature perpetuated in naturalistic fiction and renders it in fantastic form. And although it offers a pseudo-scientific rationale for its events, it is only the more terrifying as a result. Even Henry James was eventually to offer his own skeptical version of the presence of
supernatural evil in *The Turn of the Screw* (1898). And there are numerous other distinguished examples of the form from this period: Oscar Wilde’s *The Picture of Dorian Gray* (1891); H. G. Wells’ *The Invisible Man* (1897); and Conan Doyle’s *The Hound of the Baskervilles* (1902).

In comparison with these, de la Mare’s “Kismet” was rather primitive in technique. Nevertheless, it was published again in *The Sketch* of 7 August 1895, under the superheading “A Novel in a Nutshell,” by “Walter Ramal.” Taking up just one page of the magazine, the story concerns a seaman returning to his home late on a frosty night, after a long absence, singing as he goes, expecting to surprise and delight his wife. A carter, beset by superstitious fears as he travels along the lonely road, offers the jolly seaman a ride and has him sit on a box in the back of his cart. The journey passes in silence as the seaman finds it too difficult to converse with the taciturn driver, and the seaman’s good humour, in the presence of this surly fellow, is soon replaced by a “vague presage of impending disaster.” As they enter his village, the seaman decides to walk the remaining distance to his home. But coming up to his house, he finds the cart pulled up in front and the box missing from the back. With unnamed fears, he creeps to the back of his house where a howling dog quickly recognizes him as his master. Unable to restrain “his wild forebodings and fear of unknown evil,” he climbs a tree and, inching out on one of its boughs far above the ground, peers in at his own bedroom. There he sees his mother-in-law standing over the “still, pallid face of his dead wife,” and the carter with the box, which he can now recognize as a coffin. He falls from the frozen branch, cracking his skull against another branch in his descent. As he lies “broken and lifeless” on the
ground, the dog approaches, licks his master’s bloody hand, “then threw up its head to
give tongue to a long-drawn howl of terror.”

The story indulges the macabre interests of the late-Victorian audience while
clearly embodying what were to become de la Mare’s obsessive concerns: the intrusion
of mysterious forces into the mundane; and the struggle between the forces of death and
love. The origin of both those general interests and of de la Mare’s particular concerns
has been suggested by Briggs:

The ghost story was well-suited to express ambivalent reactions, the sense
of loss and gain, for it seemed at the outset to invite the reader’s modern
cynicism, only to vanquish it with a reassertion of older and more spiritual
values. Even amidst its superficial terrors it might thus provide subtle
reassurances.13

Tales of the supernatural, or with hints of the supernatural, served a materialistic age by
providing reassuring memories of a more primitive but more spiritual past. In fact, the
entire point of such stories seems to be to suspend the reader’s cynicism; all of the
writer’s narrative energies are concentrated on that task as he convinces both himself and
his readers.

De la Mare accomplishes the feat of changing the disbelieving reader’s mind with a
technique that he was to use in many of his stories, and which he could have picked up
from LeFanu or a number of other writers. He multiplies the narrative point-of-view.
For the story begins from the point-of-view of the carter, with whom the reader has little
empathy, or whom, perhaps, the reader might view as backward. The carter is a witless
country fellow with limited, rural knowledge and a superstitious sense that “grim shapes
were gathering behind him.” As he approaches the figure of the seaman walking along the
road ahead of him, he is enraptured by the power of the seaman’s singing: “The music in
the song seemed to run in his blood – a shudder shook him from head to foot.” The carter
is an innocent. By contrast, the seaman is exotic, his face “sun-browned”; he is a sailor
over Britain’s wide empire who possesses “The bravery to walk alone at midnight
through the still country lanes.” In other words, he is a far more attractive figure, with
whom the reader could more easily identify. And yet, once the seaman has swung
himself into the cart and the narrative has shifted to his point-of-view, his joy is quickly
subdued by the carter’s surliess. Again and again, the seaman struggles to reassure
himself, to repress unnamed fears. Nevertheless, as he walks into the village and hears
the howl of a dog, “terror seized upon him for a moment, so that he gasped for breath and
trembled as he walked.” The seaman, the reader’s more sophisticated, more worldly
window into this naive rural place, has been infected with the same irrational fears that
possessed the carter. And once he climbs the tree and realizes the truth, the coincidence
of his journey, sitting on his own wife’s coffin, seems to the reader more like a
conspiracy of supernatural forces, the grim toying of a still-active Fate, or ‘Kismet.’

Although the characterisation is not deep – his characters are stock types – the
nature of the drama was to become very characteristic of de la Mare’s stories. No ghosts
appear. From this starting point and on throughout his long career, de la Mare never
resorted to insisting on the appearance of such phantasmagoria. The implicit is much
more important to him. De la Mare’s ghosts reside in the narrative uncertainty, the
indeterminacy in which his stories, and many of his poems, leave us.
That de la Mare made his debut in *The Sketch* is itself revealing. Rather than being a literary magazine, it was a large-format, weekly, pictorial magazine edited by Clement Shorter, who also edited the *Illustrated London News* and several other pictorial magazines. While Shorter professed that "literature . . . remained his first allegiance," he knew that the pictorial magazine depended upon "eye-catching graphic novelties," and he worked diligently to that end. As a result, his career "took him through that curious borderland between new-style mass journalism and old-style belletrism which existed around the turn of the century." The *Sketch* centered on news of social and cultural events, including "Racing Notes," a large section on "The Art of the Day," and another section entitled, "Our Ladies Pages." Reproductions of photographs of plays, ballets, cricket players, actresses, society masquerades, and, occasionally, a portrait of a woman in a rather daring state of undress alternated with the text. Stories were seldom included. By all appearances, then, *The Sketch* was a rather eccentric venue for a story, although de la Mare's "Novel in a Nutshell" may not have overtaxed its readers. De la Mare was paid three guineas for his contribution.

Giving up his work for Esperanza, de la Mare was dedicated, through the spring of 1895, to writing stories and attempting a novel. In this, he was driven partly by his desperation to escape from Imperial Oil, as he wrote to Elfrida: "I am dying in the place of Oil . . . How greatly I loathe this hurrying, sordid place." But in the process of learning this new trade, he came under some very disparate influences. Although recognizing that he should write fiction that was grounded and robust, he instead
produced work more nearly allied to symbolist examples.\textsuperscript{19} His attempt at a novel, entitled \textit{The Master}, was saturated with the trappings of aestheticism and included also the symbolist idea of the correspondence of the senses.\textsuperscript{20} This novel was finished in the fall of 1895 but was never published, though sections of it may have been submitted to magazines, including the \textit{Cornhill}.\textsuperscript{21}

\textit{The Master} was probably too heavily stamped with the techniques of French symbolism to have much popular appeal. When de la Mare turned himself more squarely to the ghost story, he had much greater success. At the same time as he was indulging himself with \textit{The Master}, he was producing more short stories, and he was helped with the submission of these to magazines by his wife and brother-in-law. As Whistler has ascertained, his work was sent out to journals of all camps and colours, but “The Decadent \textit{Yellow Book} liked his work as little as the Counter-Decadent \textit{New Review}.”\textsuperscript{22} Finally, “The Hangman Luck,” which had been rejected by the \textit{New Review}, appeared in the \textit{Pall Mall Gazette} on 4 November 1895.\textsuperscript{23} The \textit{Gazette} was a rather sensational newspaper, not a magazine, but de la Mare had been trying to write a story that would fit its pages. And the story that he contributed was, like “Kismet,” built on a far-fetched coincidence.

“The Hangman Luck” is told in the first person, from the point-of-view of a tramping man who is exhausted and afraid. As the story begins, he starts awake from the doze he has fallen into at a country pub. An overbearing and drunken local insists on buying him rum, which he drinks with a toast “‘To the hangman, Luck!’” (408). But as the narrator stands up, he notices “a patch of sullen red upon my hand” (408), a stain
which is noticed by both the landlord and the drunk. And while the landlord eyes him suspiciously, the drunk offers to take him home for a meal and to physic him for the tremors that are now playing over him. They leave the pub and, as they walk towards the setting sun, the narrator reflects ominously that “each step was nearing us to the cornfield, each step was retracing the way by which I had come” (411). The drunk leads him to a pool where he might clean his hands, and as the narrator washes away the blood, he begins to relate the source of his fears. After walking all day, he had come to a village and, being tired and hungry, had asked at each house for milk and food. But he had been scorned by everyone there, even by the children. Coming “to cottages, solitary in vast gardens and hemmed with fruit trees” (412), he was confronted by an old woman who declared that she would rather feed her scraps to the pigs than to him. And with “madness of hunger and thirst and heat and anger and hatred of God mounting in [his] brain” (412), he struck her down with his heavy stick, then hid the body in a cornfield. The drunk, growing sullen and quiet at this story, nevertheless remains sympathetic: “I fancy I know the woman; she’s a long talker, and of a shrill temper” (412). As they tramp through the cornfield, the narrator leads the drunk to the body of the woman, the drunk’s own mother, takes the few coins that the man offers him, then runs off, leaving him with “the grey old head of his mother resting on his hands” (413).

The same malevolent force of Fate is operative here as in “Kismet.” In both stories, the narrative works to create a sense that events are leading to some inescapable conclusion. There are other similarities, too, between the two stories. The irony of the seaman sitting on his own wife’s coffin is matched by the tramp’s toast to the force of
Luck that will eventually lead him back to the murdered woman. Then there are the pathetic images with which each story closes: dog and dead master, drunk and dead mother. But “The Hangman Luck” also includes an element that was to become another of de la Mare’s obsessions: the criminal mind. Indeed, this is the only story in which de la Mare attempts to delineate that mind from the inside, using the first-person narrative.

In response to the drunk’s claim that “‘Cities are the devil’s works’” (409), the narrator ruminates on the effect that city life has had on him, echoing the clerk of John Davidson’s “Thirty Bob a Week”:

“A man pelts down to hell never seeing a gleam of a star; look at me,” said I, all my hopelessness and misery boiling in my heart, nearly choking speech. “What chance have I had? Maybe I am weak-kneed and a lounger. But if I had been no sinner, maybe I should have been a saint!” (409)

De la Mare’s personal dissatisfaction with city life pushes through here, though tramping the countryside like his character (as a fellow Georgian, W. H. Davies, was to do, and as his friend Edward Thomas made a habit of) was an option that he seldom pursued.

The next three of de la Mare’s stories to be published showed similarities with and differences from the previous two. It was as if de la Mare were playing variations on a theme, trying to find a marketable refrain in the process of carving out the tenor and resonances of his own voice. These three stories appeared in the Cornhill magazine.

The Cornhill had originally been one of the most successful of literary magazines, capturing a large audience by publishing parts of two novels by prominent writers in each issue, as well as stories, poems, and articles. Founded by George M. Smith in 1860 and boasting a circulation of 110,000 for its first issue, the Cornhill also came under the
guidance of some distinguished editors: W. M. Thackeray at its outset; and Leslie Stephen from 1871 to 1882 (who published Thomas Hardy and Henry James in its pages). By the 1890s, however, the practice of serialising novels was waning and the *Cornhill* was struggling to maintain a circulation above 10,000.

John St. Loe Strachey was brought in as editor in 1896 and was working diligently to try to restore the magazine’s declining reputation and slumping readership. Under the previous editorship of James Payn, the *Cornhill* had changed its focus from “high-quality literary essays to light fiction and articles aimed at a less literate audience,” and its price had been lowered to 6 d. But the result had been disastrous: it was not sensational enough for that new audience, nor sophisticated enough for the old. Strachey’s project was to restore the magazine’s prestige and win back its readership. Its price was changed back to a shilling at the same time as the quality of its reviews and stories was improved. Strachey took on de la Mare’s stories as part of the project of restoration. De la Mare was going upmarket from the *Sketch* and the *Pall Mall Gazette*, and he was paid accordingly, as much as £10 per story.

The stories were brought to Strachey’s personal attention by Roger Ingpen, who was now working for the magazine’s publishers, Smith, Elder & Co. Apparently, Strachey was very much struck by the work, as the editorial note he appended to the first of the stories he published demonstrates: “Those who hold the doctrine of transmigration will hardly fail, after they have read this story, to think that the spirit of Edgar Allan Poe is once more abroad.” Certainly, some of the characters in these early stories demonstrate the pathological obsessions common to Poe, and the narratives
themselves may seem designed with the single purpose of producing a frisson in the reader. Yet as we shall see, de la Mare himself became increasingly aware of his “possession” by Poe and worked actively to distance himself from Poe’s morbidity.

However, in the story to which Strachey referred, “A Mote,” de la Mare was still experimenting with narrative methods for overcoming the reader’s disbelief: here, a skeptical narrator faithfully records the visions and fantastic beliefs of another character.27 In this case, the narrator, Edmond, records the bizarre behaviour of his uncle, who, by revolving his eyes within his head, claims to witness visions of a strange and startling inner world in which all his thoughts are embodied.28 The story takes place in what must be a country house, set amongst gardens and orchards. The uncle has discovered his inner world entirely by accident, but has subsequently become addicted to its procedures – “I want above all things to spend my life watching” (418) – convinced that a tiny character that crawls across its landscape, moving towards his doom, is his own representative.

The story might be about the dissolution of the uncle’s identity as he realises that he is possessed by innumerable demons. At first, his inner world seems like a monstrous version of Eden, densely packed with vegetation and with creatures that, like those the Ancient Mariner sees in the polar sea, may be blessed or cursed: “Deep in the lazy foetid green of the underwood sparkled quick eyes, and smooth, glossy skins shimmered” (417). But the uncle seems convinced that this world is his, rather than God’s, creation: “There was an atmosphere of ages over the place, and a distressing suggestion that all upon which my eyes looked was of me and in me – my own creatures
and creations.”” He seems, in fact, to be eyeing either his own evolutionary history or the numberless shapes of his own subconscious:

“I have spied upon the gambols of my hairy ancestry – perhaps Darwin! – and each godless ape was in mine own image. Each transmigration of my eternal – think on’t, my boy – eternal self has passed before my eyes, is now. This brood of creatures, of which I am the god and maker, are multiplying like worms in offal; cities teem with ugly and deformed, with lame and vile.” (418)

As his nephew records the progress of what he views as “Nerves” (418) and his wife obliviously carries on with her domestic routine, the uncle undergoes a kind of breakdown of his identity: one morning he awakes, no longer able to distinguish between his two worlds, and is forced to do battle with a venetian blind and the limbs of his fruit trees.

In Le Fanu’s work, the truth of the stories is authorised by their narrative frame. The case notes of Dr. Hesselius, practitioner of “metaphysical medicine,” as they are offered to us by his sober disciple in the tales of In a Glass Darkly (1872), seem hard to discount. However, throughout de la Mare’s story, the status of the uncle’s visions remains uncertain because of the entirely skeptical view of the nephew-narrator. At times, indeed, the uncle’s descriptions rise to such a fever pitch that the reader cannot help but adopt the view of the narrator:

“I see a huge tower of granite,” he grunted; “I see lean spires of metal and hazardous towers, frowning upon the blackness of their shadows. White lights stare out of narrow window-slits: a black cloud breathes smoke in the streets. There is no wind, yet a wind sits still upon the city. The air smells like copper. Every sound rings as it were upon metal. There is a glow – a glow of outer darkness – a glow imagined by strained eyes. The city is a bubble with clamour and tumult rising thin and yellow in the lean streets like dust in a loampit . . .” (419)
The rapid play of personification and metaphors in this passage is suggestive rather than descriptive, again demonstrating the influence on de la Mare of the symbolist obsession with the correspondence of the senses. But as the speech of a man witnessing a terrifying scene, the words seem too carefully chosen, the scene too obviously a distillation of a dozen different infernos, to be entirely convincing. At this point, the reader surely feels, like the narrator, that the uncle, rather than being a witness to some supernatural spectacle, must be caught in some kind of linguistic hysteria.

De la Mare must have been struggling, in this early work, not just with writing convincing prose that fulfilled his readers' interest in the supernatural, with escaping from what he called "the woodenness of fantastic imaginary folk," but with finding some personal significance in the subject. When Henry James turned to the ghost story a few years after this, he used it as yet another genre through which he might examine the convolutions of human perception and knowledge. *The Turn of the Screw* (1898) may have a convincing and terrifying kernel at its center. But James also draws much attention to the layers of framing narratives, so that the reader does not know what value to ascribe to the Governess' experience. Is she self-deluded about the ghosts of Peter Quint and Miss Jessel? Is she hysterical from the effort of repressing her erotic interest in her employer? And what interest does Douglas have in presenting her story to the assembled company of men and women? How accurate, too, is the narrator in representing the contents of the manuscript from which Douglas reads the original account? Indeed, such are the complexities of the framing that James' ghost story points forward to the interest of later writers like Virginia Woolf in examining the relative truth of human experiences.
But de la Mare was not interested in examining the intricacies of human psychologies by employing narrative methods of James’ kind. De la Mare himself, as author, was to become infected by some of the descriptive enthusiasm that characterises the uncle in “A Mote.” The suggestive comment, the half-explained, implicit understandings between characters that are only elliptically expressed to the reader – this kind of balance between denotation and connotation was to become both the unique quality and, at times, the bane of de la Mare’s stories, and his narrative technique is engineered around its production. At the beginning of his career, de la Mare was deliberating over elements in the tradition that might help him in this project.

The idea for “A Mote” had clearly been derived from the allegorical journey of Pilgrim’s Progress. “The Moon’s Miracle,” the third of de la Mare’s stories to appear in the Cornhill, begins with an epigraph from Paradise Lost, an allusion to the celestial battle. Extraordinarily, the story is an account of such a battle viewed from the suburbs of London. Again, the narrator is a young man recording his experience in the company of an old man – this time, the Count, who was to appear in several of de la Mare’s later stories. Here, though, the relation between the two men is less skewed in favour of the narrator. As the two of them sit up late into the night, the Count muses: “‘here am I lavishing my hoarded experience on a raw youth who sucks at his book as though it were the fruit of the tree of Life’” (430). The narrator is there to be schooled (and, in his confusion between the literary and the real, might be self-parody on de la Mare’s part). As they gaze out on the suburb of Wimbledon, the Count considers the approach of his own death and laments the uncertainty of an afterlife: “‘Alas! many an old comrade have
I seen swagger into eternity, but never a one has bugled clear to me from his shadowy bourne” (431). A moment later, the narrator and the Count together experience a fantastic vision as a celestial city swings into the night air above “the Home for the Dying.” They can soon see winged men and horses moving about and quickly realise that a battle is about to take place in the sky, and that the enemy is encamped in tents about the moon. The narrator is, at first, worried that he is delusional: “To me it seemed a traitorous deed to extinguish the candle of science in a breath, to trample Newton’s grave” (432). He hopes that some other person out on the common will notice the incredible events and, thus, confirm their reality. But there is only a woman, sleeping unaware on a bench. Nevertheless, the narrator himself is soon absorbed by the spectacle, his scientific skepticism and need for corroboration falling away as the battle lines are drawn in the sky: “Upon the Count and the sleeper . . . I wasted little attention” (434). Lest the reader should start to doubt the reliability of the narrator, we are soon provided with a confirmation of the reality of this night vision as two other people – a musician out on the common, and the woman on the bench – notice the celestial spectacle and run in terror to where the narrator and the Count stand watching.

But as morning approaches and the spectacle begins to be muted by daylight, the narrator’s confidence in the substance of what he has seen also wanes. He suggests that the spectacle may have a limited effect: “It may be debated if this prodigy were visible outside of the Count’s Wimbledon. At some miles distant the horsemen might appear like clouds, the city a cloud, and would call for little attention” (438). Then he equivocates about the source of the vision: “Now, however, morning smoke was rising;
London was out of bed; and moonsmen and nightsmen had disappeared as if they were mere creatures of the imagination” (439). And finally, when they have entered the house and sit at the breakfast table in the sober and full light of day, narrator and Count “eyed each other askance, each suspicious of the other’s credulity” (439). Night visions, it seems, cannot endure in the harsh light of day.

The narrator is not, then, of a single mind. He struggles to reconcile fantastic night visions and the vacuous reality of daylight, even for himself. And his faith when in the midst of the fantastic events, which has guaranteed the veracity of the vision for the reader, has gradually modulated to a skepticism that likewise infects the reader. Even the narrator’s insistence that he has the additional hard evidence of the Count’s charts and diagrams to support his own sense of the events turns out to be less than reassuring:

Perhaps it were not amiss to the military reader to be presented with the Count’s full diagrams, and technical utterances, relating to the event; but so abstruse were his explanations, so voluble and incoherent (and so drastic) his censures and approofs, his charts so profoundly ‘impressionistic’, that I despaired even of understanding them, far more of fitly and authoritatively setting them down. Wherefore this account is brief and merely my own. (438)

Though they may have witnessed a single spectacle, the Count and the narrator, the older and the younger generation, are divorced from each other by their interpretations. Their stories do not match. Each is alone.

One might suspect, then, that de la Mare, in this story, was looking forward to psychological theories of the disparities between individual perceptions and the relative truth of experience. But in fact, this work, and all that was to follow, is based on spiritual anxiety. Even while the intricate rationales of psychological theories were being
propounded and the pseudomyths of psychoanalysis were developing, displacing religious interpretation, de la Mare was to insist resolutely, throughout all his work, that a spiritual realm continues to haunt us and to elude our rational explanations.

De la Mare’s artistic consciousness was formed and galvanised around this realisation of the dual nature of existence. It was a truth too large for him to digest or move beyond in later years. Towards the end of his career, in the poem “Two Gardens,” from *The Burning Glass* (1945), he looked back self-consciously over the doubled perception that characterized much of his work:

Two gardens see! — this, of enchanted flowers, Strange to the eye, and more than earthly-sweet; Small rivulets running, song-reëchoing 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 watchword, *Hark!* A still and starry mystery, wherein move Phantoms of ageless wonder and of love.

Both visions — the natural and the supernatural — are equally fascinating. The first garden enchants with the “plenitude” of things clearly seen, heard, and smelt; the second garden’s hidden presences, silence, and “creeping odours” create a mystery, a space where benevolent phantoms may emerge. But while the aging poet can recall the particular pleasures of both gardens, he can seldom experience them directly anymore:

“Two gardens for two children — in one mind: | But ah, how seldom open now their gates I find!”
At the beginning of his literary career, it took de la Mare some time to recognize that he could turn this doubled vision – intense pleasure in the substance of nature and a strong foreboding that something remained hidden behind nature’s rich veil – to his own fortune and to find appropriate means of expressing this apprehension. His writing life was to be entirely devoted to exploring the commerce between these two worlds. He was on Une Aventure Spirituelle, as Luce Bonnerot subtitled her study of de la Mare.  

At this very early stage in his career, there seem to have been limits to the number of ghost stories that de la Mare could produce with variation. By the fall of 1896, he was experimenting more seriously with poems. And by the next year, he was submitting some of this work, without success, to the magazines. That de la Mare decided, at this early stage in his career, to invest some of his energy in poetry, a medium notoriously poor in financial dividends, is highly significant. At times, he had expressed his doubts about using his literary work for material ends. He once wrote to Elfrieda: “I am very tired little woman. Smoke and voices and inkpots! If there were some other way than by literary work to gain freedom! I love it so well it seems traitorous to myself to use it.” And he must have finally decided that, more important than a literal escape from his drudgery at Imperial Oil, was the freedom found in the imaginative spaces of his writing.  

Thus, rather than trying to write verse to fit the style of a particular magazine, as he had done very consciously with his stories, de la Mare devised his own vehicle for experimenting with the medium of poetry. In the winter of 1897, he began to produce his own household magazine, under the title of the Horn Book, in small, leather-bound
volumes with gilt edges, which was eventually to run to five volumes. The immediate audience for these were the young Rowleys, the children of his sister Florence. And, like Edward Lear and Lewis Carroll before him, de la Mare apparently found great inspiration in the immediacy of his child audience:

he found, by adjusting as he went along to the reception he met, the right pitch for his child poetry. Aimed so directly at this audience, the poems came directly too. For once, he began with simplicity, and out of his head; not with tortuous industry from approved literary models. Pages of nonsense rhymes and limericks in the Horn Book, merge imperceptibly into nonsense poetry, and these into poetry proper.35

Freed from mercenary concerns and the perceived expectations of an adult audience, de la Mare could indulge his whims and write spontaneously. Furthermore, he may have realized that in poems, especially those for children, the writer had a greater licence to deal with the irrational and fantastic, supporting the merest phantoms with the substance of rhythm and the charm of rhyme. Five of the poems from the Horn Books appeared in de la Mare’s first published book, Songs of Childhood, published by Longmans in 1902.

In writing the work for this book, he drew on a number of sources. The most obvious precedent for children’s verse was undoubtedly the folk tradition of ballads and nursery rhymes, and this tradition, bolstered by elements of the fairy tale, was to provide de la Mare with some of his most potent forms and subjects throughout the rest of his life. There were also the literary examples of Isaac Watts, Anne and Jane Taylor, Christina Rossetti, Edward Lear, and Lewis Carroll. But the most influential contemporary example to hand was undoubtedly R. L. Stevenson’s A Child’s Garden of Verses, which had originally been published by Longmans without illustrations in 1885
but had been republished by John Lane in a beautifully illustrated edition in 1896, just a
year before de la Mare began his own Horn Book.

Once he had started to write verse, de la Mare made a very deliberate study of
technique. Through 1898 and 1899, he did not publish anything. Instead, he seems to have been devoting his time to a study of prosody from Chaucer to his own day, marking and commenting on passages in notebooks. Whistler has examined these and observes:

"Scarcely an entry is put down for the sake of its content – that is, for its imagination, felicity, philosophy, or even just as another nugget of those odd facts he loved to collect. Instead, they record with avid, energetic austerity, a total absorption in the technician’s minutiae." As he wrote his verses for children, he brought more and more of his newfound techniques to the task.

Remarkably, these earliest poems show a balance between the rhythms and themes of folk tradition and more sophisticated literary models. Of these new verses, one of the first to be presented to the public begins:

As I lay awake in the white moonlight,
I heard a sweet singing in the wood –
Out of bed,
Sleepyhead,
Put your white foot now,
Here are we,
Neath the tree,
Singing round the root now!"

The original title of this poem suggests that these seductive voices belong to “The Gnomies,” presumably an even more diminutive version of those legendary, dwarfish creatures that are supposed to guard the earth’s treasures. But despite this reference to
folk tradition, the nature of the song would surely recall for the adult reader the chant of the daughters of Hesperus, whose continuous singing protects the golden fruit of the Hesperides in Tennyson’s poem:

The golden apple, the golden apple, the hallowed fruit,
Guard it well, guard it warily,
Singing airily,
Standing about the charmed root.\textsuperscript{39}

Tennyson was probably one of the chief influences in the development of de la Mare’s exquisite prosody and on his choice of subjects, though de la Mare would later react against him, when faced with surveying Tennyson’s achievements in a review for the \textit{TLS}: “I wish AT had expired in 1843 and was Christina Rossetti.”\textsuperscript{40}

This ability to fuse elements from radically different influences and from both folk and literary traditions was to characterize the entire collection of these early children’s poems. In this collection, there were obvious reflections from literature for children, but curiously transformed. Isaac Watts’ moralistic \textit{Divine Songs} included a famous verse “Against Idleness and Mischief,” using the example of the bee for its moral:

\begin{quote}
How doth the little busy bee
Improve each shining hour,
And gather honey all the day
From every opening flower!\textsuperscript{41}
\end{quote}

De la Mare would undoubtedly have known this poem, along with the parody of it by Lewis Carroll which mocks Watts’ tendency to moral application. But de la Mare was able to find his own unique approach. When he looks at an insect, he chooses the fly. Ignoring its moral qualities and the lush possibilities for parody, he concentrates instead on recreating its peculiar point-of-view:
How large unto the tiny fly
   Must little things appear! –
A rosebud like a feather bed,
   Its prickle like a spear.

When de la Mare speaks from the child's point of view, as he does in many of the verses, he creates the same sense of wonder in the appearance of things, but without relying on the play of scale between diminutive, helpless child and kindly, large, looming adult that is a large part of the more condescending type of children's verse.

Although many of the poems draw on the forms and subjects of the nursery tradition, on nursery rhymes and fairy tales, the voice of the poems transcends the nursery idiom. With their archaisms, surprisingly elaborate diction, and carefully modulated rhythms, these are poems about the powers of language. The children of these songs are not naive, nor are the songs facile. On the contrary, the child's world, informed by the visionary wisdom that Wordsworth identified with the child's sensibility, is revealed to be more complete, more whole, than the adult world.

Certainly, some of the poems depend upon the naive misidentifications and peculiar sense of relationships between things that are so particular a part of both childhood and folk superstition:

I had a bunch of cowslips,
   I hid 'em in a grot,
   In case the elves should come by night
   And me remember not.  

There are ogres and dwarves and witches. Children disappear. Others are saved from evil by the presence of their singing guardians. Fantastic sounds and sights fade with daylight: "The sweet, sweet singing died sadly away, | And the light of the morning
peep'd through.” And yet, visions of beauty and wonder, seen in the full light of day, seem to offer a channel back into that enchanted world.

We have only to compare a few of de la Mare’s poems with those of Stevenson’s *Child’s Garden of Verses* to note the remarkably different and unique approach that de la Mare had taken. Stevenson’s allegiances are entirely with the world of daylight and the adventures and play that belong to it. When the child must resign that world to sleep, a subject of so many of the verses, his sole compensation is imagining that he is setting out on some great sea journey:

My bed is like a little boat;
Nurse helps me when I embark;
She girds me in my sailor’s coat
And starts me in the dark.

....

And sometimes things to bed I take,
As prudent sailors have to do;
Perhaps a slice of wedding-cake,
Perhaps a toy or two.

All night across the dark we steer:
But when the day returns at last,
Safe in my room, beside the pier,
I find my vessel fast.44

The child’s make-believe is a means of conjuring safe passage through the unknown and unnamed dangers of the night. Indeed, sea-faring adventures are the dominant form of play for Stevenson’s child. When de la Mare deals with the same bed-taking scene, he uses entirely different tones:

I praythee, Nurse, come smooth my hair,
And praythee, Nurse, unloose my shoe,
And trimly turn my silken sheet
Upon my quilt of gentle blue.

. . .
From far-away there streams the singing
Of the mellifluent nightingale,—
Surely if goblins hear her lay,
They shall not o' er my peace prevail.

. . .
You Angels bright who me defend,
Enshadow me with curvèd wing,
And keep me in the darksome night
Till dawn another day do bring.45

This child's verse is both prayer and incantation. The child enlists the help of angels to ensure that benevolence (nightingale's song) will outweigh malice (goblins) in the journey through the night. And yet the delicacy of the child's request to Nurse, with its many "prythees" and the preciousness of the language, create a song, like that of the "mellifluent nightingale," more than adequate to ward off the child's fear of evil.

Stevenson's night spell is in the make-believe posited through language, de la Mare's in the language itself.

Indeed, Stevenson's children never find anything particular to fear in the dark.

One child traipsing to bed by candlelight claims fear—"Now my little heart goes a-beating like a drum, | With the breath of the Bogie in my hair"—but the image only amuses the reader.46 By contrast, de la Mare allows his child a visionary sensibility, an acute night vision that sees that the dark is thronging with fairies, goblins, ogres, wolves, and dwarves. And from some of these, the child does not escape:

'A FAGOT, a fagot, go fetch for the fire, son!'
'O, Mother, the wolf looks in at the door!'
'Cry Shoo! now, cry Shoo! thou fierce grey wolf fly, now;
Haste thee away, he will fright thee no more.'
I ran, O, I ran, but the grey wolf ran faster,
O, Mother, I cry in the air at thy door,
Cry Shoo! now, cry Shoo! but his fangs were so cruel,
Thy son (save his hatchet) thou’lt never see more.47

Here, the mother’s overly simple formula of crying “Shoo” proves inadequate to ward off
the wolf that threatens the child. By contrast, the lullaby that the mother sings in “The
Ogre,” a version of the Coventry Carol invoking Jesus to protect her children, fends off
the hungry ogre and his “disastrous thumb | Groping discreet, and gradual, | Across the
quiet room” towards the two sleeping children.48 Similarly, in “The Supper,” the wolf
trailing a benighted child through the snow is deterred from eating her not by any
substantial guardian, but by a disembodied voice:

Salt wells his hunger in his jaws,
His lust it revels to and fro,
Yet small beneath
A soft voice saith,
‘Jane shall in safety go,
Jane shall in safety go.’49

Thus, de la Mare’s songs suggest that fear is a ubiquitous element of childhood and that
evil is not merely fanciful, but is a powerful force even though adults may be unwitting of
it. Nevertheless, if these songs evoke definite images of evil, they do so not for the sake
of sensation, but in order to show the mastery of love and song over evil.

For language organised into song is a powerful tool. In “Tartary,” a child speaker
turns language into the brazen instrument of his desire:

If I were Lord of Tartary,
Myself and me alone,
My bed should be of ivory,
Of beaten gold my throne;
And in my courts should peacocks flaunt,
And in my forests tigers haunt,
And in my pools great fishes slant
Their fins athwart the sun.  

Compare this with Stevenson’s “My Kingdom,” a poem on the same subject, though one entirely coloured by the adult’s retrospective view:

Down by a shining water well
I found a very little dell,
    No higher than my head.
The heather and the gorse about
In summer bloom were coming out,
    Some yellow and some red.

I called the little pool a sea;
The little hills were big to me;
    For I am very small.
I made a boat, I made a town,
I searched the caverns up and down,
    And named them one and all.

From the outset, the diminutives reduce the glory of the kingdom the child claims for himself. The adult speaker nostalgically views the ease and innocence of his own childish presumption of power, a power soon checked when his mother calls him home to tea:

“Alas! and as my home I neared, | How very big my nurse appeared.” And this effect of distance between speaker and subject was only emphasised when Charles Robinson illustrated Stevenson’s book, peopling every page with his round-limbed infant characters. By contrast, de la Mare sees childhood from the inside. Nowhere in his book does the author resort to winking at his adult readers, showing that he is impersonating the child, only displaying the caprices and fancy of the child to charm and amuse the adult reader.
Though de la Mare seems to have had both a powerful and intuitive ability with children’s verse and an ability to amalgamate various literary influences within it, he was curiously reticent to market this work for a larger audience. In 1900, Roger Ingpen arranged for the literary agent J. B. Pinker to take on “Walter Ramal’s” work. But de la Mare relinquished only his stories to Pinker, for the moment keeping his small packet of children’s verse to himself. By February 1901, however, he had forty-two verses to submit to Pinker, believing that these songs about childhood would form his first book. In the summer of that same year, Pinker placed them with Charles Longman.

While de la Mare had previously developed his work entirely at his own discretion and published it when he could, he now found that the production of a book involved a good deal more negotiation and compromise between author and publisher. Certainly, Longman gave de la Mare some control over the book’s production and appearance, allowing him to choose the cloth and binding material: an ivory-coloured parchment spine and light blue three-quarter, cloth covers. But Longman decided that the book should be published “in the style of Stevenson’s A Child’s Garden of Verses, ignoring the nursery market and dispensing with the lavish illustrations required for that. Longman felt that the poems were over the heads of children themselves.” Certainly, Longman was drawing on experience since his firm had published the first edition of Stevenson’s book in 1885. But the 1896 edition of that book, with the extensive illustrations and decorations by Charles Robinson, published by John Lane, the Bodley Head, had proved even more successful. Evidently, Longman did not have the absolute confidence to invest in expensive illustrations for the work of this untried author. In any
case, at this stage in his career, de la Mare agreed that "the illustration of such books is a mistake. If there is any true imagination at all in the writing, then pictures only confuse and distract the reader's own constantly fleeting pictures."\(^56\)

But there were points of difference between author and publisher. In place of de la Mare’s preference for a frontispiece of a child from a Rembrandt or Velazquez painting, Longman suggested something rather different: "I have a charming watercolour drawing by Dicky Doyle of fairies playing under Dock Leaves which seems to me more the sort of thing if an existing picture is to be utilised."\(^57\) Instead of the sober, direct, and unsentimental gaze of the Velazquez child, we are given a delicate black and white reproduction of Doyle’s fanciful garden fairies to set the tone for the book.\(^58\)

De la Mare also accepted changes in the text of his work, though the suggestions for these came from a different source. The typescript of the poems came under the close inspection of Longman’s literary adviser, Andrew Lang, who suggested a considerable number of emendations. Lang was a recognised expert in precisely the kind of work that de la Mare was writing: he had edited *The Blue Poetry Book* (1891) and *The Nursery Rhyme Book* (1897), as well as the long series of fairy tale collections, beginning with *The Blue Fairy Book* (1889). But he also had a long-sustained reputation as a popular critic: "For newspaper readers in the 1880s, no single journalist personified Oxford – and 'culture' – more strikingly than Andrew Lang."\(^59\)

Indeed, de la Mare seems to have accepted most of Lang’s suggestions, many of which improved the smoothness of the verses.\(^60\) In place of "Beads and shells, | Silk and pearls" in de la Mare’s original version of "The Gnomies," Lang suggested the more
perfect rhyme "Shells and beads, | Poppy seeds." In other cases, the flow of the verse was improved by a simple reversal of words.61

Lang also suggested some changes of substance, as with the ending of "The Dwarf." In de la Mare’s original, young Jane is sent to the dwarf for honey and warned by her mother not to laugh at him. But Jane soon finds herself overly tried by the dwarf’s appearance, gait, and voice and "She laughed, and laughed, till she died, she died | Jane laughed and laughed till she died."62 In the next stanza of the original, the dwarf buries Jane, and in the final stanza laments her loss. But Lang wrote beside these last two stanzas: "I don’t see the fun of killing her. Marry her to a Prince. Just as cheap." And so de la Mare pinned a small sheet of notepaper to the typescript and replaced the last two stanzas with four stanzas that extend Jane’s life considerably. He amended Jane’s death to sustained laughter: "She laughed, and laughed, till she cried, cried, cried, | Jane laughed and laughed till she cried." The new version ends with Jane and the dwarf laughing "a gladsome duet | From a house i’ the deeps of the wood."63

But de la Mare was by no means completely susceptible to suggestions from Longman or from Lang, whom he very much admired. When it came to irregularities of rhythm, such as those he had purposefully built into poems like "The Silver Penny," he resisted Lang’s "corrections." The result was that Songs of Childhood was, as a book of children’s verse, entirely original in its metrical intricacy.

Given the rather sophisticated nature of de la Mare’s songs, one may well wonder if Longman was right, if these verses were beyond the nursery market, beyond even the understanding and interest of older children. The subjects of his verses may have been
the familiar figures of our earliest childhood days and may have appealed to children for that reason. However, de la Mare was using them not to define a self-enclosed and protected world, but to serve as thresholds into the strange and unknown. The initial landscape may have been familiar even to children, but the events (including the “event” of the poem itself – its cadences and alluring diction) work to carry the reader, child or adult, beyond the familiar, towards “metaphysical questionings and the pursuit of enigma.” The issue, for de la Mare, is not whether these verses are comprehensible to children but whether, by recreating the sensibility of childhood, we can offer genuine insights that are perceivable only through the child’s sensibility.

Perhaps the first critical notice of the book and its author, Walter Ramal (for de la Mare was still using the pseudonym), came from rather close quarters. Andrew Lang, who had edited the book for Longman’s, made mention of it in Longman’s Magazine, in the section called “At the Sign of the Ship,” in which he regularly offered his musings on the state of literature. John Gross describes this column: “Every month for nearly twenty years he produced a dozen pages of scholarly small talk, chopped up into separate, easily digested paragraphs . . . in its day ‘At the Sign of the Ship’ was the most widely admired and talked about feature of its kind.” In the issue in which he reviewed Songs of Childhood, he begins rather unpromisingly:

An increasing aversion to new poetry is a distinct and well-recognised symptom of old age. Of course this remark only applies to people who, when young, were ready and willing to give new poetry a chance. Most young people think all poetry ‘such footle, you know,’ and age does not alter their opinion.
But Lang’s feigned senility— he was about to turn 57— and lack of interest provides the context for his relatively enthusiastic response to de la Mare’s work: “New verses which do not find me all of stone are Mr. Walter Ramal’s Songs of Childhood (Longmans).”

Like Longman, Lang thinks most of the verses are not “aimed” at the nursery, though “The Fly,” “The Silver Penny,” “Bunches of Grapes,” and “The Hare” would be “almost as likely to please even little children as the old favourites, the traditional nursery rhymes.” The verses take us back into “the vague reverie of our childhood.” As a corollary to this, Lang notes, “It is less what he says than what his verse suggests that delights us.” Lang seems to be proposing a relationship between the sensibility of the child and de la Mare’s use of language. In fact, Lang had hit on a key element of the work: suggestiveness was to be a feature of de la Mare’s work from here on, though, as we shall see, it was to be found a damning fault by later critics. And just as John St. Loe Strachey had noted the influence of Poe in de la Mare’s stories, Lang had also noted the literary inheritance in de la Mare’s verses: “Mr Ramal has some of the secret of Keats’ La Belle Dame Sans Merci.”

Despite Lang’s positive review— and there were others from Edward Thomas and Mary Coleridge— the book did little to help de la Mare’s financial situation. Whistler reports that Songs of Childhood produced only £2 16s. 11d. in royalties in its first six months. And in the entire year of 1904, it produced only 4 shillings. Indeed, even though the book was to appear in new editions in 1916, 1923 (illustrated by Estella Canziani), and 1942 (Faber’s edition, decorated by Marion Rivers-Moore), its sales were always remarkably slow.
Nevertheless, de la Mare's studies of the condensed form of verse and the elliptical storytelling of the ballad may well have taught him something about writing prose, for it was in the same period when he was studying prosody and writing verse that he produced two of his best stories, "The Riddle" and "The Almond Tree." He placed "The Riddle" in one issue of *The Horn Book*. The story was perfect from its initial appearance. Although de la Mare copiously revised most of his work when it was to be republished, "The Riddle" appeared in the *Monthly Review* in 1903 without change, and again and again through his lifetime with only the slightest emendation.69

Written before the turn of the century, at the beginning of his career, "The Riddle" is a definitive de la Mare tale. The story begins abruptly with the introduction of seven children (that magical, folkloric number, and the same number as in de la Mare's own family) to their ancient grandmother, with whom they have come to live. She gives "to each a present according to age," kisses them, and then tells them the conditions under which they may live with her.70 They may do as they will, she says, though they must come in to see her every morning and every evening. And she places one restriction on them:

"And there is only one thing, just one, I would have you remember. In the large spare bedroom that looks out on the slate roof there stands in the corner an old oak chest; aye, older than I, my dears, a great deal older; older than my grandmother. Play anywhere else in the house, but not there." (159)

More of a warning than a strict prohibition, these words, like those of God to Adam and Eve or of Bluebeard to his wife, are bound to incite as much curiosity as dread. And indeed, the children seem to find some ambiguity in this prohibition. Should they not
play in the room that contains the chest, or in the chest itself? In any case, over the course of time, the children find themselves, by ones and twos, in the room and drawn, for a variety of reasons, to the chest. Each climbs into the empty and pleasant smelling chest without fear, “the lid closed softly and gently down” (161), and the child is gone.

Despite her failing senses, the grandmother inevitably notices the gradual disappearance of the brood. But she can only repeat her warning to the remaining children and offer this consolation: “‘Some day maybe they will come back to you, my dears . . . or maybe you will go to them. Heed my warning as best you may’” (160). Of course, the children are not able to heed the warning. Finally, even the oldest is drawn in her sleep to the room and to the chest: “There, just as if she were dreaming it was her bed, she laid herself down in the old rose silk, in the fragrant place” (161). The grandmother is left alone in the house, sitting in her window-seat, yet thinking less of the world outside than of her “tangled skein of memories” (162).

All is obliquely given in this story. Like the fairy tale, the symbolic and the literal are intermingled, and one mode proceeds to the other without fanfare or disruptive pronouncement. The reader is allowed a great deal of room for conjecture, for filling out the symbols and hints upon which the story is built. For instance, we do not know what has become of the children’s mother, though the thoughts of the first child to enter the box give us some clue:

The chest was empty, except that it was lined with silk of old rose, seeming darker in the dusk, and smelling sweet of potpourri. And while Henry was looking in, he heard the softened laughter and the clinking of the cups in the nursery; and out at the window he saw the day darkening. These things brought strangely to his memory his mother who in her
glimmering white dress used to read to him in the dusk; and he climbed into the chest; and the lid closed gently down over him. (160)

His mother is both behind him, associated with the familiar noises produced by the other children, and in front of him, in the intimate enclosure of the chest. Perhaps, too, we can assume that Henry is the youngest of the children, the closest to the absent mother.

Likewise, we know that Ann is the oldest because she is named first in the story, the grandmother gives her a workbox rather than a toy, she reads rather than playing with the other children, and she is the last to be seduced by the lure of the box.

But most oblique in meaning is the chest itself; its age is unknown, its exact power is uncertain, but de la Mare takes great care to make it a benevolent symbol. When Henry goes to look at it, he “spoke to the dark-smiling heads at the corners” (159). Matilda, in search of her missing brother, comes across the chest and finds it “so sweet-scented and secret” that she climbs in with her companion doll (160). Indeed, the narrator must tread more and more carefully to prevent the child-consuming chest from developing an ominous presence. When the wistful pair Harriet and William find themselves “looking out over the slate roof at the green fields” (160), we know they must be in the room with the chest in the corner, though they only go over to it when lured by the sounds of an unseen mouse. And after they examine the chest and come upon the idea of playing “Sleeping Beauty,” the chest serves them as a perfect prop, representing the tangle of brambles around the enchanted sleeper. Likewise, boisterous Dorothea and James use the chest as a prop in their game of Esquimau spearing fish. And after reading about fairies and gnomes and falling asleep with their “babel of voices close to her ear, and faint swift
pictures before her eyes” (161), Ann sleepwalks silently to the same room and, as we have seen, lies down in the chest as if it were her bed. The chest is not something to be feared: its emptiness, rather than being a void, represents something positive to each of the children.

The starting scenario of “The Riddle” could very easily form the basis for a domestic adventure or fantasy – as we see, for example, in E. Nesbit’s *Five Children and It* (1902) – and yet “The Riddle,” with its rhythmic alternations and the resonant symbolism that derives from it, clearly has much in common with the folk-fairy tale and perhaps also with the dramas of Maurice Maeterlinck. For the story is built on a rhythm as it wavers gently between the children as they disappear into the chest and the grandmother who watches and waits in her window-seat, her powers of perception gradually failing her until she is left to contemplate only her memories. Across this predictable rhythm, de la Mare plays slight variations: each of the children has different reasons for entering the chest, reasons which mark both their individuality and their childhood natures and which increase our sense of what is lost when childhood literally disappears. As a fairy tale, “The Riddle” has the brilliance of radiant symbolism, the meaning of which surpasses the merely allegorical, without relying on obscurity or equivocation to produce its effects.

The fantasy story of children living in an isolated house, sometimes with an aging relative, was to be repeated, with variation, many times in de la Mare’s work. His own sense of children’s self-reliance reached its apogee of expression in *Crossings* (1921), a fairy play in which four children are left alone in a country house for a fortnight...
melancholy father and daunting aunt. And just as these children fare well in their isolation, most of his children – like those of “The Almond Tree,” “Miss Duveen,” and “An Ideal Craftsman” – demonstrate a precocious insight and wisdom beyond that of their adult guardians. Indeed, these guardians sometimes take a forcefully malevolent attitude to their young charges – most notoriously, the aunt of “Seaton’s Aunt” seems to have absorbed her young nephew, as a spider does a fly.  

With “The Riddle” and the other stories he produced around the same time, de la Mare had discovered an ideal mode for his prose. Nevertheless, he was still having trouble selling the work. He sent out “The Count’s Courtship,” “The Almond Tree,” and some other stories to numerous magazines (including Pall Mall, Outlook, Speaker, Gentlewoman, Illustrated London News, and Century), all without success.  

But despite the accumulation of rejection slips, de la Mare was now sure of himself and of the value of his work. By this time, he had developed considerable self-awareness about his own bent towards enigmatic subjects and an allusive style, and he recognised the need to balance these leanings with references to the concrete and the substantial. He was especially confident that, in “The Almond Tree,” he had achieved this balance and that the story, although far too long for most magazines, was of a high calibre, as he wrote to Roger Ingpen:

I’m not a bit dejected, old fellow, for I never supposed Smith [publisher of the Cornhill] would care for the story. He bent his eye on the unconventional, and – frowned. I dare say it was painful to him, I am thicker-skinn’d p’raps. For it’s the flavour of the thing I swear by, atmosphere – what you will. If a story has that, and that the glamour of reality – what’s else? But the superhuman difficulty is to tell the truth – and shame the Public . . .
O the graceless guineas! It’s not so much money I want, but it’s lack, that’s the devil. Is there no mad publisher nowhere?\textsuperscript{73}

De la Mare could now see that the production of “atmosphere” depended upon maintaining a connection with “the glamour of reality,” that he must amalgamate those “Two gardens . . . in one mind” in his prose. He must have realised, too, that much of his early work had only a glimmer of reality.

Fortunately for his career, de la Mare was soon helped by Henry Newbolt, a highly influential editor, poet, and man of letters, who recognized the original elements of de la Mare’s work and published some of de la Mare’s poems and a few stories in the \textit{Monthly Review}, beginning in 1902.\textsuperscript{74} Newbolt was also to introduce de la Mare to a large social circle at his house in Kensington, to provide him with a connection to the firm of John Murray, publisher of the \textit{Monthly Review}, and to offer personal encouragement to the naturally retiring de la Mare over the next 35 years.

Newbolt met de la Mare after reading a manuscript of his poems that Pinker had sent to the publisher John Murray. Newbolt felt that the whole was uneven, and thus discouraged de la Mare from publishing them as a book. But he agreed to publish the best of them in the \textit{Monthly Review}, and he also took “The Riddle” for the February 1903 issue. Accepting Newbolt’s advice about the poems, de la Mare turned his energy back to prose, a more reliable source of income, and to the writing of what was to be his first published novel. It was finished by August of 1903 and published by John Murray in 1904.
The full title of this book – *Henry Brocken: His Travels and Adventures in the Rich, Strange, Scarce-Imaginable Regions of Romance* – gives some idea of the subject of the book. Brocken is a version of de la Mare himself and the novel involves a series of encounters with characters derived from his reading that had peopled his imagination. It is a rather self-consciously ostentatious display of his studies. And even de la Mare himself was to admit that the story was essentially “criticism in narrative form.”

The book begins with a slim framing story, one that nevertheless has some characteristic de la Mare touches. With both parents dead, Brocken is raised from the age of four by his “ever elderly” Aunt Sophia. Finding his dead father’s library the best companion for his youth, Brocken is eventually inspired, like Don Quixote, to set out on a journey to discover the fantastic regions that these books must allude to. Leaving one March morning on an aged, gaunt, but trustworthy horse, Rosinante, Brocken quickly falls into a reverie and awakes to find himself transported “into the grey, sweet mist of a midsummer dawn” (6). His first encounter is with Lucy Gray, subject of Wordsworth’s poem; next with Jane Eyre and Mr. Rochester, with whom he spends a night; then with Herrick’s Julia, Electra and Dianeme in the Garden of the Hesperides. And so Brocken continues, visiting Bottom and following Mustardseed, finding himself in peril along with Gulliver in the country of the Houyhnhnms, coming to the World’s End Inn where he converses with characters from Bunyan’s *Pilgrim’s Progress*, then arriving in the Land of Tragedy where he is entertained by the doctor from *Macbeth*. Taking the doctor’s boat, Brocken travels three days downriver until he arrives at the sea. On the shore, he encounters Poe’s Annabel Lee, but after losing her, quickly sets off again on the sea. He
comes to a kind of Isle of the Dead, where he meets Criseyde. She seems intent on taking
his boat and setting off on a quest for a hero. But it is Brocken who finds himself rowing
away from the island bound on an uncertain journey further out to sea. So the book
offers an impressionistic rendering of the literature which had affected de la Mare.
Neither a critique nor a straight reading of this literature, the novel is instead an oblique
commentary and extension of these works.

Although the scenes he used in *Henry Brocken* are derived from his reading, there
are also clear thematic connections between these scenes and those in his previously
published stories. For instance, the passage at the World’s End inn has some connection
with his story “The Village of Old Age,”77 and the journey of Rosinante and Brocken
(especially in the Land of Tragedy) is similar to the inner journey described by the uncle
in “A Mote.” This only shows that de la Mare was deeply and lastingly affected by the
scenes and symbols he discovered in his reading. *Henry Brocken* was a kind of
declaration of sources and a reading of these sources through his own eyes, rather than a
satire of the literary. He was the Quixote of his own tale, as he more or less revealed in
an introduction he planned for the book: “I present no chart, I recite neither latitude nor
longitude, I will but describe as best I can the land to which Happy Chance has conducted
me, and wherein it seems Happy Chance means to keep me.”78 The book was originally
offered, through Roger Ingpen, to the publisher Constable, but was refused. Pinker sent
it on to John Murray, who agreed to publish it. It appeared in the early spring of 1904,
the first book to be published under de la Mare’s real name, and attracted more critical
attention than *Songs of Childhood*, most of it favourable.79
As a collage of scenarios from a wide range of sources, the book is useful in revealing de la Mare’s influences, but it is rather tedious for a contemporary reader. Undoubtedly, writing the book gave de la Mare a chance to try to animate the fantastic, using ready-made scenarios from Swift, Defoe, and Bunyan. He convinces us of the vividness of the characters in his own mind. The nature of the book also suggests that de la Mare drew no distinctions between different levels of representation: the allegorical (*Pilgrim’s Progress*), the satirical fantasy (*Gulliver’s Travels*), and the realistic (*Jane Eyre*) are part of the same domain through which Brocken travels. Furthermore, as one might expect of a lyric writer, there is no obvious destination or motive for the journey.

Despite the critical favour the book received, it hardly lived up to its billing as a novel. Sales confirmed the fact that it did not have popular appeal. Whistler reports the following dismaying incident:

> When de la Mare wrote [to Murray] in June, with his usual diffident desperation, to enquire whether there might soon be a small cheque from Murray’s for the novel, as he was hoping to take a holiday, he learned that on the contrary there was a deficit of £41.19s.3d on costs, and that of this he himself owed Murray’s £3.16s.4d for excess proof-corrections – something quite beyond him to pay, even by abandoning the holiday.  

Indeed, de la Mare’s fondness for proof corrections was something that his publishers were to bewail for nearly every one of his books over the next fifty years, though the sales of later volumes could support such costs. At this point in his career, de la Mare was, at his own reckoning, earning an average of £157 a year from both his job at Imperial Oil and his writing. Already on the edge of poverty, with three children to support, he was finding publishing books an additional liability. Writing for magazines, though
necessarily limiting because of the expectations of their audiences, was a far more reliable source of income. Throughout 1905, he used whatever spare time he had to write stories and poems for that market.

Newbolt had resigned as editor of the *Monthly Review* in the summer of 1904. And although one of de la Mare’s stories, “An Ideal Craftsman,” made it into the *Monthly Review*’s pages in June of 1905, that was the only story he published that year. Fortunately, in November of 1905, Roger Ingpen found de la Mare some work writing reviews for the *Bookman*. In that same month, Newbolt decided that de la Mare had finally accumulated enough accomplished poems for a book, and he urged John Murray to publish them. Newbolt’s influence with Murray must have still been considerable.

*Henry Brocken* had lost the firm a considerable sum of money. But Murray did publish them, though they were more cautious this time, agreeing to print only 500 copies.

This collection of poems for adults, which had been selected and edited by Newbolt, his wife, and Ella Coltman, a family friend, was simply entitled *Poems*. Several groups of the poems had already been printed in the *Monthly Review* under headings which give some idea of the divisions within the book: “Ten Characters from Shakespeare,” sketches in blank verse, in May 1902; “Memories of Childhood,” lyrical poems on the loss of the childhood self, in January 1904; and “Four Sonnets,” quite ponderous allegories, in July 1904.82

The book begins, rather self-consciously, with the series of poetic portraits of Shakespeare’s characters, in blank verse. Some of these still have the trappings of the French symbolist influence about them, as in the opening of “Hamlet”: “Umbrageous
cedars murmuring symphonies | Stooped in late twilight o’er dark Denmark’s Prince.”

The pathetic fallacy could hardly be taken further. Indeed, sometimes de la Mare seems to be striving towards a painterly unity of the kind practised by the pre-Raphaelites. He creates a poetic equivalent of the tapestried effect most obvious in the work of Edward Burne-Jones, where figure and ground are of equal visual importance. In his depiction of Ophelia, he seems intent on following the example of John Everett Millais’ painted version:

There runs a crisscross pattern of small leaves
Espalier, in a fading summer air,
And there Ophelia walks, an azure flower,
Whom wind, and snowflakes, and the sudden rain
Of love’s wild skies have purified to heaven.

In such extended metaphors, human and natural worlds flow into each other. The details of nature become extensions of his character, or the character extensions of nature. Many pre-Raphaelite paintings derive a stilled, hyperreal quality from their use of such symbolism. But the effect in these poems is to obscure rather than to clarify.

Furthermore, without the benefit of rhyme or the licence allowed to children’s verse, these seem staid and sombre, writerly exercises in the evocation of atmosphere.

Where the Songs of Childhood forge symbols without using labels, this book of adult poems is plagued by overt symbolism, by rather unconvincing allegory: Youth, Science, Poetry, Malice, Idleness, Melancholy, Humanity, Fear . . . Many of the poems are overburdened with abstract language. Occasionally, de la Mare falls into heavy handed analogy, too, like this one in “The Miracle”: 
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?

... So creeps ambition on, so climb
   Man’s vaunting thoughts. He, set on high,
Forgets his birth, small space, brief time,
   That he shall die;
Dreams blind in his stagnant air;
Consumes his strength, strips himself bare.85

The last line of that first stanza demonstrates his mastery of prosodic technique: the vowel twists of “agelong inches endless” slow the reader to a creeping pace. But the latter stanza has the stamp of Shakespeare’s language or of Edward Young’s Night Thoughts rather heavily upon it.

But for all this, Poems also contains original poems, in which he had found means of implying analogies through an understated symbolism or through narrative.86 “The Children of Stare” is perhaps this early volume’s best example of his success with symbolic verse narratives, that “de la Marean” mode which was to be most famously realized in “The Listeners.” The poem opens with a depiction of the setting – winter falling on an apparently deserted ancestral home – then focuses more intently:

Still is the fountain’s music,
The dark pool icy still,
Whereupon a small and sanguine sun
   Floats in a mirror on,
Into a West of crimson,
   From a South of daffodil.87
In the first line, de la Mare employs an inversion which helps to still movement, to convey the sense of a nature slowed but also charged with meaning.88 Onto this stage, he introduces the children:

‘Tis strange to see young children
In such a wintry house;
Like rabbits’ on the frozen snow
Their tell-tale footprints go;
Their laughter rings like timbrels
‘Neath evening ominous.

The contrast is extreme between the stillness of the setting and the movement of the children, so quick and unobserved that we catch only footprints and laughter. As in “The Riddle,” the setting has an almost overpowering substance, while the children who inhabit “earth’s austerity” in an “evening ominous” are merely fleeting, ghostly presences, “Each with his tiny fire | Blown to a core of ardour | By the awful breath of God.”

In fact, there are a number of lyrics in Poems in which the speaker observes and comments on a child caught up in some play, fantasy, or reverie from which he himself is excluded. These are the “Memories of Childhood” poems.89 Nearly all of these express an amazement at the powerful visionary ability of the child, while evoking a melancholy sense of the speaker’s loss of that ability. But these lyrics are rather whimsical in comparison with “The Universe,” in which the same idea is expressed more vigorously:

I heard a little child beneath the stars
   Talk as he ran along
To some sweet riddle in his mind that seemed
   A-tiptoe into song.

In his wild eyes lay a wild universe, —
   Wild forests, peaks, and crests;
Angels and fairies, giants, wolves and he
Were that world's only guests.\textsuperscript{90}

And this power of the child to create a universe through imagination and the power of words chanted to himself bears comparison with divine power:

Elsewhere was home and mother, his warm bed: –
   Now, only God alone
Could, armed with all His power and wisdom, make
   Earth's richer than his own.

When the adult speaker of these poems seeks the child's extraordinary immersion in the world, symbolized as seeing the face of Pan, he is warned by a woodman: ""Seek not the face of Pan to see; | Flee from his clear note summoning thee | To darkness deep and black.""\textsuperscript{91}

As a whole, then, the book is pervaded by a sense of that great gulf – lamented in so many Edwardian literary productions, but most notoriously in \textit{Peter Pan} (1904) – between the adult poet and the enchanted world as perceived through the child's eyes, a world which can only be partially plumbed through the poem. As a result, the dominant tone is neither of joy nor fear, but of melancholy and loss. ""Autumn"" might be considered an emblematic poem for this volume. All is fading, past, held only by memory. There is now only ""Silence where hope was.""\textsuperscript{92} Childhood has been a dream from which the poet has woken into a bleak and vacuous adulthood, as in ""The Phantom":

\begin{quote}
I may see the thorny rose  
   Stir and wake  
The dark dewdrop on her gold;  
But thy secret will she keep  
Half divulged – yet all untold,  
Since a child's heart woke from sleep.\textsuperscript{93}
\end{quote}
In his next books of poems, *The Listeners* and *Peacock Pie*, de la Mare was to find the means to lull the child’s heart asleep again. In 1976, I. A. Richards explained this transition: “The 1902-6 work seems to be trying to tell us about X. In the 1912-13 volumes X is almost always actually there.”

Like *Henry Brocken*, *Poems* received generally favourable reviews but produced no royalties for de la Mare. Nevertheless, even though his three published works had not helped his financial situation, they had made his name known and had given him passage into a larger circle of literary acquaintances. The key to a change in his financial circumstances, which would subsequently lead to a massive change in his literary prospects, was brought about, in 1908, by Newbolt. He was able to secure from the government a one-time honorarium to de la Mare of £200, a sum that was to be managed by Newbolt on de la Mare’s behalf. Newbolt urged acceptance on de la Mare as both a deserved honour and a kind of national duty:

> I congratulate you very warmly on this recognition of your work in the most difficult quarter of all. It has been critically examined both in the Prime Minister’s Office and also by ‘independent expert opinion’ and I need hardly tell you that the standard is a most exacting one, because the applications are so many, and the money available so inadequate. The sum offered is small, but it is a very large aliquot part of the amount devoted to literature, and you must henceforth regard it as settled, that you are among those few who are capable of serving their country.

De la Mare did accept and resigned immediately from his position of eighteen years at Imperial Oil, in September of 1908. He was finally to be a professional writer.
He seems to have taken Newbolt's charge to him very seriously, and there was no shortage of opportunities for him to direct his energy, formerly wasted on his days at Imperial Oil, into writing. Indeed, his prospects as a man of literature were expanding on all sides. He had the support and influence of a number of important critics and writers. In the previous two years, he had published eleven new stories in magazines. And the government grant would surely have increased his profile tremendously, as well as enabling him financially. In that same year, he met Edith Sichel who, in turn, introduced him to Bruce Richmond, editor of the *Times Literary Supplement* since its inception in 1902. Before the end of 1908, de la Mare was working on two different novels, writing them simultaneously but on alternate days, as well as producing regular reviews for the *TLS*.  

His spirits must have been tremendously buoyed by the turn of events. In October 1908, he wrote to Ella Coltman, enumerating his current literary endeavours with great self-denigration that is undoubtedly ironic, meant as a mockery of his former industrious but soulless employment at Imperial Oil:

First, then, I'm writing the inane adventures of three Monkeys, 'Thumb, Thimble & Nod.' As this was already begun I thought it best to be finished with it. I rather hate it, but manage to reel out about 2000 words a day. So I am just hoping to have finished the writing of it at the end of the month. You will think it horribly childish and dull stuff, and never speak to me again. Next I shall try to turn out one short literary article a week and at least two sets of verses - as nearly all is useless, one must allow for waste.  

The "inane adventures" were part of *The Three Mulla-Mulgars*, a book which was to prove a delight to children and adults alike. A large part of the book's scenario, which
concerns three "royal" monkeys on a quest for their father, was derived from the exotic travels described in *Purchas His Pilgrimes* (1625), the book which had inspired Coleridge's *Kubla Khan* and which de la Mare was reading while writing *The Mulgars*. Although de la Mare was again relying on his reading to direct his writing, he managed to avoid the academic atmosphere that hangs over both *Henry Brocken* and the least impressive of *Poems*, perhaps because he was writing in a children's mode.

The second novel on which he was working, *The Return*, was really a lengthy short story, a direct extension of the kind of themes that he had been working with in earlier stories, though he was confident enough now in his ability to delineate the fantastic impinging on the real that he could dispense with multiple narrative frames or uncertain narrators. Arthur Lawford, a respectable middle-class family man, falls asleep on the tomb of an eighteenth-century suicide, the Huguenot Nicholas Sabathier. When he awakes, his face has changed inexplicably. While his daughter accepts that, despite the change, he is still her father, his wife is suspicious and hostile. Indeed, he bears a remarkable resemblance to an engraving of the dead man. The story concerns the struggle of Lawford not just to convince his wife of his true identity, but to resist the persona of Sabathier which seems to be incubating inside him and which has a powerful attraction for him.

Not only does the novel bear a thematic resemblance to his short stories, but de la Mare had written it in the hopes of winning a large audience. Forrest Reid discussed the writing of *The Return* with de la Mare some years later, in preparation for writing a
book-length study of the author and his works to date. He was shocked to discover de la Mare’s mercenary intentions:

it was around success in a much vulgarer sense [than the strong admiration of a limited number of readers] – success as understood by the libraries and book-shops – success as represented by ‘sales’ – that the conversation I refer to hovered: and presently there emerged the startling confidence that *The Return* was a bid for it, had been designed deliberately as a sensational story, a ‘shocker’, a thing the public would infallibly rise to, would recognize as its own.98

After the financial failure of *Brocken* and *Poems*, one could hardly blame de la Mare for attempting to move a little closer to the demands of his audience. But in any case, in both Reid’s and Whistler’s estimation, the book transcended its mercenary aim because de la Mare, initially steering toward the sensational, could not help but be lured off course by the beautiful.

My point in so briefly describing these last two books is not to dismiss them as unimportant, but to suggest that de la Mare, at the exact moment when he became a professional author, had succeeded in integrating numerous influences and elements into his own writing persona. As both *The Return* and *The Three Mulla-Mulgars* demonstrate, he was a master of his own unique voice and of a particular literary territory.

He had begun his literary career from the urge to find an imaginative escape from the mundanity of his working life. No doubt the rigour of meticulous copying and accounting that de la Mare performed at the offices of *Imperial Oil* provoked a strong counter current. Hedged in by urban realities and, later, by the responsibilities associated
with a growing family – he was to have four children by 1906 – de la Mare had to find ways to invoke and inhabit another world. As an adult drudging through his work in the City by day, his dreaming life naturally took him in the opposite direction, towards childhood, the country, and night. Almost inevitably, the inwardness, the dreaminess of the symbolist had a genuine appeal and meaning for him.

And yet the novelties and exotic elements of symbolism were refracted in de la Mare’s work, were made palatable to the distinctively English sensibility, were attuned at times to that nostalgia, increasing through the Edwardian years, for the kind of pastoral ideal that Le Gallienne had invoked and that was increasingly identified with childhood itself. De la Mare schooled himself so deeply in the techniques, genres, and subjects of the English literary tradition that the influences of these works overpowered his own voice at times. Just as the spirit of the dead Sabathier almost overcomes Lawford’s hold on life in The Return, Bunyan, Keats, Poe, Tennyson, Shakespeare, Swift and a host of others threatened to possess de la Mare completely. In his introduction to the Oxford Book of Modern Verse, W. B. Yeats placed de la Mare amongst a group of poets who “preferred to keep all the past their rival.” There was considerable danger in having such a prodigious inheritance, and yet he was able to find a point of coincidence between his symbolist leanings, the baggage of tradition, and the demands of his audience. Notably, the best of de la Mare’s work from this early period – Songs of Childhood, “The Riddle,” “The Children of Stare,” and The Three Mulla-Mulgars – is either children’s literature or is informed by the child’s sensibility. For de la Mare, it was the use of the themes and style of children’s literature and of folk tradition, as well as the
persistence of a childlike sensibility, that enabled him to subdue the past, to see it as a
rival rather than as a master.
Chapter 2: The Secret of the Memorable De la Mare as Critic, 1908-1923

... his critical essays, as much as his poems, are themselves works of art; an exquisitely wrought expression of the same odd, profound beautiful vision of reality.

Lord David Cecil

Where, if not within, we are tempted to ask ourselves, is the sole reality of life; and what is this world but a chequered ball in whose hieroglyphics we may read on close scrutiny something of the destiny which has made us children its momentary possessor in the garden of eternity?

Walter de la Mare

In 1953, from the vantage point of a man turning eighty, de la Mare looked back on his early writing career, commenting on his decision to become a critic:

I had by then (as Disraeli declared was the fate of critics in general, let alone reviewers) failed as a writer. No fewer than three books had then appeared, two of verse, and one, an extravagant romance, *Henry Brocken*. And by 1908 their financial ‘taking’ for the author had amounted to a deficit occasioned by his purchasing the copyright of two of them for £20. He was forced into reviewing in 1908, he implies, because of his failure as a writer of poetry and fiction. But his reviewing work, far from being simply more of the drudgery necessary to maintain himself and his family, was to prove both financially rewarding and creatively empowering. Through his reviewing, he increased his income fourfold over his Imperial Oil salary. But more importantly, he was thrust into the midst of the literary world, where he had a chance to make numerous friends and acquaintances and to consolidate his own sense of himself as an author. The period between 1908 and 1914 in which he was most prolific in his reviewing was also the period in which he produced what was to be some of his most celebrated and enduring poetry. This can only be
because his reviews, far from simply being the kind of “fine writing” disdained by younger writers and critics like T. S. Eliot, conveyed the same kind of vision that he was pursuing in his poetry. Amidst the profusion of his reviews, he was ruminating on the nature and function of literature, and these musings would reflect back on and support the venture of his own poetry and fiction.

Reading through the profusion of his criticism, one has to insist on the terms “rumination” and “musing,” rather than “philosophy,” to describe what one finds there. His critical voice, impelled by emotion and intuition, found expression in metaphor and allegory. Eschewing a systematic development of critical concepts, careful description, and logical inference, he maintained instead a romantic preference for conjecture. Thus, de la Mare’s criticism did not have a *dialectical* relationship with the poetry and fiction he was writing at the same time. Both modes of writing were very much in the same vein, as Lord David Cecil has observed. Nevertheless, the criticism was important in very practical ways in enabling the writing of the creative work.

When de la Mare resigned from Imperial Oil, he had been struggling along on a salary of about £156. But remarkably, the £200 Royal Bounty granted by the Asquith government, carefully managed by Newbolt, lasted the de la Mares until the late summer of 1910, or almost two years from the time of de la Mare’s resignation. In that same two-year period, de la Mare had written an astonishing amount, producing some of his most enduring work in this period of relative freedom, including many of the poems that were eventually to appear in the volumes *The Listeners* (1912) and *Peacock Pie* (1913). However, he had published very little of this work: “The Bird of Travel” appeared in
Lady’s Realm in October of 1908; and “The Almond Tree” was finally published in the English Review in August 1909, though it had been written ten years earlier. But according to Whistler, Pinker was having problems placing The Three Mulla-Mulgars and was not enthused by The Return, even though de la Mare declared that he had written it with mercenary intent.

Despite the disparity between de la Mare’s rate of production and the rate at which work was placed by Pinker, Henry Newbolt was entirely optimistic about de la Mare’s prospects. He wrote to de la Mare in April 1909: “The difference between your ‘position’ now and a year ago is almost impossible to estimate.” For de la Mare was now a professional writer, moving in literary circles, becoming visible to publishers, editors, and other writers. As he wrote in one of his earliest reviews, “If there is one reward beyond all estimation which the writing of books may bring to a man, beyond wealth, beyond fame (both, it would seem, not very easily won over), it is the making of friends – friends known and friends unrevealed.” The writing of reviews, however, benefitted him not just in terms of this growing circle of friends and in increased confidence in his vocation as a writer, but also financially, as he accumulated fees from the reviewing work that formed an increasingly large part of his professional duties. As he wrote to Pinker, “I am now . . . wholly dependent on writing for a living. And of course reviewing will remain, at least for the present, a more or less fitful and precarious source of income.”

Even if he had not made a great mark with his two books of poetry and Henry Brocken, he nevertheless quickly established a reputation, amongst editors and
publishers, as an insightful and even-keeled reviewer. Before retiring from Imperial Oil, he had written a few reviews for the *Bookman*. But after meeting Bruce Richmond through Edith Sichel, he quickly became a regular reviewer for the *Times Literary Supplement*. In fact, the extraordinary amount of reviewing he did for the *TLS* has only recently become obvious. For many years, contributions to the review were unsigned. Thus, in 1956, when Edward Wagenknecht composed a bibliography of de la Mare’s contributions, he was able to identify 71 contributions by de la Mare between 1908 and the end of 1913; and he lists 214 articles as de la Mare’s lifetime contribution. Since Wagenknecht’s bibliography, the records of the *TLS* have been computerised and the authors of each contribution more positively identified. For the period between October of 1908 and the end of 1913, this database lists 97 contributions by de la Mare in addition to those listed by Wagenknecht. In other words, in a period of a little over five years, de la Mare had contributed as many as 168 reviews to the *TLS*, sometimes at the rate of three a week. This is an extraordinary accomplishment for a man who was a slow and meticulous reader. The figure is even more astounding when we take into account de la Mare’s other pursuits in the same period.

In the summer of 1909, Pinker arranged for de la Mare to meet J. A. Spender, editor of the *Westminster Gazette*, a newspaper which published a Saturday supplement on literature. De la Mare began to contribute reviews for this newspaper by September 1909, and by the end of 1913 had contributed at least 63. Even more importantly for de la Mare personally, he began an intense relationship with the newspaper’s literary
editor, Naomi Royle-Smith. She was to serve as his muse throughout the most productive years of his writing life.

De la Mare's connections branched out rapidly and quickly brought him more work than he could handle. Spender, evidently well satisfied with de la Mare's reviewing work, recommended him to William Heinemann. After de la Mare performed a few test readings – which Heinemann said would "give me an idea of the sort of opinion I should be likely to have from you"—he became a publisher's reader, receiving his first ms. on 11 October 1911. Although both Henry Newbolt and Naomi Royle-Smith were enthusiastic about the work, de la Mare found it quite taxing because "he said he always mentally sounded the words to some extent, and this cannot possibly be done at the speed of the 'eye-reader' who registers the words subliminally."15 Of course, this mental sounding was what made de la Mare the kind of writer he was, attentive to the sound of words and rhythm of phrasing, both in prose and verse.

His work as a reader for Heinemann was by no means as happy as his reviewing, though he stuck to it until the outbreak of war in August 1914. And as difficult as it must have been for a slow reader like de la Mare to wade through manuscripts, this extra task supplemented both his income and his awareness of the literary climate. Indeed, when D. H. Lawrence heard from Edward Garnett that de la Mare had replaced Heinemann's former reader, a fellow named Atkinson, he wrote excitedly to Garnett: "Do you mean Walter de la Mare? – if so, how ripping! I hope Atkinson has gone."16 Lawrence subsequently submitted several manuscripts to Heinemann which were read by de la Mare: his first volume of verse (later published as Love Poems); and the novel, Paul
Morel, the early draft of Sons and Lovers. Neither of these was published by Heinemann, though not because de la Mare morally disapproved of them. De la Mare did write to Garnett about Sons and Lovers, expressing his fear that the book would be banned by libraries, but he also suggested that the book was flawed: “I don’t feel that the book as a whole comes up to Lawrence’s real mark. It seems to me to need pulling together; it is not of a piece and the real theme of the story is not arrived at till half way through.”17

But most of his reading was not so promising, and he found the love stories the worst, as he complained to Naomi Royde-Smith:

This foolish reading galls me unbearably . . . After all what is it? — spending one’s time nearly all the week long in the company of frantic and garrulous and often nasty people — many of them out only to make money, without the least counting of the cost . . . Of course there are good books and clear brave imaginative minds among them. But I do so want to have a little quiet while to be and think in.18

By contrast, de la Mare’s own love stories (see “The Lost Path” or “The Almond Tree”) are to be found immersed in the deeper texture of his symbolist narratives, and they are always tempered with longing and pain and tragedy. By and large, then, the job of publisher’s reader did not suit him at all. It was too time-consuming and, paradoxically, interfered with his own literary sensibility in a way that his clerical work at Imperial Oil had not done. Unlike his reviewing work, in which he was faced with a fait accompli, a book already edited and published, as publisher’s reader he had to puzzle through another author’s raw, typically unpublishable, material.
By the end of 1911, de la Mare was writing reviews regularly for the *TLS* and the *Saturday Westminster Gazette* and occasionally for the *Edinburgh Review*; he was reading manuscripts for Heinemann; he had written two novels — one for adults, the other ostensibly for children — both of which were published in 1910, and was busy writing some of his most enduring poetry, which Constable had agreed to publish in two separate volumes. It seems that he had carried over the industriousness that was forced upon him at Imperial Oil and that it was serving him well as a professional writer. Newbolt was justified in thinking the government’s bounty a good investment. As he later reminisced, it actually sufficed to change the whole situation, for before I paid over the final instalment de la Mare was receiving for reviews in *The Times Literary Supplement* and *Westminster Gazette* more than four times the amount of his salary as a statistician to the Oil Trust and — more important still — his time was at his own disposition and the credit of his work was cumulative. It would be impossible to exaggerate my relief and satisfaction at seeing this dangerous corner turned: and the publication of the long list of de la Mare’s books has again and again renewed the memory and the pleasure.

But with his time “at his own disposition,” it is remarkable that de la Mare had largely given up writing short stories, at least for the moment. Stories were a lucrative form for him, especially when compared to the financial liabilities that both *Henry Brocken* and *Poems* had imposed upon him and the slim royalties he had garnered from *Songs of Childhood*. While “Kismet” had only earned him three guineas, his stories published in the *Cornhill* magazine earned him about £10 each. And in fact, the publication of his short stories reached a peak in his last few years at Imperial Oil, at the time of his direst financial need: from 1906 to 1908, he had published eleven stories.
Chapter 2: The Secret of the Memorable

But now his time was largely dedicated to reading and reviewing. He quickly developed a critical voice that rang with experience and yet did not preclude a sensitive attention to and transparent description of his subject. His first review for the TLS appeared on 24 September 1908, and was of George Russell’s Some Threepenny Bits. This is a collection of Russell’s contributions to the Manchester Guardian, unedited, unrevised, and arranged as forty-two chapters. De la Mare started by considering the slender expectations raised by the title: “If the title . . . is intended to disarm the too critical reader of these little essays, amiability demands that it should. His last volume, we think, was a Pocketful of Sixpences.” The implication is that these anecdotal articles are very small change indeed. And indeed, some of their subjects – “‘last Monday at the Mansion House’” – are so slight and the occasions so limited that they have lost all interest: “history as modern as this has a rather melancholy effect. No dustier death is there than that which overtakes yesterday’s newspaper.” And yet de la Mare is able quickly to give us a sense of the appeal of Russell’s anecdotal and frequently humorous tales of high life and prominent persons: “Keble shares the honours with salt fish and parsnips; Gladstone with roast goose. Few pages pass undignified by a Bishop – not the Bishop isolated and aloof, but the Bishop anecdotal and tête-à-tête.” This is surely not the social world that de la Mare aspired to, nor a kind of journalism that he would imitate. Even so, he allows for the charm that some readers might find in these tales: “Perhaps the most necessary of the raconteur’s graces is that of the butterfly – that flitting from flower to flower, sipping from, enjoying all. No one can deny this grace to Mr. Russell.”
With the double negative, de la Mare allows for Russell’s ability while signalling his own detachment from its charms.

Thus, while Some Threepenny Bits may not have been to de la Mare’s personal taste, he did not begrudge it its more enthusiastic readers. Presumably, it was precisely this even-handed criticism that Richmond needed in his reviewers. Before the end of 1908, de la Mare had contributed another eleven reviews, and Richmond was to rely upon him to write on a wide range of literary subjects: fairy tales, biographies, novels, travel writing, and poetry. Occasionally, de la Mare had a chance to consider the writers of the past when he was reviewing collected works or biographies or writing articles for anniversaries, as he did for Poe, Swift, James Thomson, and Thackeray. But more often, he was dealing with the work of his contemporaries, some of whom had an enormous influence on his own development, like Thomas Hardy and Henry James. He reviewed novelists of all persuasions: Edith Wharton, G. K. Chesterton, George Gissing, Marjorie Bowen, Maurice Hewlett, Arnold Bennett, Rider Haggard, Joseph Conrad, H. G. Wells, E. V. Lucas, and Ivy Compton-Burnett. He considered the writing of his friend Edward Thomas and the poetry of T. Sturge Moore, W. H. Davies, and Lascelles Abercrombie, with all of whom he was later to be grouped in the Georgian Poetry anthologies. The poetry of John Masefield, Arthur Symons, Laurence Binyon, Alice Meynell, and Alfred Noyes was also set before him. He had, too, to consider the pronouncements of the established men of letters, Edmund Gosse, Arthur Quiller-Couch, and Havelock Ellis.

His work for the Saturday Westminster Gazette exposed him to an equally wide range. Here, he considered the work of Thomas Campion, Sir John Suckling, John Lyly,
Robert Herrick, Jonathan Swift, Laurence Sterne, Wordsworth, Jane Austen, Shelley, Elizabeth Gaskell, and Thackeray. Of his contemporaries, he was faced with the work of Hardy, Chesterton, Bridges, Kipling, Masefield, Synge, Pound, George Moore, J. M. Barrie, and Edward Thomas. Nor was he restricted to British authors: Tolstoy, Ibsen, and Maeterlinck were also his reading.

In the course of reading and writing on this profusion of authors, de la Mare was developing a sophisticated and consistent vision of literature. As he attempted to evaluate the works before him, he was guided by a few key notions that are echoed again and again in his reviews. The most important of these is of poetry as the highest ideal and possibility of literature. "Poetry" always meant more to de la Mare than a rhythmical arrangement of words. To him, it was a way of perceiving the world or of representing a world, either in rhyme, free verse, or prose, so that it had the most vivid presence: "poetry does not exactly intensify experience. It is itself the accompaniment, the aura, of intense experience." This intensity could be achieved in literature not by rendering the actual world to the smallest of its most mundane details but by evoking a more substantial world, one transformed through the power of the individual author's imagination so that it had a powerful and engaging effect, a resonance with the imaginations and minds of his readers. Poetry would clarify and simplify our view of the world, and it would do so by animating the factual world with unifying symbols. Of course, the world presented in poetry must be recognizable to the reader and must, therefore, draw upon the reader's phenomenological experience of reality. As de la Mare admitted, "The mind faints in a vacuum of the senses." A certain attention to concrete
things is necessary. At the same time, he insisted, the details of experience must be transformed through imagination, must be lifted up above "the mere flood of actuality." 

And as we will see again and again in his reviews, he felt that the kind of sensibility most naturally capable of creating this balance between fact and symbol is the child's. The adult writer succeeds to the extent that he maintains the child's sense not just of a newly wrought world but of a newly forged language.

In suggesting that the actual world becomes real only when raised halfway towards the symbolic, de la Mare seems to be anticipating some of the ideas of Jungian psychology and criticism, particularly of Jung's notion of archetypes. But since de la Mare never systematized his ideas on the subject, preferring instead to invoke them only in the course of his reviewing, his idea of literature may seem to be contradictory: sometimes he seems to be propounding an affective theory, in which the response of the reader is the key to the value of the work; at other times, he stresses the intrinsic qualities of the work itself; occasionally, he seems to favour an expressive theory of literature; and then again, he may assert the freedom of the reader to interpret as he will. Unfortunately, at times he may simply appear to be indulging a bent for fine writing. For instance, about Thomas Campion's lyrics, he wrote: "No other poems in the language have quite their bird-like exquisite movement. They vibrate with a frail delicate music that sings and dies away, and reawakes, like the voice of a bird in the shadowy moonlight of a wood." 

Here, de la Mare seems dangerously close to the "impressionistic criticism" that T. S. Eliot identified as "the faithful record or the impressions, more numerous or more refined than our own, upon a mind more sensitive than our own." Eliot attacks this mode of
criticism since, he feels, rather than illuminating its subject in an intellectual light, it is being used for "the satisfaction of a suppressed creative wish." However, when we survey a wide number of de la Mare's reviews, we begin to detect a consistency of approach and a rigorous application of certain criteria that belie that suspicion.

As well as embodying his critical principles, de la Mare's reviews also reveal his influences. Clearly Campion was one of them. His first front-page review for the TLS was written on another key influence, for the centenary of Edgar Allan Poe's birth, in January of 1909. De la Mare had been peculiarly affected, almost shocked, upon first reading Poe's work, though the influence of Poe is evident in his own early stories. Now, dealing with what he felt was a public prejudice against a man whose soul, identified with his work, had been judged morbid, de la Mare carefully considered the value of prose and poetry that enmesh the reader in a "labyrinth of gloom and foreboding" (194). The audience for such work must be the young, he thought, since fear and horror make an appeal to the youthful mind, which has not yet learnt "to appreciate the charms of sobriety in literature as well as in life" (194).

The exaggeration of Poe's work, he noted, is felt both in subject and in point of view in his prose. Without benefit of the "psychical enigmas" that have engaged writers of horror and ghost stories at the end of the nineteenth-century, Poe focussed instead on the physically repulsive. And he never adopted a moderate perspective on his subject: "He surveyed the world now through a telescope, now beneath a minifying glass" (195). But the morbidity of his imagination and the distortion of his perspective have nevertheless occasionally been harnessed to careful analysis and craftsmanship: "logical
lucidity, a keenness of intellect, a passion for proportion, for climax and crisis” (195).

Thus, though the stories may be concerned with the delusions of monomania, Poe can describe those delusions like the “physician in charge” in a lunatic asylum (196).

De la Mare found Poe’s poems more revealing of him than the prose. Poe was “a man of no time and of no place.” His imagination was his chief environment and therefore, de la Mare claims, he had a natural gift for and affinity with lyrical poetry. In fact, de la Mare voiced complete agreement with him on the nature of lyric poetry:

He maintained that poetry has intrinsically nothing to do with truth or morals; that its only office and purpose is to give pleasure; that its only subject matter is beauty; that its aim is indefinite, and music its chief instrument and delight. He denied that a long poem was even possible. There is little to quarrel with here, so far, at any rate, as lyrical poetry is concerned. (197)

But while de la Mare agreed with Poe’s poetic principles, he found the poetry marred in respect of some of them:

The verse has little grace and flexibility of rhythm, and much too much mere trickery. Even over so restricted a range of subject recurs a flatness of phrase, a deadness of thought in his poems that casts a doubt even on the sincerity of the emotion that evoked them. Yet, despite grave and vital defects, Poe’s poems are saturated with some mysterious emanation. (198)

Extraordinarily, F. R. Leavis was to level these charges of rhythmical “trickery” and lack of sincerity twenty years later, not at Poe, but at de la Mare himself.33 The connection between the two men that Leavis unwittingly pointed to is revealing, especially when we recall Strachey’s pronouncement that in de la Mare “the spirit of Edgar Allan Poe is once more abroad.” De la Mare may certainly have learnt a great deal from Poe about the craftsmanship of fantasy and lyric poetry, but he had entirely different ends in view. For
Poe "makes no apparent effort to surmount the humiliating facts of our mortality" (195). De la Mare, on the other hand, like Herbert Herbert in *The Return*, is forever surveying the possibilities: "Are we the prisoners, the slaves, the inheritors, the creatures, or the creators of our bodies? Fallen angels or horrific dust?"34

Another key influence on de la Mare, Jonathan Swift, had also concentrated on the physically repulsive, but to different effect from either Poe or de la Mare: "Swift has repelled many a reader, but his nastiness rarely failed to convey a hint of satire or irony."35 The allegory and adventure in *Gulliver’s Travels*, as well as in *Pilgrim’s Progress* and *Robinson Crusoe*, had a profound effect on de la Mare. Not only do the characters of these books appear directly in de la Mare’s *Henry Brocken*, but their influence is obvious in *The Three Mulla-Mulgars* and *Memoirs of a Midget* (1921). The uniqueness of perspective offered by a change in the relative sizes of character and world was a simple enough device and could create the same sense, in prose, of a world transfigured that de la Mare achieved through entirely different means in his poetry. But if he was glad of the influence of Swift’s prose, he was almost indifferent to his poetry: "Of Swift, as of one or two other great masters of prose, it may be justly said that had he never written a line of verse his fame and achievement would scarcely have suffered."36

De la Mare could hardly be sympathetic to poems whose qualities, as C. H. Sisson has pointed out, were "at the opposite pole from the aspirations of romanticism."37 The editor of the two volumes of Swift’s poetry that de la Mare reviewed in 1910 claimed “harmony, invention, and imagination” for those verses. De la Mare questioned Swift’s application of each of those qualities, revealing his own
romantic idea of poetry in the process. For Swift's harmony is only "ease and dexterity, like a tune played deftly on one string." His invention is extremely limited in scope, and certainly less interesting than that in his prose. And his imagination, too, is more appropriate to prose, since it "sticks so close to a narrow and crude materiality." Indeed, de la Mare felt, as much as Swift has tried to use poetry in his singular project of satirising the "littleness of mortality," he has failed to write poetry at all: "All true poetry transfigures life by restoring its simplicity. . . . Poetry reminds the world of its lost youth, withdrawing the veil with which age and the cares of life obscure the mind and the imagination." Harmony, invention, and imagination are not mere decorations added to prose statement, but must be attuned to this restorative function, to recreating the sensibility of childhood.

Just as de la Mare had complained about his own waning powers in "The Phantom," Swift and his contemporaries have lost their visionary abilities. They are of the age which "awoke from the dream that haunted and fed the imagination of the seventeenth-century." Not only has the dreamer awakened "into the plain security and limitation of his senses," but the proximate darkness has been banished by "the taper of reason." (How fascinating that de la Mare would point to the security and limitation of the sensory world!) Just as Poe has viewed life as if through a telescope and "minifying glass," Swift has relied on the "brilliant illumination" of this "taper of reason" to examine "at distressingly close quarters . . . all that men are wont to disregard." For de la Mare, both Swift's detailed examination and the garish light under which it is conducted are violations of the darkness. Day and night, the known and the unknown, are both
essential elements of the wholeness of being, and yet each has corresponding modes of awareness. Clarity of perception suits the daytime, but darkness should be probed with dream and imagination. That Swift is unwilling or unable to submit to dream or to fully engage the visionary aspect of imagination is symptomatic of his age. Imagination was, for the writers of the early eighteenth century, a disturbingly untrustworthy faculty, more likely to create deceiving images than to provide visionary truths.38

The metaphor of life as a night only partially illuminated by our candle of perception and understanding recurs throughout de la Mare’s criticism. In relation to the passage of Ruskin’s life, de la Mare mused:

A man takes up his candle, and in its clear but baffling light must push his way through the darkness of life’s corridor past every hindrance, stopping his ears as best he can against fear and the conflicting voices, towards the glimmer of the window at the far end, only to stand at last confronting in the dark glass, against the deeper darkness of the night without, his own weary and haunted face; bravely aware that even the candle that has been his guide and comrade must be extinguished before he can see beyond . . .39

The passage depicts the nature of Ruskin’s life and work as essentially courageous and childlike. But the metaphor also reveals de la Mare’s conception of life, based on darkness, dream, night vision, and distortion of vision. For each of us, our passage through the darkness is bound to reveal just a glimpse of reality, the rest filled out by our imaginations or by fears hardened into social prejudice and convention. The candle that offers us some consolation in the gloomy passage through life prevents us from “seeing” beyond.

The absolute consistency of de la Mare on this issue, as well as the continuity between his critical and creative work, is revealed by the fact that precisely the same
image recurs in the story “Physic,” published twenty-seven years later. A young boy, just falling into a fever, is horribly captivated by a dark square of window and complains to his mother: “And why do faces come in the window, horrid faces? Is that blind right down to the very bottom? Because I would like it to be.”\textsuperscript{40} The response of some, like Swift, to the demons conjured by our fear has been to illuminate as brightly as possible our “room” of existence with the light of reason. But something is lost by doing so. In “Physic,” the mother destroys the fascinating half-darkness of her bedroom in the urgency of ministering to her sick child:

The shining of the street lamp was quietly dappling its walls with shadow. The whole room lay oceans deep in silence; the duskily-mounded bed, the glass over the chimney-piece, the glass on the dressing table. They may until that very moment have been conferring together, but now had, as usual, instantly fallen mute, their profound confabulations for the time being over. But she did not pause even so much as to sip of this refreshing stillness. Her finger touched the electric switch, and in an instant the harmless velvety shadows – frail quivering leaf-shadows – the peace, the serenity, had clean evaporated. It was as if the silence had been stricken with leprosy, so instantaneous was the unnatural glare . . . \textsuperscript{41}

The child’s fear of the faces in the dark, the mother’s equivalent fear of her child’s illness, drive them to shun darkness. But darkness reveals as well as obscures.

On occasion, de la Mare was willing to admit that brilliant illumination was the greatest achievement of poets. In a review considering the achievement of Edmund Spenser, he mused on two kinds of poets: “The greatest poets, immensely capable and comprehensive men, have lived the complete common life of their fellows, but have lifted it bodily into the region of poetry. They take the whole fabric of life to the window and spread it out in that strange and lovely light.”\textsuperscript{42} He counts Shakespeare amongst these.
But while he acknowledges this illumination and exaltation of "common life" as the supreme poetic achievement, he dwells at greater length on another kind of poetry:

The next greatest – using the word for want of a better – have been men who have lived isolated and apart, in a world of dream, of vision, and of the spirit. We enter into a rarely trodden province of ourselves when we read them. We seem to live in their company, not, as when reading Shakespeare, with all our earthly life transcended, its every foursquare side lit up, but look back, as Adam and Eve looked back into Eden, into a garden denied to us, except thus transitorily. Such a poet is Spenser.

And, we might add, such a poet is de la Mare. And yet, de la Mare also had strong affinities with Shakespeare. Shakespeare's plays had provided de la Mare with the basis for his poetic character sketches in Poems, but there is also a strong similarity of theme, revealed in de la Mare's own enumeration in Shakespeare's work of such ideas as are accompanied by an instant quickening and heightening of emotion. Inmost and deepest of these are Shakespeare's reiterated comparison of life to a transitory and evanescent dream, his endless metaphysical brooding on Time, the continuancy, mutability, fickleness of life, the ravages of change, the whole restless coming and going and perpetual flux, and above all, his livelong absorption in the thought of death – its "reeky shanks and yellow, chapless skulls" – its mystery, horror, peace, and the riddle of its survival.  

Much of this passage might be a description of de la Mare's work, even that for children.

Despite the deep impression that the examples of literary tradition made upon de la Mare, he was curiously original in his ability to fuse apparently disparate influences and to plunder portions of his precursors' work while rejecting other aspects. In the case of both Poe and Swift, de la Mare was genuinely shocked by their cynicism; this limited his admiration for their work. Poe's vision of evil, Swift's of human malice, the
obession of both with physical malignancy, de la Mare felt, remained unbalanced by a vision of the benevolent aspects of human nature or of God. The more contemporary influences on de la Mare were also only partially inspiring. In contrast with Poe’s and Swift’s cynicism, de la Mare thought Henry James’ skepticism deeply revealing of human nature: James had used his fiction to plumb the wellsprings of human action. In doing so, he “has so refined the art of fiction as to reveal most of its practitioners as mere happy, splashing, vigorous and rather noisy and indiscriminate paddlers saturated in the mere flood of actuality.” De la Mare was surely pointing, with this image, to the practitioners of so-called “realism” in fiction. Once again, he implies that reality, as opposed to what he called “actuality,” is something with depth, and that depth can only be probed with dream or imagination. But de la Mare did not believe that James gives us a complete picture of reality. Indeed, James’ insights are so focused on adding layers of meaning to singular manifestations that, in reading his work, we frequently lose our sense of the whole of reality: “We see what Mr. James sees, but with the passive eye of reverie rather than with the active eye of the imagination. He deepens and subtilizes rather than broadens and voluminifies.” As de la Mare observed, “Is there a novelist living, unless it be Mr. Henry James, with a like mastery of the sense of ‘otherness’ of things?”

Given his own involvement with the ghost story, de la Mare was particularly responsive to James’ contribution to the genre, *The Turn of the Screw*. Here, de la Mare felt, James had avoided the histrionics of plot that drove Poe’s stories forward: “That being hopelessly bad is not being vulgar is one of the minor enlightenments of *The Turn of*
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*the Screw*—though the turn itself is of the screw of ‘ordinary human virtue’.” And although de la Mare found the characterization of Mrs. Grose rather thin and the prologue “a trifle forced and disproportionate,” he lavished the most superlative praise on the accomplishment of the whole:

> what story in the whole region of fiction can match its deliberate, intentional, insidious horror, the sense and presence of gloating, atrocious, destructive evil which it conveys, the steady, cumulative intensity of the ‘awful hushed cold intercourse’ between living and dead, of the blind groping of love amid the debauched innocence of childhood? (9)

He felt that what James had done, in the encounters between child, ghost, and governess, is to make manifest a truth which can scarcely be perceived by any other means. He has put before us “evidence of a subliminal world that centuries of psychical research can only supplement” (9-10). At this point, however, a curious kind of literary morality, more a mark of humility than of priggishness, appears in the review. De la Mare seemed to believe that some knowledge should remain forbidden, that the “subliminal world” should not be exposed with fiction, ending his consideration of the novella by stating that it is “unmistakably on the verge” of being one of those “stories that should not be written” (10).

While de la Mare welcomed the probing of the subliminal world (as long as this was accomplished with open-ended metaphor), he also rejoiced in the exploration of the phenomenal and social worlds. Furthermore, although his own work was grounded entirely in an English milieu and made no direct allusion to larger European literary tradition, de la Mare was well aware of currents and practices beyond the English Channel. In 1910, his reviewing brought him up against Chekhov, a writer whose
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philosophy might seem almost the opposite of de la Mare’s: “The artist’s – the ‘objective writer’s’ – concern, he maintained, is not problems, not preaching, not specialization, but to be an impartial witness. He should state, not solve. Justice should be more precious to him than the air he breathes.” Indeed, not only his artistic philosophy, but also the range of Chekhov’s experience were a radical contrast with de la Mare’s. De la Mare wondered at the sublime expanses of landscape and panorama of characters described in the Russian’s letters:

It is the richness and abundance, the sense of these dark, immense, sea-like spaces and interlinked horizons, the extremes of culture and primitiveness, of rapture and misery as of landscape and weather, and the swarming variety of character, caste, and kind that cannot but astonish the English reader of these letters. (12)

Chekhov’s experience of the vastness of his homeland and its people inevitably reflected on the rather blinkered situation of the English: “It brings home to us a rather restricted insularity, even in our literature, that narrowly verges on the parochial” (12). De la Mare tried to muster some national pride: “London, it is true, is a large place; England, in parts, a peerlessly lovely; the Empire reflects the journey of the sun” (13). But he finally conceded that, in being able to gallop from place to place for two months and still be at home, Chekhov had the advantage of sheer breadth of experience.

One might suspect that de la Mare’s insistence on imagination and inner truth is merely a result of the limitations of his experience. For the British, their sense of the expanse of the Empire may well have supported their idea of their own worldliness. Translations of such works as Chekhov’s, however, revealed the parochialism, the insularity of their experience. After all, Chekhov is able to create sublimity, at least in the
English mind, by objectively surveying his country and its people: “Out of this flooding life and experience, guided by the two ideals of art and science, he made his stories” (17).

But it becomes clear in de la Mare’s review that Chekhov’s notion of objectivity, his urge “to combine art and science,” required a unifying and animating force behind it, a force which seems very much akin to de la Mare’s notion of the role of imagination. He quoted from one of Chekhov’s letters to Suvorin from 1904:

“Let me remind you that the writers who we say are for all time or are simply good, and who intoxicate us, have one common and very important characteristic: they are going towards something and are summoning you towards it too, and you feel, not with your mind but with your whole being, that they have some object, just like the ghost of Hamlet’s father, who did not come and disturb the imagination for nothing.” (17)

Thus, for Chekhov, even the apparently objective must be arranged so that some effect larger than the sum of parts is created. How close this is to de la Mare’s own insistence that “Only by an impulsive or deliberate imaginative arrangement, a crystallization, by the creative and elucidating influence of an idea, can life or any fragment of life be isolated and given the necessary form and finality.”

De la Mare was astonished to discover that Chekhov himself felt that he had failed to achieve unity and meaning in his own work. Again, de la Mare quoted from Chekhov’s letter to Suvorin:

“And we? we! We print life as it is (‘one smells the hot rolls’), but beyond that – nothing at all. . . . Flog us, and we can do no more! We have neither immediate nor remote aims, and in our soul there is a great empty space. I don’t know how it will be with us in ten or twenty years – the circumstances may be different.”
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For Chekhov, the possibility of moving beyond an empty realism seems to be dependent on a religious sense, a sense of which he claims to be bereft. But de la Mare finds Chekhov's love and generosity for both his fictional characters and the people he meets on his travels and writes about to be an adequate equivalent to religion. It is that which provides the "crystallization" in his work.

By contrast, the writing of W. M. Thackeray puzzled de la Mare:

We read him, and there passes before our eyes an astonishingly lifelike panorama of the social London of his day, thronged with figures in a direct and natural relation each with each, and grouped in a design that is neither arbitrary nor fantastic. And yet what is the intrinsic and final meaning of it all to a mind intent on the less shallow riddles of life? Against what background of mystery, of the beyond, do these puppets enjoy, or rebel against, their being? Why do Tolstoy and Tchekov stir and deepen heart and understanding, and why does Thackeray so frequently awaken little better than a transitory but absorbed curiosity, often sharpened by aversion?51

Indeed, Thackeray seldom allows his characters to take on a life of their own. Except for Barry Lyndon and a few other books, the author is forever intruding upon his creatures, offering "acute insight into character and motive," but leaving us with "aridity and sourness" in the process (46). Like Poe and Swift, he is too intent on demonstrating "the meaner aspects of life" to the exclusion of all else (48). Just as James had plumbed too deep into the subliminal world, Thackeray had depicted in minute detail the surface of life, the contorted face reflected in the dark window.

One might have thought that de la Mare would level similar criticism against Thomas Hardy, "master of the desolating."52 But in fact, his references to Hardy's novels, stories and poems are entirely generous. And the two men had great mutual
respect for each other and were eventually to meet. De la Mare had asked of Thackeray’s characters, “Against what background of mystery, of the beyond, do these puppets enjoy, or rebel against, their being?” The question is moot in Thackeray’s case, but Hardy provides both background and vital impulses in his novels:

> Few English novelists can compare with Mr. Hardy in the depth and significance he gives to life by unifying it with that of the great world without. Harassed, trapped, circumvented, worn-down though his puppets may be, he bestows on them not only nerves and hearts and bright eyes and dancing feet and good appetites, but he sees to it that their little toy-dramas shall be magnificently staged.\(^53\)

Thus, although the action of his novels is confined to the villages and towns of Wessex, Hardy’s characters convey something of the larger sense of life, beyond Wessex and beyond England, something which brings Hardy into allegiance with Chekhov. And although all Hardy’s characters are damned from the start, blighted by the absence of “any loving Providence,” they nevertheless move on the stage of “a richly humanized Nature.”\(^54\)

> From this small sample from his reviewing, then, we begin to see how discriminating de la Mare was, how sensitive to the example of tradition. Although apparently unsystematic in his criticism, he was guided by principles and key ideas which were revealed, frequently in metaphors, in the course of his reviewing. A little later in his life, he was forced to offer a more studied account of his ideas on literature as he came more fully into the public eye and submitted himself to lecturing. But whenever he could, he drew upon metaphor and allegory to explain himself. Thus, in 1923, when he published *Come Hither*, his “Collection of Rhymes and Poems for the Young of All
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Ages,” he gave his introduction to the collection in the form of a story, simply entitled, “The Story of This Book.” The story is important because it presents de la Mare’s attitude to the collection that follows, a collection that represents what he considers most valuable in the tradition of English poetry. In it, he offers his insights about both the creation and the reading of poetry.

The story is a first-person narrative, the speaker’s recollections of the “rovings and ramblings” of his boyhood that led him to the compilation of this book of poems. Enchanted by what his mother has told him about the “trees and waters and green pastures, and the rare birds and flowers to be found” in a place called East Dene (vii), the boy sets out to find the place. Instead, however, he comes across a stone house in a hollow, called Thrae and owned by Miss Taroone. Forgetting his search, the boy is content to play in the extensive grounds of the house, to romp in its barn, and to eat the fruit of its orchards. One day, however, after sliding down the roof of the barn, his pockets bulging with chestnuts, he is confronted by Miss Taroone and examined by her “Clear cold eyes of the colour of pebbly water, in which I seemed to be of no more importance than a boat floating on the sea” (xi). She questions him about “what I did there; my name; why I was not at school; where I lived; and did I eat the chestnuts” (xi). Apparently unperturbed by his presence in her grounds and indifferent to his thievery, she makes a rather curious pronouncement: “‘Well, if you are happy to be here with the rest, so much the better’” (xi). She gives him the run of her house with its “multitude of rooms, with their coffers and presses and cabinets, containing I knew not what treasures and wonders!” (xii). After asking him his name again, “‘for a sign’ as she said” (xii), she
refers to him as Simon. She has her maid, Linnet Sara Queek, feed him on occasion, and occasionally speaks to him about her own history. She mentions another house, a family mansion named Sure Vine, and talks with great pride about Nahum Taroone, a man who is away on an indefinite quest and who might be her brother or nephew, or possibly her son.

The setting and characters are clearly allegorical; the names are anagrams, homophones, symbols, or a combination of these, the meaning of some more immediately obvious than that of others. Thus, in his search for Eden (East Dene), the boy has become enchanted by Earth (Thrae), a place presided over by Nature and surrounded with mystery (Miss Taroone). Nature has come from Heaven (Sure Vine). And Nature’s most prized accomplishment is Human Nature (Nahum Taroone). The details of the story add enchantment and complexity of meaning beyond this base. And there are echoes here of the situation in both “The Riddle” and “The Children of Stare.”

As the story continues, it veers away from the allegorical towards a metonymic symbolism. For Miss Taroone leads Simon up to “Mr. Nahum’s round room” (xix), which looks out over the roof of the house in all directions. Crammed with books and pictures and objects of all descriptions, the room is nothing less than a vast storehouse of human culture and knowledge, a kind of museum in which Simon, after an initial bout of terror, spends day after day. In the first week, he examines the pictures, some of which “seemed to me to be absurd; some made me stupidly ashamed; and one or two of them terrified me” (xxiv). Indeed, Miss Taroone has warned him that “many of the pictures I take it in Mr. Nahum’s round tower are of that world. His MIND. I have never
examined them. My duties are elsewhere” (xxiii). But she also charges him to make the most of his time there: “Don’t think of me too much. I have great faith in him. Sit up there with him then. Share your eyes with his pictures” (xxiii).

So Simon devotes himself to “reading” the pictures until, by accident one day, he discovers that the pictures are not of the world outside, Miss Taroone’s domain, but are derived from a number of books ranged in the cases below the pictures, books which are simply titled “THEOTHERWORLDE” (xxiv). Evidently, the poems included in the book have been, for the absent Nahum Taroone, a means of entry into “the other world,” the second world that Miss Taroone has referred to, but of which she has no knowledge. “It seemed Mr. Nahum had made paintings only of those he liked best” (xxvii). Nahum’s view of reality is curiously inverted then: he grants most visionary power to the world of the poems and least to the actual visible world of nature.

Motivated by his desire to find East Dene, Simon devotes himself to reading rather than playing in Miss Taroone’s extensive grounds. Looking back on his time in Miss Taroone’s house, he muses: “I have sometimes wondered if Thrae had not once in fact lain within the borders of East Dene, and that being so, if Miss Taroone, like myself, was unaware of it” (xiv). And early on in his time in Thrae, before being introduced to Nahum’s artefacts, he comes to this strange realisation: “When I was most busy and happy and engrossed in [Thrae], it seemed to be a house which might at any moment vanish before your eyes, showing itself to be but the outer shell or hiding place of an abode still more enchanting” (xviii). He likens this potential metamorphosis to the Transformation Scene in a pantomime:
did you suppose, just before the harlequin slapped with his wand on what looked like a plain brick-and-mortar wall, that it would instantly after dissolve into a radiant coloured scene of trees and fountains and hidden beings – growing lovelier in their own showing as the splendour spread and their haunts were revealed? (xviii)

But as he begins to read and to make sense of the poems in Nahum’s collection, he realises that the words are creating a kind of Transformation Scene in his mind: “what I then read has remained a clear and single remembrance, as if I myself had seen it in a world made different, or in a kind of vision or dream” (xxxii). There is a correspondence between his sense of the imminent transformation of Thrae and the effect of words in his mind. Thus, if Thrae is to be transformed, it will be through a kind of epiphany prompted by the symbols of language: East Dene might be found not by taking the short cut, as Linnet Sara suggests, through the quarry, by the pits, then climbing over “a Wall,” but by a journey of the mind made through words.56

Through the poems he reads in Nahum’s books, Simon comes to a realisation about the symbolic powers of language, the relation of language’s “second world” to the real world, and the importance of the reader’s imagination in conjuring this “second world”: “I found that the mention in a poem even of quite common and familiar things – such as a star, or a buttercup, or a beetle – did not bring into the mind quite the same kind of images of them as the things and creatures themselves do in the naked eye” (xxxii). All children notice this peculiar power of language, but Simon begins to see the world of words as a more complete reality. The world beyond the windows of the tower, even the pictures on the walls of the tower, recede in importance behind the words of the poems: they and the mind they embody are the origin of all things humans perceive and
understand. After his last night in Miss Taroone’s house before being sent away to school, reading and copying from Nahum’s books the poems that form the substance of *Come Hither*, Simon

stood looking out over the cold lichen-crusted shingled roof of Thrae – towards the East and towards those far horizons. Yet again the apprehension (that was almost a hope) drew over me that at any moment wall and chimney-shaft might thin softly away, and the Transformation Scene begin. I was but just awake: and so too was the the world itself, and ever is. And somewhere – Wall or no Wall – was my mother’s East Dene . . . (xxxviii)

He has not found East Dene yet, but he has realised that the travels he makes with his mind, more so than those he might make across the vast and uncertain terrain of the world, have more hope of bringing him within its boundaries.

Thus, Simon serves as the childhood persona of de la Mare himself, and *Come Hither* is nothing short of an anthology of de la Mare’s favourite lyric and narrative poems, those that, as Simon says, “affected my mind when I was young, and continue to do so now that I am old” (xxxiii). Indeed, even before de la Mare had written “The Story of This Book,” one of the recurring metaphors in his criticism had been the house of literature. Reviewing the project of Dent’s “Everyman” series, he commented:

Life is an old house of many rooms, in each of which is a bookshelf; and it is because Mr. Ernest Rhys [the editor] and Mr. Dent [the publisher] have cast a leisurely eye over each in turn, from the basement, where philosophy and science drowse and brood, up to the nursery, where Crusoe and Gulliver sit on either side of the fire and Hans Andersen softly fiddles; and up yet an even less frequented stair to the attic, whose casement gleams out across the fadeless fields of poetry . . . that every man can browse at peace, and no man need go away hungry.57
Life on Earth (or in Thrae) is lived not nakedly in a world of facts and cold realities, but in this house of literature, which comes to surround us more closely than Nature. Poetry, as the architecture of his house makes evident, is the basis of all our understanding, providing us with a means to comprehend the panorama of earth and sky that we view from the attic in our earliest days. Nor was this image entirely metaphorical: he spent much time from 1909 on at the Newbolts' country home, Netherhampton House, and both he and Henry Newbolt worked in its attic room, nicknamed the "Ark" because of its open timbers and its boat-like shape.  

The myth presented in "The Story of This Book," combining fairytale structure and the details of Christian mythology, reveals numerous things about de la Mare's conception of poetry. Most crucially, however, it allows us to see that de la Mare believed poetry is essentially connected to childhood and is inspired by the child's sensibility. This belief was based not just on the relation between the emotive qualities of poetry and the child's powerful responses, ranging from wonder to terror, in the face of the raw matter of the world, but also on the child's experience of language. As W. H. Auden was to remark à propos of de la Mare's poetry,  

It is commonly believed that children are, by nature, more imaginative than adults, but this is questionable . . . however, there is one constant difference between children and adults, namely that, for the former, learning their native tongue is itself one of the most important experiences in their lives, while, for the latter, language has become an instrument for interpreting and communicating experience.  

Thus, de la Mare wants to create in the mind of his reader, child or adult, this freshness of response to language, wants the reader to feel, as Simon does in "The Story of This
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Book,” words making a more vivid world within the mind. In his praise for The Dynasts, de la Mare found this power: “As for Mr. Hardy’s words, they are wraiths of reality, a kind of phantom presentment of things themselves in all their most peculiar significance.”\textsuperscript{60} He made similar remarks about James’ “extraordinarily individual use of words, which squeezes out of them, as it were, their entire intrinsic as well as their face value.”\textsuperscript{61}

At times, de la Mare’s emphasis on the effect of the words of literature on the mind of the reader might seem like an affective theory of literature, that he is suggesting that all art in whatever medium can be defined by its ability to provoke an imaginative response of the audience to it. When he wrote an article for Film Scenario Magazine, he championed film as an artform and gave perhaps his most definite statement of his philosophy of art:

the spectator of a film, whatever his intelligence, cannot but be ‘imagining’ all the time. For though the feat of converting the words, say, of a novel into lifelike characters, scenes and so forth, surpasses if anything in skill and complexity that of similarly converting an immensely rapid sequence of almost imperceptibly differing photographs, the latter feat surely is astonishing enough. Yet even a five-year-old at the movies accomplishes it without an effort!

Whether highbrow or lowbrow or some happy medium, then, we cannot help treating a film as a work of art.\textsuperscript{62}

This statement seems to make the status of the work as art entirely dependent upon the effort of “reading” required by the reader of words or the viewer of the movie, rather than upon any intrinsic qualities of the work itself. But, in fact, for de la Mare even everyday
actuality required a similar kind of "reading" if it was to be really present to us. As he explained in an aside to another review of Hardy, "Like all preternaturally real people, Mr. Hardy's characters are also a little like ghosts. For they have one and all come out of the house of imagination into which all our fellow-beings must go if we are really to understand them." We might say that actuality requires "reading" to become reality. By contrast, literature, like the flickering frames of the film, forces us to read (or gives us the world read).

Thus, rather than basing his criticism on a radical distinction between art and non-art, de la Mare posits instead a continuous scale of relative value. However, with regard to film, he points out that most are low on the scale, that they disappoint the viewer because "they lacked the secret of the memorable":

For the enduring recurrent and entrancing memory of any work of art, whether story, symphony, painting or poem, is a kind of aura that remains in the mind when all the details, lovely, hideous, grotesque, commonplace, violent or serene have done their work, and most of them may have gone for good. It is what the thing in itself, complete and isolated, does to the mind that is not only memorable but also meaningful, and an experience perhaps of a singularly powerful and intimate kind.

A work of art is greater, then, to the extent that it has an effect on its audience, that it leaves behind this aura, this memorable and meaningful trace.

However, the possibility of poetry leaving this trace or aura is dependent upon a certain quality of "the thing in itself, complete and isolated," a phrase which suggests that de la Mare also thought of art as dependent upon certain qualities intrinsic to the work. And to complicate matters further, he defined those qualities as expressive of the artist. The work bears all the marks of its maker: "a work of art is not only a feat of the
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imagination, but of one particular imagination. It is saturated and permeated with a
certain mind and personality – its author’s, its maker’s, whose first and most important
incentive was the achievement of something to please himself.” Here he gives
precedence to the part of the maker in creating the work of art, rather than to the audience
in interpreting it. Yet de la Mare recognised that it was only to the extent that something
universal appeared in the “mind and personality” of the maker that the work had value,
that the audience might read something in it: “Poetry expresses the universal, reveals the
heart and mind of the many in the glass held up to reality by the one.” Thus, he arrives
at that Nietzschean paradox about the lyric poet:

by very reason of this selflessness, the poet somehow is paradoxically the
world’s supreme egotist. Himself is his touchstone to prove all that of
value the world contains. But only so long as that touchstone is his
intrinsic self – something of which he is quite unconscious, which
saturates his poetry, claiming it his while proving it all men’s, only so long
does it keep its power and magic.

The “poet,” de la Mare’s word for any artist drawing on this “intrinsic self,” creates
something of universal value precisely by indulging in self.

We arrive at the central unifying idea and image of de la Mare’s criticism when we
realize that, for him, the “intrinsic self” in all of us is most deeply evident in our child
sensibility. For all writers, the ability to create this sense of “secret understanding” with
the reader, to maintain the “aura” of intense experience, depends less upon particular
techniques, symbols, or strangeness of diction, than upon the persistence of the
childhood sensibility within them. Their aim is to find paradise in “a state of being . . .
that it needs only true wisdom and innocence to find here and now.”

though the saints may cry “Little we see in Nature that is ours,” the mystic and the poet, and the children they resemble, weave into, extort from, her meadows and solitudes and her waters and peace, a world beyond this, a world which it may not be entirely vain to fancy is the real one.

Once again, the “wisdom and innocence” that the poet draws upon are extensions of the sensibility of childhood, which feels the world charged with an unseen power, ever about to undergo a transformation. When the poet is successful, as de la Mare felt Robert Frost had been with the poems in North of Boston, “one is always conscious of the silence, the mystery, that saturates life; of that presence which – call it what we will, God, Nature, Sub-consciousness, Beauty, Reality – makes miraculously significant the mere falling of one leaf in all a forest.”

As he had written in censure of Swift’s verse, “Poetry reminds the world of its lost youth.” The best poetry restores that youth. Swift’s unrelenting satire, however, confronts the world only with its decrepit and corrupt age. Because of this identity de la Mare perceived between poetic power and the child’s sensibility, he was forever gauging writers, in his reviews, by their connection with childhood. For instance, despite de la Mare’s amazement at the diversity of Chekhov’s adult experience, what animates that experience is ultimately more important: “In spite of the early and full maturity of Tchekov’s mind and intellect we seem to retrieve in his letters the consciousness and sensibility of childhood with all its vividness and absorption.”
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Robert Louis Stevenson provided, as I have contended, perhaps the most immediate example for de la Mare’s own children’s verse with *A Child’s Garden of Verses*. De la Mare observed of him that “Such a man never grows old, if indeed he ever really grows up. A passion to make-believe affords the spirit – and through the spirit the body – a long series of fresh starts.” But interestingly, de la Mare also detected that tendency in Stevenson which, I have suggested in Chapter 1, reveals his distance from childhood, the limitations of his child-spirit. His nostalgia for what is irretrievably lost leads him to protest too much; or, as de la Mare put it, “he seems too often to be the child at fantastic play, too seldom the child lost to self in self, contemplative.”

Echoing another Jungian idea, de la Mare thought that an adult might recover the contemplative quality of the child not in such “fantastic play,” but in the state of dreaming: “when dreaming we share the imaginative outlook of the child, the lunatic, the primitive, and the man of genius.” Again, the metaphor that de la Mare uses to describe the state of dream is drawn from theatre:

> With our nightcaps we put on both moral and intellectual irresponsibility. Midnight finds us slowly and unamazedly descending the amazing steeps of sleep. Our heads on our pillow, in an intimate silence, or amid a surf-like volley of voices, the curtain lifts, and the drama, the pantomime, the peep-show, according to the night’s programme, stands revealed.

But the dream world can seldom be sustained for long after waking: “it is only the highly fortunate who dream all day.” For most of us, “With morning the puppetmaster emerges once more in a kind of fading ravel of loose ends, and vigorously reassumes what day’s sharper consciousness is pleased to call reality.” Thus, the dreamer who is capable of maintaining the dream through the stark light of day must be considered
industrious: “Dreaming, moreover, no less than an active career on the Stock Exchange or Parliament, requires some sort of a mind, and usually a very capable one.”

So fascinated was de la Mare with the subject of dreaming that he half-jestingly urged its national importance: “When the State really begins to take an intelligent interest in its citizens one of its most precious possessions, triple bound in morocco, and safe in its archives, will be a great big Book of Dreams.” While the state, of course, never did follow his advice, Havelock Ellis produced The World of Dreams in 1911, in which Ellis’ ideas on dreaming found, “as Mr. Ellis confesses, a most daring and formidable champion in Professor Freud.” But the kind of significance that Freud found in dreams was not to de la Mare’s taste:

Freud has dealt almost exclusively with the experiences of the neurotic. Hyperaesthesia, synaesthesia, logorrhea, glossolalia — such big guns need not cow us. Every beautiful face we see is seen half in a dream. Love itself is a perception of the same faint tenuous aura. All art — poem, picture, music — is suffused with its very atmosphere. The imagination cannot live without it.

In response to his need for a book which dealt with dreaming on his own terms, he was eventually to compile his own anthology on the subject, Behold, This Dreamer (1939), the subtitle of which reveals the range of importance of dreams for de la Mare: “Of Reverie, Night, Sleep, Dream, Love-Dreams, Nightmare, Death, the Unconscious, the Imagination, Divination, the Artist, and Kindred Subjects.” But in this earlier criticism, he maintained one consistent line: dreaming is a return in sleep to childhood, but poetry delivers that sense of the waking dream of childhood into the very midst of the adult consciousness. For this belief, de la Mare had his own champions.
Hans Christian Andersen was the subject of de la Mare’s front-page, New Year’s Day review in the TLS in 1914. Recounting Andersen’s rather peculiar childhood and youth, de la Mare noted: “Life seemed to him a phantasm, as it often does to a child of a solitary, volatile, conscientious disposition, confronted with the amazingly real.”

Addressing the question of why Andersen himself did not like children, de la Mare speculates that this may have been because “to the last of his seventy years he was himself a child at heart.” The writer who maintains the childhood sensibility does not yearn nostalgically or sentimentally for childhood, since he is already in possession of its spirit. At the same time, this persistence of childhood does not make Andersen immune to serious adult concerns: even though “his stories reveal every conceivable gift and grace, oddity, absurdity, and simplicity of a childish fancy . . . a large proportion of them, and many of these the best, appeal directly to the ruminating, memory-bewitched adult mind.” Similarly, Auden wrote in relation to de la Mare’s poetry for children: “while there are some good poems which are only for adults, because they pre-suppose adult experience, there are no good poems which are only for children.”

The childhood sensibility lingers on in the adult, alive in the artist, latent or suppressed in others, but ready to be revived by the right incantation.

Hans Andersen was perhaps one of the grander champions and an obvious example to support de la Mare’s idea about art and childhood. But even in a writer as sober as Edward Thomas, de la Mare counted the child’s vision as the secret, unifying power. Behind Thomas’ “pure delicate prose, undulled and undiluted with phrases that are simply convenient counters without beauty of sound, or fineness and precision of
meaning.” de la Mare noted, was a more singular, captivating quality that had something to do with a childlike honesty: “the love of all things simple and pure and childlike; the hatred of all things mean, stereotyped, pretentious.”

Like Thomas, Henry Newbolt was a man ringed with the serious concerns and details of the adult world. And as with Chekhov or Andersen or Thomas, Newbolt admitted the experience of his adult life into his writing. But again, de la Mare sees these as illuminated from within by the persisting spirit of childhood:

More or less directly all enduring literature is autobiographical. The child that lives so vividly in the man of genius, the child that never really dies in every true and sensitive heart, plays on in its solitude the game of make-believe, weaves into its imaginings the diverse threads that make up a diverse personality and its own peculiar view of the changelessly real.

Adulthood and the persona that one adopts with it are depicted as an elaborate game that the child plays. This sense, de la Mare felt, was reflected in Newbolt’s novels, like The Twymans, in which elements of Newbolt’s own long and rich experience are included, but which, more essentially, recount “a soul’s adventures in the midst of the busy enthralling world of the actual.”

As a corollary to his idea of the persistence of childhood in the best writers, de la Mare could also see that some individuals might be bereft of it: their sense of adventure is lost; the adult forgets that life is a kind of complex play; the actual is mistaken for the real. Thus, not only does Thomas demonstrate the forthrightness of the child, but this attitude brings him into conflict with “worldly-wise adults”:

Mere growing up for all but a few dulls the imagination, confuses hope, and sharpens selfishness. And those few hapless children who are born adult only add to the disaster. Of what these hard, charmless, worldly-
wise adults are; of what individually and in the mass they do – the country they devastate and pollute, their blindness and folly, the contempt they have for things beautiful, their implacable hostility to what they cannot understand – of all these Mr. Thomas writes with a deliberate, uncommenting, careful zest...

De la Mare shared Thomas’ distrust of such “worldly-wise” folk. As he considered in a review of a children’s book with which Bruce Richmond had happily entrusted him, we grow old “not so much in the course of time but by the stagnation of thought.”

Reviewing the short stories of Cunninghame Graham, he observed sardonically:

Whether fortunately or not . . . the world is not run by the young, but by the middle-aged. And for the most part, maturity, having shed the first fine flower of life, thoroughly protected and ‘be-fig-leaved,’ falls into a lethargy of the senses, submits its emotions and instincts and intuitions into the safe-keeping of intelligence, of prudence, of expedience.

For this reason, he asserted, “It is, in a sense, a blessed fortune for a poet not too intent on the recognition of his own generation to die young. He at least is in no danger of burying his best work in his efforts to add to it; and age clouds youth far more densely than can the grave.”

De la Mare maintained the ideal of childhood as the sensibility informing all artistic endeavour throughout his life, though it received varying expression. In 1919, when he delivered a lecture on Rupert Brooke at Rugby School, later published as *Rupert Brooke and the Intellectual Imagination,* he adopted a more critically rigorous approach to the question of the importance of childhood experience and sensibility, and he differentiated between different stages of childhood, allowing the intellect to play a
greater part in certain kinds of poetry. He divided poets and their imaginations into two
types: poets of mystical imagination and poets of intellectual imagination. The first sort,
he thought, are connected to the child’s sensibility, possessing an irrational, but deeply
insightful and divining power, and a trust that, from our perspective, is credulity. The
second sort employ the probing and adventurous consciousness of youth. While the
child is full of faith and wonder, brooding and solitary, the boy is active, adventurous, and
social. Of the boy, de la Mare remarks, “When ‘shades of the prison-house’ begin to
close about him, he immediately sets out to explore the jail.” The boyish imagination he
refers to as the intellectual imagination because it “flourishes on knowledge and
experience. It must first explore before it can analyze, devour before it can digest, the
world in which it finds itself. It feeds and feeds upon ideas, but because it is creative, it
expresses them in the terms of humanity, of the senses and the emotions, makes life of
them, that is” (13-14).

Although de la Mare’s focus, in this study, is on Brooke and his variety of
imagination, he does deal with the mystical imagination which has its base in the child’s
sensibility. De la Mare thinks of this as a divining, intuitive imagination, where beauty is
implicitly truth. He warns of the pitfalls of this type:

The visionaries, those whose eyes are fixed on the distance, on the
beginning and end, rather than on the incident and excitement, of life’s
journey, have to learn to substantiate their imaginings, to base their
fantastic palaces on terra firma, to weave their dreams into the fabric of
actuality. But the source and origin of the poetry is in the world within.
(13)
De la Mare must have counted himself amongst this camp which, while essentially symbolist, was willing to make concessions to the emerging objectivity of poetry. He did not, however, go as far as Pound advocated when writing,

> I believe that the proper and perfect symbol is the natural object, that if a man use ‘symbols’ he must so use them that their symbolic function does not obtrude; so that a sense, and the poetic quality of the passage, is not lost to those who do not understand the symbol as such, to whom, for instance, a hawk is a hawk.\(^1\)

De la Mare placed Brooke close to Pound’s ideal, allowing that he could be satisfied with the sensuous: “He delights, that is, in things in themselves not merely for their beauty or for the unseen reality they represent.”\(^2\)

Although such eccentric, and in themselves lyrical, schemes for differentiating poets fascinated de la Mare, it is also evident that he was completely aware of the terms of the more public and far more contentious debate amongst his contemporaries about the value of tradition, and about the merits of realism versus symbolism in poetry, what de la Mare himself described as “intellectual” and “mystical” uses of imagination. Of course, one of the dominant trends in poetry in the early part of the century was towards a more apparently impersonal poetry, towards what Pound notoriously called “Direct treatment of the ‘thing’ whether subjective or objective.”\(^3\)

But rather peculiarly, Pound’s and Eliot’s doctrine of impersonality prompted them to call for a radical break with tradition, an assertion of individual autonomy from the weight of the past, precisely through the process of interrogating, judging, and
subsuming that past into their own poetry. By contrast, de la Mare did not feel that
tradition was an oppressive force. Tradition represented to him not the known but the
forever strange. He never produced such sweeping reappraisals of the past as these two
European-minded Anglo-Americans, nor would he have subscribed to Eliot's claim about
"tradition" that "Seldom . . . does the word appear except in a phrase of censure." Like
Simon, de la Mare was quite at home within the tradition of English literature. This does
not mean, however, that he did not see the need for innovation.

Traditional as he was, he was neither bound to the ideals of the Victorian age nor
hampered by them in his criticism. He realized, even in the Edwardian period, that
English poetry had shifted in direction from its Victorian mode. While considering the
achievement of Tennyson one hundred years after his birth in 1809, he mused in a front-
page article:

English poetry, it may be definitely asserted, has floated out beyond the
Tennysonian tradition. "The Dawn in Britain," "The Dynasts," "The
Rout of the Amazons" - it is not necessary to go further afield, or to cross
the Irish Sea for illustration - such work as this, in conception as in
execution, is little influenced by, if not actually antagonistic to, the ideals
of the Victorian age. De la Mare welcomed such "antagonistic" developments, whether in poetry or prose,
provided they resulted in a synergy between form and content.

Thus, even though de la Mare had concurred with Arthur Symons that "'Rhythm
alone, and rhythm of a regular and recurrent kind only, distinguishes poetry from
prose,'" when he reviewed the free verse of D. H. Lawrence's Love Poems, he did not
opt simply for the conservative response:
Some of the poems in this volume are metrically so formless and unstable that they can scarcely be called verse at all. They are a kind of fluid, insubstantial prose. None the less, because the idea and feeling that he aims at expressing are at one with the weightless, stressless, rhythmical form he has given to their expression, we can no more dispute Mr. Lawrence's art than his naked sincerity.97

Here, de la Mare is clearly relying on the idea that poetry is poetry by virtue of the identity of form and content. Lawrence's subject is extreme, "an almost intolerable longing for sensation and for peace from sensation," but he has nevertheless found the form for his subject, since "all this becomes strangely articulate in these wavering, groping rhythms."98

He felt that Thomas Hardy had been equally successful in forging a relevant form with The Dynasts, "the only representative of a new species of literature . . . a species singularly original and unforeseen."99 After Hardy had brooded over the scheme of this mentally enacted drama for more than twenty years, he had finally managed to create a form of fiction that combined the psychological novel and the drama: "while keeping true to the actual human experience it sets out to present, it bathes both these, and the innumerable characters and wills, influences and motives that brought them about, in an atmosphere of pure imagination" (24). Hardy had managed to find a new form to present an enduring condition: "so we wend our way through The Dynasts, incessantly conscious of man's mortal, corporeal insignificance, yet conscious, too, of the illusion of space and time and of things material, incessantly conscious of our own immortal gravity and calm, and of the inward voices" (24). This was the essential human drama that de la Mare felt should figure, centrally or evocatively, in all literature. Within The Dynasts, Hardy used
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personified forces of fate and of emotion that are as old as the form of drama itself, yet de la Mare did not find this particularly anachronistic. After all, he insisted, "Do we not every day hear the lamentable Pities chanting from afar as we scan our morning paper’s tragic crop?" (25).

On the other hand, de la Mare was deeply critical of certain aspects of tradition, particularly of affectations of style that no longer had any resonance with readers. In attempting to render the aura of experience, de la Mare warned, poets must be careful not “to haze [the poem’s] reality with a clouding rather than an illuminating metaphoricalness and to suggest a mere connoisseurship in fine words.” When de la Mare reviewed Richard Le Gallienne’s collection *Attitudes and Avowals*, he acknowledged the distinguished length of Le Gallienne’s literary career but attacked his mannerisms: “Certain little trinkets of style and so on, rather more precious than valuable, have proved irresistible to him; and now, it seems, he will never give them up.” T. Sturge Moore, whose work had been included with de la Mare’s in the first *Georgian Poetry* anthology, was, de la Mare pointed out, more of a Victorian than a Georgian, and his work demonstrated “Symmetry of form, sustainment of tone, with this kind of austere opulence of colour and detail.” But de la Mare found, too, that the 1914 volume, *The Sea is Kind*, was sometimes hampered by “Contorted knots of language,” by “consonant-muffled and involved phrasing,” a criticism which he subsequently qualified: “It would be worse than superfluous to point out such slight hindrances as these in work of a beauty so rare and so original if it were not for the fact that poets have a tendency as they grow older to grow obscurer. Masters of their thought, they become tyrants in their
utterance.” Moore, the aging poet, like Le Gallienne, insists too much on his own terms.

De la Mare’s admiration and sympathy for Richard Middleton’s achievement did not blind him to its faults. Of a volume of Middleton’s poems that he reviewed in 1913, de la Mare complained: “there is more lax thinking, and worse, lax feeling in this volume than there should be; too flaccid a use of despiritualized phrases – imperious ways, sombre hours, roses, tears, lilies.” Quoting a particularly unsuccessful line of verse, de la Mare echoed the call of Hulme and Wyndham Lewis and Pound for a more virile, or at least more vigorous, poetic: “‘My passion now made mad Riots in wanton lands’ is obviously a weak effort to set words to a task they will never be able to perform until bellows and furnace and sound poetic biceps insist on it.” Indeed, de la Mare was careful to distinguish between the genuine insight of the poet reflected in sincere language and the more formulaic use of poetic diction, phrase, and cadence. Of Eden Phillpotts, whose enthusiasm for landscape “leads too often to beautiful, sometimes merely to fine, writing, sometimes even to blank verse,” he wrote: “Danger awaits every artist . . . who rests content with a mould that has become a little blurred with use.”

Although de la Mare could see these various symptoms of literary exhaustion in some of his contemporaries, he saw no need for a full-scale literary revolution. In fact, he deplored revolt of all kinds. He knew that “Habit is, of course, an artist’s most treacherous foe,” but believed, too, “Better write no more than merely strive to be original.” Culturally conservative, de la Mare viewed revolt as mere youthful fad. In
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1912, reviewing essays by a Mr. Stebbing which reanimated the meanings of *Truths and Truisms*, as Stebbing’s book was entitled, de la Mare mused:

> Just now, indeed, we are not so much in need of new thoughts as of the justification of old ones. We must positively dare to be sententious in order to adjust the balance. The voice of rebellious youth is loud in the land, and a wild dance is in progress about a caldron bubbling with every unwritten law and accepted dogma that pacified the minds and ruled the conduct of our grandmotherly grandfathers.108

Perhaps one of the “rebellious youth” he had in mind was Ezra Pound.

De la Mare was to meet Pound on several occasions, but before these meetings, he also had the opportunity to review two of his books in the *Saturday Westminster Gazette*. The first of these, *The Spirit of Romance*, struck de la Mare as rather pedantic. He admitted that this study of medieval literature was “illuminating” and occasionally “downright.” But he also detected an egotistical aspect in it: “Being so learned, was it necessary, we wonder, to *seem* quite so learned?”109 Even so, he appreciated Pound’s work as a critic: “Mr Pound had gone his own gait; and that is just what we ask of a critic, if he is to inebriate as well as cheer.”

Less than a year later, however, de la Mare reviewed the work of Pound the poet and proffered a scathing condemnation of his *Canzoni*:

> It is difficult to see why a man with anything very pressing to say, any haunting dream to tell, with any irrepressible fountain of music leaping and echoing in his mind should take such elaborate pains to be elaborate. Mr Pound decks up and cumbers his Pegasus to such an extent with this jingling and antique saddlery that it is only very rarely we can see the steed for its harness.110

De la Mare found that, on the one hand, Pound was hopelessly bogged down in allusions that, for some reason, he insisted on drawing from arcane sources. And on the other
hand, Pound's imitations of Housman, Browning, Meredith, and Whitman, as well as the "tenuous shade of Swinburne . . . not long absent from his shoulder," prevented him from achieving the poetic:

Mr. Pound's work is too egotistic and not individual enough. By much the greater part of his volume is at least one remove from reality — from his own reality. And if there is one thing on earth and in man that is of the very essence of reality — that strange alliance between soul and sense — it is poetry.

De la Mare's impression of the poet was soon extended to the man himself, after the two met at a Square Club dinner and again at Ella Coltman's house: "de la Mare rarely took such a determined dislike as he did here. Pound's posing, his bizarre style of dress, his flamboyant hair, all thoroughly confirmed the impression of sham his Canzoni had made on de la Mare."111

Both Pound's initial immersion in the vast pool of world literature and his subsequent devotion to an impersonal ideal for poetry missed the mark as far as de la Mare was concerned. What de la Mare was after in his own work, what he expected in poetry, was neither a self-reflective literariness, nor "Direct treatment of the 'thing.'" The point for de la Mare, as we have seen in his description of the aura of poetry, is that the "thing" cannot be treated directly, but must be evoked or invoked. He was looking for a symbolism in language, but not merely a literary symbolism. For de la Mare, then, the question was how might symbolism be balanced against so-called realism; or, to use his own terminology, how might the symbolic in contact with the actual produce the real. Either realism or symbolism, when used as exclusive modes, failed to create any lasting impression, any aura: "The one drags back the mind to the morning's newspaper, the
other wafts it into the merely literary," as de la Mare wrote of the two kinds of fault in a play by Arthur Symons.

He saw that successful symbolism sometimes arose from a visionary state akin to madness, as he had noted that many of John Clare's best poems had been produced when his intellect was clouded, as the saying goes. Why such clouding should give so strange and clear an imagination gloom to shine in; what exact office of his immortal being had forsaken him; whence came these hints and visitings as of another world dwelling in this, like the faint colours and shadowings deep in a crystal, are questions fascinating to ask. But who can answer them? On the other hand, despite the visionary power of the imagination, de la Mare frequently expressed the idea that the object, carefully described, is the adequate symbol. Of the burning of debris in autumn fields, described in a volume of autobiography, de la Mare noted: "Here the bare scene simply and imaginatively painted is that highest symbolism, the symbolism of all true poetry, which needs no comment and no key." But even when tied to the "bare scene," symbolism still depends on imagination for the selection of detail and for illuminating description.

Symbolism could very easily result in a complete detachment from the world, as de la Mare felt was evident in John Cooke's anthology of Irish Verse, in which many of the poets seem to stand in an introspective solitude deliberately aloof from the interests and difficulties of life; to seek in nature only a mystical symbol of the twilight and sequestered kingdom of dream within. The effect at last is one of monotony. The reader begins to lose touch with reality altogether; and poetry is no longer a mirror reflecting in beauty and clearness the whole moving and living world of men, but a hermitage and a cloister.
Indeed, de la Mare ends his review with a warning from Yeats confessing to his own enchantment by the symbolic practices of William Blake: “Ah, how many years it has taken me to awake out of that dream!”

While symbolism and enervated literariness were dangerous, a kind of journalistic attention to details could, de la Mare believed, be equally dangerous. He once described the morning newspaper as “that concatenation of crime, disaster, and futility.”

Reviewing W. A. MacKenzie’s *Rowton House Rhymes*, which animated the lives of the pitiable and the dejected from the inside, following the mode of Kipling and Henley, de la Mare wondered about the virtues of using poetry to describe “the situation, thoughts, and emotions of a man sharply conscious and alert in a detestable, hope-shattering environment” and questioned whether the author is always sincere: “Much of the writing is too emphatic, too violent, to leave the mind sufficiently at rest to feel and to understand.”

The same balance between realism and symbolism that he required of poetry was also his measure for the novel, and indeed for biography and history. In one of his early reviews, he complained that biographies usually offer only “a very brief survey of the hero’s or heroine’s childhood (often the most interesting and amiable part of his life)” and concentrate on “great names and lustre, rather than an attempt to reveal something of the mystery of a man’s simple, human, workaday existence, wherein he dreams, broods, fears, loves, and wearies.”

In 1909, John D. Rockefeller published his memoirs, and de la Mare was understandably keen to write a review of his former, mercenary employer. Scouring the book for some defence of the heartless business methods and savage
competitiveness practiced by Rockefeller not just in relation to competing enterprises but
with regard to his own employees, de la Mare drew a blank:

It is a real disappointment; for although, perhaps, with that shadowy knowledge which we already possess of its author it would have been ungracious to look to his volume for the more precious or the lighter graces of literature, yet it was merely reasonable to expect a convincing apology for the art and science of indiscriminate money-making, a rousing "Veni, vidi, vici!" – something racy and cute and pre-eminently Trans-Atlantic. All that is actually given us is a groping and rather dull account of a few commonplace business transactions, a few as commonplace associates.\textsuperscript{119}

Rockefeller had failed to offer a glimpse of his own inner mystery or even to provide a window onto "great names and lustre."

History, de la Mare believed, was in danger of becoming just a "mass of dessicated data, the congested and dubious facts which the record of time past resolves itself into," and felt that such facts were much more palatable and memorable when presented in fiction, "coupled with the heavenly colour of Lady Gracelime's eyes, or our hero's final discomfiture of the unspeakable villain of the piece."\textsuperscript{120} He contrasted the "powder of actual heart-estranging fact" with "the beguiling jam of fiction."\textsuperscript{121} He therefore welcomed the historical novel and, in relation to the imaginary conversations of various famous figures of history penned by Frederic Manning, asserted again that "only art can ever make history really credible, or a great name more than a label to an abstraction."\textsuperscript{122}

If biography should reflect the inner mystery of the person and history should be animated with captivating detail, the novel had to be carefully modulated between a "newspaper reality" and the more individualistic vision of its author:
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It would take a long chapter to show exactly how true to reality, exactly how far removed from a too individual consciousness of reality, the novel with a plot must steer. It must at any rate shave ever so slightly, and almost within danger of being wrecked upon, the rocks of what we may call newspaper reality. Psychologically the characters need not be of any great account; it is not a fatal mistake even to make them commonplace, so long as the stooping presence of the dim god of foreboding haunt their predestined activities. It would take a long chapter to show exactly how true to reality, exactly how far removed from a too individual consciousness of reality, the novel with a plot must steer. It must at any rate shave ever so slightly, and almost within danger of being wrecked upon, the rocks of what we may call newspaper reality. Psychologically the characters need not be of any great account; it is not a fatal mistake even to make them commonplace, so long as the stooping presence of the dim god of foreboding haunt their predestined activities.123

As we have seen in de la Mare’s early stories, the “god of foreboding” is rather forcefully present, perhaps reflecting the influence of Hardy. The novel, even de la Mare could see, had to be more subtle.

When the novel followed “a too individual consciousness,” it started to resemble a tract, as he felt was the case with Thackeray. And ruminating on John Masefield’s novel *The Street of To-Day*, he complained that the “modern novelist seems to marshal his characters in order to express his own vivid ideas on life,” and Masefield’s novel, jammed with epigram and “short hard sentences” is “a heavy tax on the digestion.” Indeed, Masefield’s inclination to extremes frequently affects his craftsmanship: “His thought is always saturated with feeling, is occasionally drowned in it.”

But the novel could also demonstrate the opposite fault, wrecking itself upon the rocks of “newspaper reality.” For instance, de la Mare found it unsettling that G. K. Chesterton’s *The Ball and the Cross* “abounds in characters and situations curiously suggestive of the very journalism which Mr. Chesterton never wearies of denouncing.” He warned again and again of trying to cover too much ground with the novel: “Life is so complex a thing that to attempt to present too much of it at once is to leave it more unintelligible.” Reading Ivy Compton-Burnett’s *Dolores*, he admits “shrewd
observation of character” but is taken aback by the “extravagantly fantastic,” the inclusion of six weddings, four deaths, and five funerals.\textsuperscript{128} Indeed, oppressed by the frequent reading of unripe fiction, he offered a general observation of the young or inexperienced writer: “They fling into their pages as many ingredients as the Witches in Macbeth stirred into their bubbling caldron, and the brew, whatever other qualities it may have, is at least piping hot.”\textsuperscript{129}

Curiously, Daniel Defoe was a great favourite of de la Mare, despite the fact that his novels are singularly materialistic. De la Mare explained Defoe’s method, which may or may not have been a conscious one, as “sedulously accumulating detail till the result has all the tang and substantiality of fact.” But he differentiated Defoe’s method from that of his own realist contemporaries:

> since Defoe’s reality is never that of the modern ‘realist,’ who walks the world spying out the inconspicuous refuse of experience, but always carries with it the personality and the humanity of its medium, nothing breaks through his narrative but what came there of its own immediate appeal and carried its full significance.\textsuperscript{130}

De la Mare makes little allowance for the differences between Defoe’s Puritan religion and the secular modern world. Indeed, he seems a trifle fastidious when he suggests that the realists are falsely intent on the sordid or the scatological.

The contemporary novelist who had perhaps come closest to de la Mare’s ideal for the novel was Arnold Bennett. De la Mare was deeply impressed with the work of Bennett, acknowledging his artistry even in his lighter novels like \textit{The Card}, in which “he is merely a markedly clever imitator of himself.”\textsuperscript{131} He was happy with \textit{The Old Wives’}
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*Tale*, but felt that, with *Clayhanger*, Bennett escaped all camps and genres in his zest for portraying

life . . . neither tragic, comic, romantic, nor ‘realistic,’ neither high nor low . . . but simply the slow, vast, creaking panorama, surrounded by which every human creature moves in by one pigeon-hole out of eternity, and moves out by another, a panorama crowded with detail, heightened by a needle-sharp absorption and curiosity, dwelt on with an enthralled delight.132

Bennett had succeeded, de la Mare believed, at least with *The Old Wives' Tale* and *Clayhanger*, in writing an “epic of the commonplace.”133 When he reviewed *Hilda Lessways*, he was even more struck by the originality of Bennett’s method: “It suggests that the novelist of the future may be the maker of only one book, the master of one definite set of circumstances seen from all possible points of view, over and over again freshly treated via the consciousness, as it were, of each of its several characters.”134

Bennett had managed to take “commonplace” characters and still hint at the workings of the “dim god of foreboding” behind the passage of their lives.

But seldom was his reading for review as serendipitous as this. More often, he was reading sensational books that clamoured for public attention. As he mused in 1913, “A taste for the simple and quiet, for what used to be called a pretty story is rare nowadays.” He was dismayed both by the reading public’s taste for noisy and sensational productions, and by the mutability of that taste:

The novelist who (in the gay or gloomy world of his fancy) leaves the Ten Commandments unbroken is at present unlikely to make a fortune. But his day may dawn again. The public is very like a schoolboy. Marbles may go out of fashion, tops may come in. It is not more than twenty years since fiction went slumming and coronets were cheap at secondhand.
Now it is the turn of the middle classes.\textsuperscript{135}

Nor was this solely a question of class, since he felt that highbrow tastes were just as changeable. What was enduring and free from faddish enthusiasm were the quiet books: "Futurists may come, Cubists may go – but here is yet another volume of reverie and consolation, of pensive reminiscence and counsel, by Mr. A. C. Benson."\textsuperscript{136}

Forty years later, de la Mare was reading through his early reviews for a collection of essays, published as \textit{Private View} (1953). He was struck by the inanity of much of his criticism, wondered again at the changes in literary fashion that had occurred in the interim, and considered once more what makes an enduring book:

Concerning plainly 'good' books of certain kinds popular taste changes slowly. Many of them are now safely among the Classics – and in their first editions represent a small fortune! Popular \textit{affection} goes deeper yet, and its inmost interest is more profoundly concerned than is that of any surface mode or cult, or perhaps of the inordinately highbrow.\textsuperscript{137}

Endurance will be based on "Popular \textit{affection}" rather than momentary enthusiasm or "inordinately highbrow" proclamations. And such "affection" stems from the kind of "reverie and consolation" that Benson had offered. For de la Mare, then, the perfect critic must depend upon the heart rather than the mind. Criticism must be based in "emotions and instincts and intuitions."\textsuperscript{138}

Thus, despite de la Mare's implication, in his later judgement, that many of his early reviews were no better than "threepenny bits," we can see that the substance of all his ideas about art, about literature, and particularly about poetry and its relationship to childhood and dreams, were there.
All of these early experiences as a critic, both as reviewer and reader, which were so concentrated in the period between his leaving Imperial Oil and the start of World War I, were crucial to de la Mare’s development and to his ability to support himself and his family as a writer. His reading gave him considerable insight into what was publishable. By the end of this period, he had himself published four more books of his own, and the last two of these, at least, The Listeners (1912) and Peacock Pie (1913), had confirmed his abilities as a poet. His work had appeared in the first Georgian Poetry anthology, and he had become acquainted with numerous other writers, finding both many allies and a few definite enemies. Now immersed in the literary milieu, he was an author with a reputation and an influence.

In his critical efforts, he encountered the full range of contemporary literary production. As we have seen, he was far from parochial in his reading, range of interests, and depth of response. And if, despite his exposure to Russian, Celtic, and American influences, he remained decidedly English in his own poetry and fiction, it was with good reason. Writing of the peculiar Englishness of Sir Arthur Quiller-Couch’s novels, de la Mare reflected on the meaning of that epithet:

It is not an easy word to define: it doesn’t mean Imperialism, and it doesn’t exactly mean Mr. Kipling, nor “The Death of Nelson,” nor Perfidious Albion, nor Macaulay, nor the Elizabethan dramatists. But the sea is in it and ships haunt its horizons; it has the flavour of cider and the atmosphere of an old tavern bluely incensed by three or four hobnobbing “churchwardens.” Now and then it recalls Shakespeare . . . and it recalls Dickens; but only because theirs too is that extraordinarily dear secret that makes England, in spite of all its wanton, wicked, tradesmanly, Londonish, alien ways, the island of one’s dreams.139

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Chapter 3: Dreams into Gold
Success in the Georgian Years, 1912-1923

Remember happy England: keep
For her bright cause thy latest breath;
Her peace that long hath lulled to sleep,
May now exact the sleep of death.

Walter de la Mare, “Happy England” (1914)

By 1910, de la Mare already had good reason to be confident in his abilities as poet, novelist, and critic, but he had neither a steady publisher nor a ready public for his product. All this was to change in the Georgian years, when his particular dream of England finally found a solid market. In the early years of the century, Henry Newbolt had been de la Mare’s patron and first critic, the “midwife” for the work in Songs of Childhood, Henry Brocken, and Poems. Those functions were subsequently taken up by Rupert Brooke and Edward Thomas. Brooke gave de la Mare enough financial security that he could turn his attention squarely to the writing of poetry and could continue to mine his own particular vein for the rest of his life. Thomas shaped that poetry, helping de la Mare to “weave [his] dreams into the fabric of actuality,”¹ and to produce his most enduring work in the process. Though both Brooke and Thomas died during the Great War, their continuing influence enabled de la Mare to achieve extraordinary artistic and financial success in the period from 1912 to 1924.

By 1915, the publisher Constable was clamouring for as much work as de la Mare could produce and, in 1920, decided to issue his collected adult poems in a two-volume set, Poems 1901 to 1918. Other publishers, too, were keen to publish de la Mare titles. Longmans saw a new market for Songs of Childhood, reissuing it in 1916, despite the
dismal sales of the 1902 edition; and they published a third edition, illustrated by Estella Canziani, in 1923, a bumper year for de la Mare. In the same year, Selwyn and Blount came out with his first collection of stories, *The Riddle and Other Stories*; and Constable issued *Come Hither*, an anthology which sold extraordinarily well, primarily on the basis of the compiler’s reputation, and remained in print for fifty years.

The vehicle that brought de la Mare so solidly to public attention at this time was not one of his own books, but the anthology series, *Georgian Poetry*, edited by Edward Marsh and published by Harold Monro out of his Poetry Bookshop from 1912 to 1922. In the first volume of this series, de la Mare, along with his companions in the volume, was presented to the reading public as an accessible, socially relevant poet of a new order, a “Georgian” generation of writers. To be accurate, he was of the late-Victorian or Edwardian generation, was already forty years old, and had been publishing work for the last seventeen years, though only now was he being discovered by the public.

As James Reeves has noted, “there was a brief period during which the image of modern poetry in the minds of most educated readers was that presented by the Georgian movement.”² What de la Mare and the rest of the Georgians seem to have provided for these “educated readers” was a spiritual tonic, a visionary agnosticism, that helped this public negotiate the waning of Christianity. One only has to glance through the first of the *Georgian Poetry* volumes to note a preponderance of explicitly Biblical themes and subjects: Abercrombie’s “The Sale of Saint Thomas”; Drinkwater’s “The Fires of God”; Bottomley’s “Babel: The Gate of God”; James Stephens’ “The Lonely God.”³ But in addition to these, there were many other poems that transformed their secular and
mundane subjects with reference, either overt or covert, to a framework of Christian
imagery: Bottomley’s “The End of the World”; Brooke’s “Dust”; Masefield’s
“Biography”; Monro’s “Child of Dawn.” Indeed, the epigraph to the volume, from
Dunsany, declared this spiritual design: “what is it to be a poet? . . . to hear at moments
the clear voice of God.” Thus, the success of Georgian Poetry depended partly upon the
public’s enthusiasm for a spiritual interpretation of Englishness that would sustain them
through difficult times.

During the war, the need for such a spiritual tonic only increased, and there were a
number of poets remarkable for developing what de la Mare had called “that
extraordinarily dear secret that makes England . . . the island of one’s dreams.”* De la
Mare was one of the chief amongst them. A second, Brooke, died in the first year of the
war, quickly becoming an icon, in the public mind, of both the tragedy of the war and the
ideals of Englishness.** Thomas was a third, championed by de la Mare as “a mirror of
England,”† though not recognized by the public until many years after his death in 1917.

De la Mare had said that Englishness “is not an easy word to define,” yet each of
these poets’ work reflects aspects of it: they find symbols of immanence in the fabric of
the English countryside and way of life. De la Mare is the one most given to reverie, to
seeing England’s gardens, houses, fields, and lanes on the verge of a transformation into
the ethereal, as Simon had perceived Thrae. Thomas insists on a far more sober and exact
rendition of the substance of the English countryside, which, through the accumulation of
its details, comes to be charged with symbolic import. And Brooke lies somewhere
between, temporarily transforming the English landscape and his own social life with his
clever flights of fancy and boyish make-believe. The only one of the three to survive the Great War was de la Mare, partly by virtue of being too old to be conscripted.

But even with the increasing public recognition brought by Georgian Poetry, the early days of the war were financially difficult for de la Mare. In 1910, he had been earning about £600 a year from reading and reviewing, in Newbolt’s estimate. And although he had published his two novels in 1910 and two volumes of poetry a few years later, he lost his job reading for Heinemann at the start of the war and stopped reviewing for the Saturday Westminster Gazette. Both Edward Marsh and Rupert Brooke became deeply concerned about the material prospects of this poet who had, they believed, something important to offer his country. Brooke backed up this belief with material support, a bequest of royalties after his death in 1914, which was surprisingly lucrative and a great boon to de la Mare for the rest of his life. In 1915, Henry Newbolt and Edmund Gosse finally managed to secure a Civil List Pension of £100 for de la Mare. In the same year, he was elected to a Chair of Fiction in the Royal Society for Literature and became a director of Chatterbox, the children’s magazine (the combination revealing his split reputation). In addition, more and more of his titles – new editions of his older works, illustrated editions, limited editions, and collections – were being published. By 1920, de la Mare was reporting his income from the publication of British editions of his various books as a little over £925 a year, while his net income was almost £1300. By the end of 1923, he had nineteen titles in print and his royalties were £2445. The publication of Come Hither pushed that figure even higher: £3653 was his average income from British royalties in the years 1923 to 1926.
In this period in which de la Mare finally found a public for his poetry, that poetry underwent some crucial transformations. Behind the financial success lay an artistic success, and behind that was Edward Thomas. From 1907 on, he was a staunch supporter of de la Mare’s work, particularly that for children, but also a tough critic of its deficiencies. He helped de la Mare shape the poetry of *The Listeners* (1912) and *Peacock Pie* (1913). And even after Thomas’ death in 1917, his influence lingered on in a different form. From the poems of *Motley* (1918) on, there is a more sober recognition of the factual in de la Mare’s work, in particular a greater resignation to the fact of death.

During his years of reviewing, de la Mare had essentially become one of the *literati*. Naomi Royde-Smith held literary salons at her Kensington home on Thursday evenings at which she introduced de la Mare to other contributors to the *Westminster Gazette*, including Rose Macaulay, Katherine Mansfield, John Middleton Murry, Hugh Walpole, Wyndham Lewis, and Gilbert Cannan.11 Though the literary import of these salons is uncertain—"Mary Agnes Hamilton praised them as creative occasions; Storm Jameson said they were attended chiefly by the unadventurous older generation of writers; Virginia Woolf thought them crowded gatherings of mediocrities"12—the effect of this gregariousness on de la Mare’s self-confidence was considerable. He “was by now feeling a certain satisfaction that he could hold his own at the glossy hem of the literary world, where smart society overlaps it . . . Newbolt, in fact, noticed an ‘even quite worldly’ tinge appearing in his conversation.”13
That confidence was evident in his work, too. From 1910 to 1912, he produced what has proved to be his most enduring poetry and won himself a large audience in the process.\textsuperscript{14} He was given a “stage” on which to do so by Edward Marsh, editor of the \textit{Georgian Poetry} series, and Harold Monro, who published the anthologies and held poetry readings at his Poetry Bookshop, which “was founded in 1912 with the object of establishing a practical relation between poetry and the public.”\textsuperscript{15} De la Mare was one of the stars of both books and readings: his work appeared in all five volumes of \textit{Georgian Poetry} and his readings drew an unusually large audience, comparable to that for Yeats, for which Monro had to hire a special hall. Just how crucial \textit{Georgian Poetry} was to de la Mare’s success as a poet in this period can be garnered from the fact that de la Mare was now dedicating his time solely to poetry. In the period of nine years from the end of 1909 to the beginning of 1919 – all through the war years – he published only two stories and no novels.\textsuperscript{16} Conversely, after the last of the \textit{Georgian Poetry} anthologies was published in 1922, de la Mare did not publish another volume of poems until 1933, turning instead to the writing of short stories and commissioned works in the last years of the series, from 1919 on.

De la Mare’s more singular dedication to poetry came at a time when there seems to have been a widespread ferment amongst younger poets. His first two books had appeared in the Edwardian years, when both the production and reception of poetry were at a low ebb. It is not surprising, then, that \textit{Songs of Childhood} and \textit{Poems} had secured neither substantial readership nor even decent royalties for de la Mare. However, the cultural climate shifted considerably between 1911 and 1915, and “The awareness of
spiritual re-awakening naturally fostered a vigorous self-consciousness among the young prewar poets.”

D. H. Lawrence defined the spirit of the time: “We are waking up after a night of oppressive dreams . . . And now our lungs are full of new air, and our eyes see it is morning, but we have not forgotten the terror of the night.”

Not only was de la Mare dedicated to writing poetry during this energized and receptive period of the 1910s, but in that poetry he had followed the mode of *Songs of Childhood*, leaving behind the self-consciously literary air that characterised *Poems*. As Forrest Reid observed in his 1929 study of de la Mare’s work, “What at once strikes us is that the critical, didactic, and objective pieces in the author’s second volume [*Poems*] have here no successors . . . In *The Listeners* and *Peacock Pie* we never pass beyond the boundaries of a world the poet has by now made peculiarly his own.”

*The Listeners* begins with a series of poetic sketches not of characters from Shakespeare or Swift or Bunyan, but of aging and lonely folk, haunted by images, by memories, by the slightest stirrings of sound: Old Susan, reading a romance by candlelight; Old Ben, his wife dead and his children gone away, sitting “beneath his jasmined porch”; Miss Loo, an eccentric old woman, living alone in her house with cat and cage of birds; a tailor stitching away as dusk falls, disturbed by “some strange footfall,” or the sound of the crickets; Martha, a storyteller who has charmed the speaker in his youth until “Our hearts stood still in the hush | Of an age gone by.” They are all, as it were, “listeners” to something indeterminate, something half-seen, half-remembered, half-heard, lying just beyond our normal perceptions yet somehow perceptibly there. Some of the poems represent the observations of a child coming into contact with these
older characters: Old Susan’s reading is observed by the child who should be in bed; Miss Loo’s eccentricities are remembered by someone who, as a child, was invited to an uncomfortable tea with her. The perspective has shifted completely from the “Memories of Childhood” work included in Poems. But despite the inclusion of the child’s experience and point-of-view, the predominant tone of the book is elegiac, regretfully marking change, loss, uncertainty, and death.

Although de la Mare subtilted Peacock Pie “A Book of Rhymes,” the distinction between its poems and those in The Listeners is not simply that between inconsequential children’s verse and serious adult poetry. There is space in Peacock Pie for nursery rhymes and nonsense verse. But even the nonsense takes us in a rather singular direction, like the three jolly farmers of “Off the Ground” who engage in a dancing competition that takes them meandering through the countryside until, at last, they arrive at the sea. One of the three dances on into the waves and water, winning the competition by dancing quite literally “Off the ground,” to an uncertain fate, “Down where the mermaids | Pluck and play | on their twangling harps | In a sea-green day.”21 Other poems modulate the aphoristic nursery rhyme into the purely lyrical, as in “The Song of the Mad Prince”:

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.22
And even though *Peacock Pie* is divided up into sections, and some of the subtitles point to traditional children's subjects—"Three Queer Tales"; "Beasts"; "Witches and Fairies"—the poems in the two books create a continuity rather than a distinction between adults' and children's worlds and use of language.\(^{23}\)

The mature poetic voice that de la Mare had now settled into, as well as the numerous contacts he had made in the literary world, made him a prime contender for inclusion with those other poets who became known, by virtue of the anthology in which their work appeared, as the Georgians. *Georgian Poetry 1911-1912* did not create a new appetite for poetry, but fed an existing desire, one that had been revealed by the enthusiastic response to Masefield's *The Everlasting Mercy* (1911). Through the pages of *Georgian Poetry*, the work of both Brooke and de la Mare found a public keen for dreams of Englishness.

The *Georgian Poetry* anthologies did not, in fact, represent a particular aesthetic ideal at all, though they did represent the taste of one man. As the title suggests, they were to include the poetry of a particular era, of a new age of poetry that D. H. Lawrence, amongst others, had announced. The first volume was developed as a means to sell the poetry of a new generation to a public jaded by the moribund productions of the late-Victorians. Although the editor Marsh and the publisher Monro held widely differing philosophies and poetic ideals, they concurred on the need to improve the chance of these young poets being heard. De la Mare himself well knew the poor reception that had been accorded to poetry. Although he was managing to publish single
poems in newspapers and journals, he had had trouble placing the volumes *The Listeners* and *Peacock Pie*: they had been turned down by both Methuen and Arnold before Constable agreed to publish them, and then largely because of Newbolt’s influence.\(^{24}\) In 1910, when Methuen returned the poems to Pinker, his letter indicated the poor prospects for books of poetry at the time: “I am very sorry to have to return de la Mare’s poems. They are very charming and some of them have a great power and imagination, but I fear the book cannot be a commercial success and it would be impossible for us to pay any money down for such a book.”\(^{25}\)

Thus, when Edward Marsh proposed to put together an anthology of contemporary poetry, de la Mare was delighted to be included in the scheme. Poetry magazines like *The Thrush* and *The Tramp*, as well as John Middleton Murry’s *Rhythm*, had not survived very long in their attempt to propagate poetry. Yet somehow this idea for a book seemed more promising. At a luncheon on 20 September 1912, Brooke “had been proposing a hoax to draw public attention to poetry – a book of poems all written by himself, issued as an anthology from a dozen promising writers.”\(^{26}\) But Marsh was certain that there was more than enough talent available for a genuine showcase of the state of contemporary poetry. He wrote a prefatory note to the first volume, *Georgian Poetry 1911-1912*:

> This volume is issued in the belief that English poetry is now once again putting on a new strength and beauty.
> Few readers have the leisure or zeal to investigate each volume as it appears; and the process of recognition is often slow. This collection, drawn entirely from the publications of the past two years, may if it is fortunate help the lovers of poetry to realize that we are at the beginning
of another "Georgian period" which may take rank in due time with the several great poetic ages of the past.

Indeed, the title of the anthology seemed, at the time – relatively soon after the coronation of a new monarch – an appropriate epithet for what Marsh was claiming as a cultural resurgence. And perhaps the new monarchy, as much as the post-Impressionist exhibition held in London in 1910, was behind Virginia Woolf's infamous pronouncement that "on or about December 1910 human character changed."27

The idea of the anthology quickly took hold in Marsh's mind, and he approached the editing in an assertive and decisive way. He decided which of each author's poems he might include before contacting them, so that these editorial decisions remained entirely his.28 Marsh even kept Monro, the book's publisher, at a significant distance from editorial matters, relying on him for his "knowledge of printing, book-making, and binding" alone.29 Although this procedure took control away from the poets thus represented, it streamlined the process of producing the volume. Within a few weeks, he had permission from a number of poets to include their work. If de la Mare was included in Marsh's scheme, then, it was because the style and vision he had developed happened to fit Marsh's particular idea of poetry. As Marsh wrote to de la Mare,

I want to do something to make people realize the quality of the work that is done these days in poetry . . . I have had promises from Gibson, Rupert Brooke and Drinkwater. I'm asking Masefield, James Stephens, and Gordon Bottomley . . . Of course I MUST have you, if I can possibly persuade you to let me have a few things out of The Listeners – that poem itself and Arabia and two or three others.30
In fact, Marsh took five poems from *The Listeners*, the only book of poetry (excluding the "rhymes" of *A Child's Day*) that de la Mare had published in the requisite years of 1911-1912.

As Marsh had promised his contributors, *Georgian Poetry* served as an advertisement, a kind of sampler of recent or forthcoming volumes of poetry: the titles and publishers for each poet's backlist were given in a bibliography at the end of the anthology. If the volume's most eminent contributor, Masefield, initially had qualms about the project, he was soon thankful for the effect that *Georgian Poetry* had on sales of his volume, *Biography*, and his other books to follow. Indeed, it was the reception of one of Masefield's earlier volumes that had revealed the potential market for poetry: "The success of Masefield's long, colloquial verse narrative, *The Everlasting Mercy* (1911), which had struck a new note, indicated there was a wider public prepared to accept new things in poetry, provided they were made easily available." Thus, with both Masefield's example before him and the hope of using Masefield's popular currency as one of the selling points of *Georgian Poetry*, Marsh engineered an anthology of recent poetry, carefully selected mildly to challenge but by no means outrightly offended public taste. His volume implicitly promised to give the reader a sampling of all the best recent poetry: "He gave the Georgian movement its essentially *anthological* character." The poets and poems Marsh included had to appeal to a very specific reading public, a public with whom Marsh seems to have been in accord:

His taste was conservative yet catholic; he did not like experiment; on the other hand, he realized that Victorian stuffiness and didacticism were out of favour. The busy reader, as often as not a professional man or woman...
with only a week-end interest in the arts, would prefer short, self-contained, lyrical pieces with the accent on ‘beauty’ rather than ‘strength.’

Although this particular consideration would seem to exclude the more experimental poets, Ezra Pound was originally to be included. But both he and Robert Frost were left out when it was decided that *Georgian Poetry* would be a series rather than a single volume and that it should, therefore, be focused on British poets.

*Georgian Poetry* was entirely dependent on the offices of Harold Monro, practically an evangelist for the cause of poetry, who both published and sold the volumes through his Poetry Bookshop. Monro had been working, since his return to England from Europe in September 1911, to revive an audience for poetry in England, and had even gone in with the exceedingly conservative Poetry Society in publishing the *Poetry Review*, a journal primarily of criticism aimed at raising critical standards and thereby attuning poetry’s readers to a more progressive aesthetic. As he announced in the pages of the review in 1912: “We shall strive to create an atmosphere. We shall attempt to coordinate the bases of thought from which poetry at last emerges.” Nor was Monro partisan in encouraging certain poetry to emerge: “He preserved a studious detachment from literary coteries and movements, for they produced, in his view, lamentable divisions among brothers. It was generally understood among literary people that Harold Monro was above considerations of fashion, fame, faction or financial profit.”

But despite Monro’s ideals, neither the *Poetry Review* nor *Poetry and Drama*, the journal he established after falling out with the Poetry Society at the end of 1912, were
precisely the right vehicles for selling poetry to the public. On the other hand, Monro could see that the public did not have enough enthusiasm to sift through the mass of mediocre poetry, much of it published at the authors’ own expense, that comprised three or four hundred volumes a year at this time. "You cannot expect the public to turn over piles of rubbish to find something for itself," Monro wrote to Miss Monroe [Harriet Monroe, editor of Poetry], "it needs, above all, a direction."37 The critical essays in Monro’s poetry journals provided an intellectual framework for this direction, but the anthologies he agreed to publish were to prove far more successful in delivering the poetry itself to that public.

While Marsh was dedicated to championing the Georgian poets, Monro was for poetry itself, in all its manifestations. As a result, Monro retained a distance from both the Georgian poets and the poetic ideals they represented. While Marsh was breakfasting with his little group, organizing reunions, or hosting them at his home in Gray’s Inn, Monro was devoting his time and energy to the numerous operations of the Poetry Bookshop, all of which were aimed at lessening the gap between poets and their public. Georgian Poetry was, to him, only one strategy. Others included publishing illustrated rhymesheets from 1914 on, a cheap but attractive way of catching public attention, inspired by the example of C. Lovat Fraser’s Flying Flame Press.38 Poems were chosen for their shortness and immediate appeal, and the illustrations were simple. Unfortunately, the dynamics of publishing in this way – Monro expected to sell only about 1000 copies of any one poem – annulled the possibility of profits for the publisher or royalties for the poet. The important thing for Monro was that the format would help
to make poetry less of a precious commodity and to circulate it "on the streets."

Nevertheless, he did think there might be some benefits to the scheme both for the poet and the poet's regular publisher. When he wanted to publish de la Mare's poem "A Widow's Weeds" in this format, he wrote to Constable & Co.: "You will easily realise that the inclusion of a poem on such a rhyme sheet can but be a good advertisement of the book from which the poem is taken."\(^3^9\)

More central to the Poetry Bookshop mission was the recital series. For "Monro's deepest purpose in creating the Poetry Bookshop was to convince people that poetry was written by men alive to their own time. The most effective way of doing this is to put the poets in front of the public in person, to induce them to read their work aloud in informal surroundings."\(^4^0\) He had begun to organize public readings and lectures about poetry while editing the Poetry Review, lectures which had included T. E. Hulme talking on "The New Philosophy of Art as Illustrated in Poetry." Now he continued this effort on the premises of the bookshop. Most of the recitals occurred in the evenings, at first in one of the rooms behind or above the shop, later in the larger hall behind the shop, which had formerly been a goldbeaters' workshop. The first poet to read, when the Poetry Bookshop opened in December 1912, was Rupert Brooke. Other poets who came to read their work included Humbert Wolfe, Anna Wickham, Francis Meynell, Roy Campbell, Margaret L. Woods, and Edith Sitwell, as well as T. S. Eliot, Ezra Pound, and Robert Graves: "For Ford Madox Hueffer, Yeats and De la Mare, and for other speakers of unusual interest, a larger hall was hired."\(^4^1\)
But the most successful of Monro's schemes for bringing together poetry and the public was *Georgian Poetry*. *Georgian Poetry 1911-1912* was published in time for Christmas 1912. And although Marsh purportedly gave about 100 copies of the original 500 printed to friends, the remainder had been sold by Christmas. By the end of the next year, 9,000 had been printed.42 And in 1939, Marsh estimated that that original volume had sold 15,000 copies in all.43 De la Mare "reckoned that his contributions to the first *Georgian Poetry* had, by 1917, brought him almost as much as his three volumes, *Songs of Childhood, Poems* and *The Listeners* together," and for a mere five poems.44

Success encouraged Marsh to keep going, to turn a single volume into a series, though Monro had misgivings. What had originally been designed to rouse a somnolent public turned into something like an institution through which the public might meet with agreeable poetry. As one after another *Georgian Poetry* anthology appeared, Monro began to doubt the value of the whole venture and of the poetry included. He was increasingly discouraged by the direction the Georgians were taking. Although his own work was included in all five volumes of the series published between 1912 and 1922, he could see that poetry was developing rapidly beyond that particular aesthetic. Indeed, in his efforts to support all serious and sincere endeavours in poetry, he had published Pound’s *Des Imagistes* in 1914, an anthology compiled largely in reaction to *Georgian Poetry 1911-1912*, as well as Richard Aldington’s *Images* and F. S. Flint’s *Cadences* in December 1915, both volumes very much against the Georgian grain. This is not to say that he was open to any direction in poetry: in 1914, he had rejected the early work both
of T. S. Eliot, submitted to him by Conrad Aiken, and of Edward Thomas, offered to him by the author himself, who suffered greatly as a result of Monro’s rejection.

All in all, then, his view of poetry was far more daring than Marsh’s and he began to react against this scheme which had perhaps done so well as to exclude other kinds of poetry from public consideration. In his book, *Some Contemporary Poets* (1920), published between the appearance of the fourth and fifth *Georgian Poetry* anthologies, he complained that the anthology’s original “‘fortuitous and informal’ quality was lost when ‘the poets subsequently included in the anthologies devoted much energy to narrowing and hardening what began as a spontaneous co-operative effort.’”

He was, in fact, against the idea of poetic camps or cliques in general, whether Georgians, Imagists, or Futurists (all of whom he published). Yet with the third *Georgian Poetry* volume, he felt that the Georgians seemed to have become just that: “This volume, unlike the first, could not be taken for a haphazard selection from the poetry of the period. It is too like the compilation of a *Group.*” Furthermore, he began to suspect that the relatively conservative poetics of the Georgians, the dominant popular voice of poetry, might handicap the next generation. He felt that the typical young poet of the time “‘knows the *Shropshire Lad* rather too well. Walter de la Mare’s rhythm also handicaps his freedom.’”

In fact, Marsh tried to counter the conservative tendency of the series, to modulate inclusions in subsequent volumes to reflect new directions and strengths in poetry. With the second volume, the older poets who had “served Marsh’s purpose by lending a note of respectability and tradition to the chorus of new voices” were weeded
With the third volume, Marsh felt obliged to include war poets, but he turned down the suggestion made by de la Mare and John Freeman to include work by Edward Thomas. He wanted to include a woman poet, too, though Monro’s suggestion of Charlotte Mew’s “The Farmer’s Bride” was countered by de la Mare’s strong criticism of that poem. Marsh went on to edit and Monro to publish two more volumes after this. All of the volumes were greeted by a ready and eager market, for which the books were definitive of the current state of English poetry.

While de la Mare was one of only five poets to appear in all five volumes of *Georgian Poetry*, he too grew increasingly concerned about the misrepresentative nature of the series. By the fourth, he was complaining to Marsh: “I feel . . . that I am a rather stale old bird to be chirping in the new nest.” And he resisted even more strenuously when Marsh approached him about the fifth volume: “To be in 5 would be monstrous – not only because our friend Walter is a Victorian, but because of all these young things clamouring for admittance.”

In fact, by the time this fifth volume was in preparation, Marsh himself was having to defend the venture against his critics. In his prefatory note, he observed that critics who had been supportive up until the third volume had suddenly turned on him when the fourth appeared, and had demanded what credentials he had that enabled him to act as an arbiter of public taste or as a distributor of poetic laurels. Marsh defended himself strenuously, pointing out that the series had followed the first volume entirely as a result of public enthusiasm and that he made no pretensions to include the best poems
of all the best poets writing at the time. Nor, he claimed, was he attempting to form or support a particular clique of poets, as his critics had also claimed:

I should like to make a mild protest against a further charge that Georgian Poetry has merely encouraged a small clique of mutually indistinguishable poetasters to abound in their own and each other's sense or nonsense. It is natural that the poets of a generation should have points in common; but to my fond eye those who have graced these collections look as diverse as sheep to their shepherd, or the members of a Chinese family to their uncle; and if there is an allegation which I would deny with both hands, it is this: that an insipid sameness is the chief characteristic of an anthology which offers — to name almost at random seven only out of forty (oh ominous academic number!) — the work of Messrs. Abercrombie, Davies, de la Mare, Graves, Lawrence, Nichols and Squire.  

The metaphor of family resemblance is revealing, for Marsh had excluded the Celtic and American poetry which would have given the volumes much more variation. He had created a rather insular, perhaps even inbred, "family." After this "mild protest" to defend the fifth volume, even Marsh seems to have lost his enthusiasm as the "uncle" of this Georgian brood, despite continuing public interest.

Undoubtedly, some of the reasons for the success of the first volume of Georgian Poetry and the popularity of the series lay outside the literary merit of the work or even the form in which it had been packaged. For Georgian Poetry appeared at a time when the market for books in general was booming. That market had been expanding since about 1850, but its rate of growth increased dramatically in the first years of the new century. In 1901, 6,044 new books appeared. By 1913, that figure had more than doubled: 12,379 new books were published. Even during WWI, the audience for fiction did not diminish, and the audience for poetry actually expanded. In fact, according to
some interpretations, the war had a direct effect on the increased popularity of poetry.

In particular, Rupert Brooke’s death in 1915 prompted a dramatic increase in the readership not only for his work, but for the Georgians, amongst whom he was a central figure. Brooke’s death focussed public interest on his life and seemed to renew the public’s faith in the value of poetry as practised by Brooke and his fellow Georgians. His death was also to have a more direct financial impact on three of the Georgians, including de la Mare.

With his death, Brooke became a point of focus for the public, just as, during his life, he was at the centre of Marsh’s group of poets. At the time when the idea for Georgian Poetry first took hold, in the autumn of 1912, Brooke was often coming to London and staying with Marsh at his rooms in Gray’s Inn, “going to plays and music halls, seeing pictures, and making numbers of new acquaintances and friends. Henry James, W. B. Yeats and John Masefield he knew already; and he made friends about this time with Edmund Gosse, Walter de la Mare, Wilfrid Gibson, John Drinkwater, W. H. Davies, and many others.” Although Brooke went to Berlin shortly after Georgian Poetry had been proposed, he had many ideas for promoting the book and agreed to give recitals at the Poetry Bookshop. Brooke sincerely believed in the value of the work of his fellow Georgians. He wrote to Geoffrey Fry in the spring of 1913, assuring him that “the cream of modern literature” was to be found in Rhythm and the Poetry Review:

\textbf{Rhythm} is being reorganized, and permanently draws, hereafter, on Gilbert Cannan, L. Abercrombie, W. W. Gibson, me, W. H. Davies, Walter de la Mare, Hugh Walpole, Dent, A. Rothenstein, Duncan Grant, D. Lees, and a hundred more artists. It’s going to be very good...
Chapter 3: Dreams into Gold

Subscribe to these, and you will be on the tip-top of modern Art and Literature. At least in Brooke’s mind, then, he and de la Mare were representatively modern poets. Another idea of his view of the state of English literature emerges in a letter to Jacques Raverat, written when Brooke was in Fiji:

And will you join me on the Poet’s Round? – a walk I’ve planned. One starts from Charing Cross, in a south-easterly direction, and calls on de la Mare at Anerley, and finds Davies at Sevenoaks – a day’s march to Belloc at King’s Head, then up to Wibson [Wilfrid Gibson] on the borders of Gloucestershire, back by Stratford, RUGBY, and the Chilterns, where Masefield and Chesterton dwell. Wouldn’t it give one a queer idea of England?

But it is unclear whether the “queer idea of England” would be a result of the route taken or the poets met along the way! In fact, Brooke’s attitude to his fellow poets was often ironic. Writing to Marsh from Tahiti, he suddenly has the urge to join a club:

I want a club to take an occasional stranger into, for a drink, and to read the papers in, and sometimes to have a quiet meal in. Where do you think I should go? I want somewhere I needn’t always be spick and span in, and somewhere I don’t have to pay a vast sum. Alas, why are there no decent clubs? What do the jolly people all do? I want to belong to the same club as de la Mare. Where does de la Mare go? To Anerley, S.E., I suppose.

There was once a-metrist of Anerley, Whose neighbours were mundane but mannerly. They don’t cavil the least At a stray anapaest, But they do bar his spondees in Anerley.

Although he may seem to be mocking de la Mare’s restrained suburban life and poetry smoothly crafted to accord with the neighbours, Brooke really did respect de la Mare, though the two men never became particularly close. (And indeed, Brooke’s letters are
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full of these apparently spontaneous verses). He claimed, in fact, to appreciate and share de la Mare’s sentiments on the war, as he wrote to de la Mare, when preparing for battle: “I’ve several things about war I wanted to tell you. They’ll keep. I wanted to say, too, that I loved your poem on the war in the Times in August. That & Masefield’s, & Hardy’s perhaps, & one other, were the only ones of the enormous crowd I thought good. Forgive my impudence.” In fact, the war was not conducive to de la Mare’s lyric gift: his war poem was “Happy England,” an exhortation propped up with abstractions.

But the full extent of Brooke’s admiration for de la Mare’s work was revealed in the terms of his will. Brooke had long felt that de la Mare was undervalued and had hoped to help him financially. In 1914, after war had been declared, “In the evenings at Umgeni and Umtata [in South Africa], Rupert talked of the South Seas, his concern for Dudley Ward, who was living in Berlin, and Walter de la Mare, whom he declared was probably the best of his contemporaries.” Anticipating his own death and hoping to benefit the most deserving poets, Brooke assigned, in his will, all of his savings and all royalties from his literary estate to de la Mare, Lascelles Abercrombie, and Wilfrid Gibson.

This bequest was to prove remarkably valuable. After Brooke’s death, each of the three poets received a little over £166 from Brooke’s savings, after his debts had been paid off. His royalties, however, were a much greater source of income. 1914 and Other Poems, which was published in June 1915, just a few months after his death, sold astonishingly well. And in combination with the Collected Poems (1918), sales reached 300,000 copies by 1926. De la Mare’s portion of Brooke’s royalties included those
from Brooke’s contributions to the *Georgian Poetry* anthologies, too. Between 1919 and 1922, the final years of the *Georgian Poetry* series, de la Mare was receiving an average of £344 a year from the bequest, while publication of his own volumes was bringing in about £925 for those same years. The bequest, by itself, was about double what he had earned at Imperial Oil. Demand for Brooke’s work was to remain constant and strong throughout the interwar years, bringing de la Mare anywhere from £200 to £350 a year.

Whistler has noted the tremendous effect this had on de la Mare and his family:

> It was this steady augmenting of his own income with money from the Brooke bequest, together with his Civil List pension [£100 per annum, granted in March 1915], which accounts for the fact that de la Mare was able to maintain his family in spite of the war, and could later send Dick to Oxford, without ever again having to take a salaried post – and this even though success and fame never brought him outstanding sales himself.

Brooke’s popularity had something to do with public rumination about the war and its effects, Brooke serving as an idol of English martyrdom and his poems as the mark of English cultural innocence and national loyalty. On his death, tributes flooded in. De la Mare himself wrote: “But once in a way Nature is as jealous of the individual as of the type. She gave Rupert Brooke youth, and may be, in these hyper-enlightened days, in doing so she grafted a legend.” Brooke’s work could be read as valedictory, examining the Edwardian way of life, anticipating its loss, and in the process creating a myth of idyllic English life and self-sacrifice.

One can speculate about the effect that Brooke’s bequest had on de la Mare. On the one hand, it may have lessened his dependence on reviewing and allowed him to create
the kind of work he wanted, to write without regard for either poetic cliques or readers’ tastes. On the other hand, one could argue that his financial security insulated him from the changing concerns of the world and thus made him unresponsive to new needs in his audience. In any case, de la Mare was not a weather vane swinging in the changing social winds. For instance, he did not shift the themes of his poetry to reflect either the atrocities or the jingoistic sentiments of the First War, though this stalwart attitude, in the opinion of some critics, may have been an advantage:

In holding up before wartime England the poetry and the values of peacetime, the work of such poets as de la Mare, Lawrence, Davies, and Hodgson made an indirect but devastating commentary upon the degradation of the human spirit and the loss of aesthetic standards in war which was the more effective because it was more subtle than the hammer blows of the patriotic versifiers.⁶⁹

Perhaps the prime exemplar of this strategy was Edward Thomas. In his poetry, written in the short span at the beginning of the war when he had become a soldier but had not yet experienced the battlefield, he avoided dealing with the brutal reality or with patriotic sentiment, focusing instead on distilling his years of experience of the English countryside. De la Mare himself was to write of Thomas’ *Collected Poems*: “When, indeed, Edward Thomas was killed in Flanders, a mirror of England was shattered of so pure and true a crystal that a clearer and tenderer reflection of it can be found no other where than in these poems.”⁷⁰

Thomas had come to poetry by a very different route than de la Mare. He was for many years primarily a Grub Street writer, prolifically reviewing and writing sketches, biographies, histories, and travel books to order in a half-desperate attempt to
support himself and his family, as he himself confessed to de la Mare in 1907: “I am very busy, choked with proofs, correspondence, endless books to read . . . I can forswear nobody who will give me money.” When he came to write poetry, it was with a different impetus and vision than that which drove de la Mare. Nevertheless, their relationship served each of them both personally and creatively, at least as far as they were a complement to each other: “if Thomas stilled de la Mare’s spirit, where he felt his own too shallowly active, then de la Mare’s happy good humour in turn soothed Thomas’ spasmodic irritability and his bitter melancholy.”

De la Mare owed a great deal to Thomas as both a friend and a critic. In fact, the two roles cannot easily be distinguished. Thomas first became acquainted with de la Mare when he reviewed Walter Ramal’s *Songs of Childhood* in 1902. Though he initially regarded that book as a rather uneven collection of lyrics, by 1906, when he was editing *The Pocket Book of Poems for the Open Air* (1907), he wrote to de la Mare asking for permission to use a piece from *Songs of Childhood*. When he heard, in reply, that de la Mare was to publish a new book of poems, he was eager to review it, assuring de la Mare that “I can do you whatever service praise may be.” Indeed, Thomas was to review nearly all of de la Mare’s books over the years of their friendship. His personal preference was always for de la Mare’s work directed at children. As he mused of a sheaf of poems that de la Mare sent him in 1909: “All those I like best belong rather to ‘Songs of Childhood’ than ‘Poems,’ don’t they?” But whatever his own bent, he worked assiduously to bolster de la Mare’s reputation in all circles, using his extensive contacts both to place de la Mare’s work and to reserve for himself the privilege of reviewing the
new books as they appeared: “de la Mare’s reputation over the next few years owed its gradual increase as much to Thomas’ constant advocacy, private and public, as to any other kind of help.”

After reviewing *Poems* favourably and receiving generous praise of his own reviews from de la Mare in response, Thomas hoped that he might meet the author in person. But de la Mare recalled that it was not until March 1907 that he met Thomas, in a place curiously uncharacteristic of him, one of the back streets of the City of London, to him far rather the astonishing ‘wen’ than the hub of God’s universe. The streets were already deserted. I was first at the tryst, and presently out of a neighbouring court echoed that peculiarly leisurely footfall, and his figure appeared in the twilight. Gulliver himself could hardly have looked a stranger phenomenon in Lilliput than he appeared in Real-Turtle-Soup-Land – his clothes, his gait, his face, his bearing.

Around the time of this first meeting, as Thomas had mentioned to de la Mare, he was coming into London once a week, meeting up with one group of writers for lunch at the Mont Blanc restaurant, another group for tea at the St. George’s café. It was the latter group into which de la Mare was introduced by Thomas and which came to encompass Ralph Hodgson, John Freeman, Arthur Ransome, Gordon Bottomley, Ford Madox Hueffer, Rupert Brooke, and D. H. Lawrence.

From the start it seems, the relationship between Thomas and de la Mare gave both of them a chance to develop and strengthen their ideas. Thomas shared de la Mare’s belief in the importance of imagination, though he doubted the powers of his own:

I don’t think I really have any imagination, certainly not enough to distinguish between it and reality. But I feel sure it is beyond what is called reality, and that it is something fit for and even aware of infinite and eternal things. Jefferies and Maeterlinck believe that it is so weak – they
call it the soul – simply because we do not as yet admit its existence and have never tried to nourish it and let it have its way. I think it may be found to be life itself to which flesh, mind etc. are only aids, that is what enables us to feel and know the divine in all things . . . so that only by imagination can we see things flesh and spirit as they are, only by it understand the life of things, and take images of them about with us for ever.79

This was surely a philosophy perfectly in accord with de la Mare’s own, as expressed in his poems, stories, and novels, but most particularly in those reviews we have examined in the previous chapter and in the notion of “the secret of the memorable.” But their talk was not restricted to their own beliefs. In 1912, while visiting the new de la Mare house at Anerley, overlooking Ashdown Forest, they had talked about the latest trends in poetry, as Thomas wrote to Helen: “We talked comfortably about Futurists, animals etc. till near midnight.”80 In this, too, they seem to have been in accord. De la Mare must have felt vindicated when Thomas revealed his shared distaste for Pound’s work, as he reported in a letter to de la Mare:

I feel unusually foolish in writing about poetry today as I have just made the most horrible mistake in saying – in the ‘Chronicle’ yesterday & also in ‘The English Review’ – that Ezra Pound is a poet. He is not & how I came to mesmerize myself into praising him I can’t think. I began by thinking his work rot but so contemptuously that I seem to have set about altering my view out of pure perversity & desire to be amiable.81

But there was a very practical side to the relationship, too. Thomas did the best he could to help de la Mare place work, acting both as a kind of second agent to J. B. Pinker in placing the poems and, more importantly, as the first critic of this work, a role he had taken with W. H. Davies earlier. In fact, as Andrew Motion has suggested in his study of Thomas’ poetry, Thomas played a crucial role to all the Georgians: “From 1900
to 1912 he chronicled the rise of Georgian poetry and commended many of its aspects . . .

But he also criticised its defects with such vigour that he may be said to have taken the role of mentor to an entire poetic generation. With de la Mare, Thomas consistently discouraged his tendency towards the arcane and the literary, stating his preference for the freshness and directness more typically found in de la Mare’s work for children. The influence Thomas had on the reading public was partly a result of his prolific reviewing, partly a result of the respect accorded his opinion. He was a regular contributor to the *Daily Chronicle*, *The Nation*, *The Morning Post*, *The Saturday Review*, *The Bookman*, and *The New Weekly*.83

As one reviewer to another, Thomas appreciated de la Mare’s work for the *TLS*, and wanted to recommend him to the editor Grant Richards. In April of 1907, he suggested that de la Mare submit poems to A. W. Nevinson for publication in *The Nation*.84 He also recommended de la Mare’s work to Ralph Hodgson, who, in 1910, was trying to put together a “country magazine.”85

When de la Mare began to send him batches of poems for comment, he at first deferred entirely to de la Mare’s poetic powers, writing in December 1907: “I liked reading the poems you sent me . . . Often the writing is admirable – I mean that I feel in reading, quite suddenly & with a thrill, that here are words arranged in a foreordained manner which I can’t explain.”86 Clearly, Thomas hit on one of the key elements of de la Mare’s poetry, its compulsive power, derived perhaps from those rhythms of folk poetry which give its expressions the quality of both naivety and impersonal truth, but which are also suggestive of the prophetic powers assigned to the romantic poet.
As time went on, however, Thomas became a more incisive critic, clearly stating his preferences and sometimes chiding de la Mare for certain mannerisms of style. Of another group of poems which de la Mare had sent him in November 1908 — some of which were to find their way into *The Listeners* and *Peacock Pie* — Thomas reported:

I have hurried through the poems at once liked many of them but chiefly

Never-to-be
An Epitaph
‘Be gentle, O hands of a child’
‘Nod’
‘Mrs McQueen’
& rather less
The Stranger
‘Or to take arms’
After ‘The Dynasts’

By the way I never feel sure about your way of dividing up such lines, but I feel sure that in the last verse of “The Dynasts” it is faulty & you really could write the verse in eight lines or in a dozen other ways. But it is lines that end on an unaccented syllable that look really wrong

Still trembling
And still unafraid ———

In 1909, despite the enormous pressure and wear from his own reviewing work, Thomas was offering detailed commentary on de la Mare’s poems, which now represented a substantial manuscript. Opening with an apology for his lack of attentiveness to the work — “Forgive my making the briefest remarks as it is late & I am tired” — he goes on to enumerate slight faults in sound and sense, to suggest the order in which the poems should be placed, and to advise which would best catch the interest of certain editors. Of “The Tired Cupid,” for example, one of the poems that went into *The Listeners*, Thomas complained:

line 19   ‘surge’ is too formidable &
lines 23-4 I won’t have ‘dew-bediamon’d’
By and large, de la Mare accepted the criticisms and reworked the poems with Thomas' suggestions in mind. In the case of "The Tired Cupid," he revised the poem to twenty lines, and removed both the formidable word and the unacceptable phrase. Some poems Thomas did not like at all, like "Arabia" and "The Three Kings." But even if he had found fault with some and disliked others, he gave his blessing to the whole: "I think they are equal to the best you have written & they ought to be made into a book. I would introduce them to Elkin Matthews if you like. He would only offer a royalty, but would (I hope) publish at his own risk."  

In the early years of their friendship, de la Mare was still working on prose fiction, and Thomas read and critiqued this, too. He liked The Return, though he could see certain inconsistencies of characterisation, and he warned de la Mare: "You have put yourself under several great disadvantages (1) in choosing such a character as Lawford (2) in avoiding extraordinary or startling incidents (3) in avoiding farce." He could see that the entirely realistic and forthright manner in which the fantastic is presented made Lawford’s transformation into the long-dead Sabathier as difficult for the reader to accept as for his wife. What captivated Thomas about the book was its atmosphere: "I like all your description of moods & moody scenes – the churchyard, the house seen from outside, the Herberts' house. Altogether it is a success, a real triumph. But a devil of a book for reviewers, I should say."  

Indeed, Thomas hoped that he might be able to help de la Mare by reviewing The Return himself for the Bookman. But just ten days after writing to de la Mare about that
book, Thomas was writing again, raving about *The Three Mulla-Mulgars*, for which he had to produce a review very quickly:

I began the book yesterday & read it speedily through – I have just finished it. I don’t know how to describe my enjoyment. It is beautiful & enchanting all through, & the harmony of the whole makes many & many of the little things wonderful which would have been beautiful even if standing alone. I am too tired to do more than go through the book telling you the passages I particularly liked & they are so many that it would tire you. All the poems are very good, by the way. It is your best prose by a long way & your best book altogether.92

Despite Thomas’ unqualified praise for this children’s book, it was *The Return* that was awarded the Polignac Prize in 1911, an award given for a book published in the previous year that showed promise, though not necessarily outright mastery. Of course, Thomas was happy to hear about the award: “My only grumble is that the good committee chose The Return. I have nothing against the Return. But what had they against the Mulgars except that it was not a serious work.”93 One of the editors at Constable & Co. concurred with Thomas, congratulating de la Mare on the prize, but voicing his own preference: “It ought to have been for the Mulla Mulgars, the Pilgrim’s Progress of the Apes, and one of the most delightful of books.”94

When *The Listeners* was published, Thomas felt that de la Mare had managed to combine the elements of his earlier work: “I think it is equal to ‘Songs of Childhood’ and ‘Poems’ together. It is as fresh as the first and it has the grey of the second book like gossamer over its blossom colours. I did not think one book could be so good.”95 One of the things that perhaps energized the book was de la Mare’s newfound knowledge of “country matters,” which showed in the characters that appeared in the poems and the
naturalistic detail that helped to set the mood of solitude or loneliness. De la Mare must have owed his eye for such things to the long rambles he took with Thomas through the countryside. As de la Mare’s poem dedicated to Thomas, “Sotto Voce,” suggests, de la Mare was practically being schooled in the process. In the poem, speaker and companion walk through the country in the heat of noon, stopping suddenly at the sound of “a whispering music.” The speaker, in an elaborate analogy, describes the sound as

The wailing, not of water or of wind –
A husht, far, wild, divine lament,
When Prospero his wizardry bent
Winged Ariel to bind . . . .

His companion, however, is only “Gently amused to see | My ignorant wonderment. He sighed. | ‘It was a nightingale,’ he said . . .”\(^6\) In fact, most of this poem, published in *The Veil* (1921) and appearing again in the last of the *Georgian Poetry* volumes, demonstrates the fusion of de la Mare’s inclination to the fanciful with Thomas’ frankness:

The haze of noon wanned silver-grey
The soundless mansion of the sun:
The air made visible in his ray,
Like molten glass from furnace run,
Quivered o’er heat-baked turf and stone
And the flower of the gorse burned on —
Burned softly as gold of a child’s fair hair
Along each spiky spray . . .

Exact observation alternates with personification and simile in a way that anticipates the almost hallucinatory quality – very real, but somehow transfigured and transfiguring – of the nightingale’s song.

Thomas was also giving de la Mare other means to substantiate his dreams. For Thomas liked “to stop at remote inns or isolated cottages, where, in laconic chat over the
bar or the back garden fence, some dying skill or local saga of dreams and ghosts could still be picked up direct from wheelwright, farrier and labourer, unspoiled by the attentions of any theorist or bogus naïf." The childhood element that Thomas valued in de la Mare's work was surely a lingering part of this same folk culture in which Thomas himself was so deeply steeped.

Though Thomas did not review *The Listeners*, he did review *Georgian Poetry 1911-1912*, in which five of de la Mare's poems from *The Listeners* appeared. While he found the anthology "representative and striking," he pointed out, in his review, that many of the poets included could not really be considered Georgian: "Not a few of these had developed their qualities under Victoria and Edward, and it cannot be said that any uncommon accession of power has very recently come to Messrs. Chesterton, Davies, de la Mare, Sturge Moore and Trevelyan."

But if de la Mare's poetic was rooted in an earlier period, it reached its height, for Thomas, in *Peacock Pie*. Eleanor Farjeon, another children's author with whom Thomas had a very close relationship from 1912 on, remembered that, on her second visit to Thomas at Steep, he "handed me a book bound in dark blue cloth saying, 'Read this, and if you are worthy of it, keep it.'" Nor was this quasi-religious charge his common practice: "He gave me lesser books without conditions; I could like them or not as I pleased." The reason for his admonition in this case was simple: "*Peacock Pie* was one of the two pure-gold nuggets he dug out of his reviewing of poetry," superseded only by Frost's *North of Boston*. 
When Thomas reviewed *Peacock Pie* for *The Bookman*, he took the most fanciful attitude to the task:

The book is worthy of its name. That is to say, in the first place, it is a pie. It is something to be eaten. Furthermore it consists of pastry and of something covered up by the crust. In the second place, that something is discovered to be so much above the ordinary pigeon, steak and kidney, or veal and ham, that it must be called *Peacock Pie*.\(^{100}\)

Nor was his delight with the book a mark of his own eccentric taste. Conrad Aiken reviewed the American edition of the book and provided a more sober evaluation: "Mr. de la Mare, presumably, needs no introduction. His 'Peacock Pie' consists of lyrics ostensibly for children; in reality it contains some of the most delightful work he has done."\(^{101}\) The opinion of both men was reflected in the immediate popularity of the book. By January 1920, it had been reprinted five times.

When de la Mare consulted Thomas about making changes to *Songs of Childhood* for the new edition which Longmans published in 1916, Thomas ventured:

Did you really mean me to suggest meddling with 'Songs of Childhood'? I had a sort of hope you would send me a copy to mark (whereby I should have two copies) so that I put off the evil hour. However, if you are to cut out some I suggest 'The Gnomies', 'Bluebells' (& yet should like to keep them), 'Song', 'The Fairies Dancing', 'The Pilgrim', 'The Gage', 'The Raven's Tomb'.\(^{102}\)

Primarily, it seems, Thomas wanted to cut the fey elements of the book, as well as some of the longer, more sombre narrative poems, to create a more consistent tone. But when de la Mare did omit four poems, they were entirely different: three short lyrics ("The Grey Wolf," "Cecil," and his original "Envoy"), which he presumably felt were technically weak, as well as the narrative "The Night Swans." And he replaced these cuts
with stronger poems in much the same vein. Thomas wanted to work on the overall tone of the book, de la Mare on its technical merits.

The generosity in the friendship between de la Mare and Thomas was on both sides. The two men frequently leant each other books and shared their latest enthusiasms. Thomas sent de la Mare seeds and roots to plant and even an old skull that de la Mare requested, scavenged from a graveyard falling into the sea. Occasionally, Thomas offered up his work for de la Mare’s critique. In early 1908, in fact, he had sent the manuscript of his book on Richard Jefferies to de la Mare and acknowledged, with its return: “I made use of your suggestions as a rule.”103 In 1909, de la Mare looked over proofs of Thomas’ “little book of sketches,” and Thomas responded positively to his criticisms: “Thank you for your praise & for your suggestions – I have adopted all but one & that because I did not want to make the corrections too heavy.”104 In early 1913, he sent de la Mare a book of his fiction, The Happy-Go-Lucky Morgans, with the hope that de la Mare might be able to place it with William Heinemann: “I also want to know if the various elements in it make a mere bran-pie or something like an eatable (don’t bother about its being digestible) pudding.”105 When Thomas’ income fell dramatically through 1912 and 1913 and he was urged to apply to the Royal Literary Fund, de la Mare gave his strong support to the application.

Thomas finally broke into poetry in December 1914. For several years previously, that medium had been urged on him by Eleanor Farjeon, Gordon Bottomley, and de la Mare himself. In late 1913, he had indicated to de la Mare that he was toying with rhymes:
in sleepless hours this morning I found myself (for the first time) trying hard to rhyme my mood & failing very badly indeed, in fact comically so, as I could not complete the first verse or get beyond the rhyme of ember & September. This must explain any future lenience towards the mob of gentlemen that rhyme with ease.\textsuperscript{106}

But his serious commitment to writing poetry did not come until a year later and was, perhaps, finally made possible by the war, which paradoxically allowed him more time to write at leisure, and by his developing relationship with Robert Frost. At first, he sent these poems only to Frost and Harold Monro. He charged Frost to “Tell me all you dare about them.”\textsuperscript{107} From Monro, however, he asked only for the simplest of response — whether Monro was willing to publish them or not — and was not surprised to find it a negative one, as he wrote to Monro on return of his manuscript: “It was chiefly to save myself what I think unnecessary pain that I asked for no explanations . . . I assume the verses expressed nothing clearly that you cared about.”\textsuperscript{108} In any case, in the event that they were published by Monro or someone else, he was mortally afraid of what the reviewers would say, knowing that profession all too well: “They (‘we’ I should say) have to show how much cleverer they are than the reviewed.”\textsuperscript{109}

His reasons for not sending the poems to de la Mare were, he claimed, entirely different: “It is too much like begging for compliments.”\textsuperscript{110} Perhaps, too, he thought that de la Mare might respond like Monro, not recognizing the value of this work so different from his own. In March of 1915, though, he took the plunge and sent copies of some pieces to de la Mare and to others of his friends, introducing them with extreme deference and caution: “I am sending you some verses by a very young poet (not a young man) who desires to remain anonymous except to you & one or two other people. Don’t
mention them anywhere, as they are to be published (if at all) under a pseudonym. He is coming to town next week & hopes to see you . . .”

As Thomas began to write his own poetry, his enthusiasm for the Georgians waned. In 1915, when a second volume of *New Numbers* came out, which included the work of W. W. Gibson, Rupert Brooke, Lascelles Abercrombie, and John Drinkwater, he complained to Freeman: “Drinkwater is hopeless. Gibson, for me, almost equally so. Abercrombie, I fancy, applies the lash, and I wonder whether he always did. I used to think he was naturally a spirited steed. *I am always anxious to like him.*” Later that same year, he wrote to Frost that he might have had a chance to be included in the second *Georgian Poetry* anthology:

> At least, Bottomley wanted to show some of my things to Marsh. But they have kept in Monro. The only things I really much like were de la Mare’s and perhaps Davies’. Bottomley may be all right. The new man Ledwidge isn’t any good is he? Abercrombie of course is a poet. I don’t know. I couldn’t really spend much time on the volume after looking to see if there was anything new in it and except Ledwidge, there wasn’t.”

Perhaps *Georgian Poetry* was “sour grapes” to him, or perhaps he genuinely would not have relished the company in which he might have appeared.

But if Thomas was not elected to the ranks of the Georgians, his friends did what they could to help him. De la Mare’s practical aid to Thomas intensified. In 1915, Edward Garnett began working to secure a Civil List pension or grant for Thomas. Hearing about this, de la Mare offered enthusiastic support, writing to Garnett: “If you are doing anything I would like to do more than this . . .”
De la Mare succeeded in helping Thomas place the poems, relying on his connection with Sidgwick and Jackson. Roger Ingpen, de la Mare’s brother-in-law, was working at that publisher at the time, and the three of them, as well as John Freeman, met in August 1916, to discuss a book. Sixty-four of the poems appeared in *Poems* (1917), “the most substantial sign of recognition [that Thomas had received] so far.”

In June of 1917, Thomas’ friends finally secured a £300 grant for Thomas, too late, since he had been killed at Arras two months earlier. After the appearance of *Poems* and Thomas’ death, de la Mare urged Marsh to include Thomas in *Georgian Poetry 1917-1918* and “even offered to stand down so as to make room for him.” Marsh refused on the grounds that he could not include a poet for the first time posthumously. But in any case, Thomas’ poems appealed neither to Marsh, nor, as we have seen, to Monro. Some personal animosity may have festered in Marsh’s case: when Thomas had been invited to breakfast with Brooke and Marsh at Marsh’s Gray’s Inn apartment in February 1913, he “gave the impression of disliking both his hosts and the food.”

Thomas was known, of course, for his brooding and melancholy disposition, and his abrupt and forthright responses. He had occasionally taken sudden offence with de la Mare over small points, though his spleen had not lasted long. Nevertheless, their relationship seems to have suffered from a gradual and quiet dissolution, at least as far as Thomas perceived it. The cause of the decay is not clear, though the most overt reason lay in a subtle competition that the two men felt with each other. Early in 1912, de la Mare had considered giving up reviewing altogether, and Thomas had asked de la Mare to recommend him to take his place. At this time, Thomas desperately needed the extra
work. But de la Mare had continued reviewing, still not confident that royalties alone would support him. The two friends were effectively competing for the same work. And later that year, Thomas complained to Gordon Bottomley that de la Mare was too tied up in that work: “He is a too busy man now, reading for Heinemann and reviewing multifariously and never quite unpuckering in our scanty meetings.” Even after receiving the Brooke bequest, de la Mare does not seem to have relaxed his pace. For in 1916, Thomas complained again to Bottomley that de la Mare was still working at a tremendous pace as a reviewer. Thomas evidently felt that de la Mare had become too comfortable in the lifestyle being financed by reviewing, Brooke’s bequest, and his own sales: “De la Mare continues to wear himself out at reviewing and making more money than he really needs, except that he is committed like everyone else to some accidental standard of living.”

But there may have been a subtler, unacknowledged cause to the cooling of the relationship between Thomas and de la Mare, one rooted in their very different poetic styles. For in 1914, at the same time that Thomas was consolidating his friendship with Frost, he confessed his distance from de la Mare to the American poet. In the same letter in which he acknowledged Frost’s advice on his first poems, he seems to have felt the need to disavow his friendship with de la Mare: “he and I have withdrawn from one another I fancy. At least I know I am never myself so long as I am with him.” It is almost as if Thomas were shifting his personal allegiances with this letter, though he evidently still loved de la Mare’s work. In a letter sent to Elfrida de la Mare, just as he
was about to leave for France with the artillery, he puts his admiration into the mouths of his own children:

This is to say goodbye which I was not able to do in any other way. We are here for a week or so before going out – I suppose to France. I want you to give my love to Jack & the children. When I was at home on my last leave Branwen & Baba were full of ‘Peacock Pie’ & I wish Jack knew how much they liked to hear it read through. I don’t know any poet who could give such perfect pleasure. Goodbye.122

Thomas was also disappointed that de la Mare and Frost had not hit it off. In 1914, when the second Georgian Poetry anthology was in preparation, Thomas had hoped de la Mare might recommend both Ellis and Frost for inclusion: “I think they would make the book more interesting & representative than if it is a repetition of the first plus Hodgson only, & I wonder if you feel able to mention them to Marsh. He is probably not friendly to me or to my opinion or I would write direct.”123 The request came to nothing, though not because of de la Mare’s negligence. Nevertheless, there were other incidents that Thomas took as evidence of de la Mare’s lack of enthusiasm for Frost. When de la Mare went to the United States in 1917 to accept the Yale Poetry Prize on Brooke’s behalf and to deliver the lecture connected with the prize, he visited Frost, but evidently did not respond to him as Thomas would have liked. In reply to one of de la Mare’s letters about the American visit, Thomas gave details about life at the front, with only one more personal reference, a quiet reproof, thrown in: “I wish you had said more about Frost.”124

Perhaps de la Mare could not drink in Frost’s poetic as Thomas did. And yet, in the 1933 volume The Fleeting and Other Poems, de la Mare published a poem in which
he had managed to fuse one of his typical scenarios with the more forthright, substantive
details of Frost's and of Thomas' poetry. The poem is "The Railway Junction," and, in
its first three stanzas, betrays almost no obvious de la Marean features:

From here through tunnelled gloom the track
Forks into two: and one of these
Wheels onward into darkening hills,
And one toward distant seas.

How still it is; the signal light
At set of sun shines palely green;
A thrush sings; other sound there's none,
Nor traveller to be seen –

Where late there was a throng. And now,
In peace awhile, I sit alone;
Though soon, at the appointed hour,
I shall myself be gone.  

Only the inversion in the third line of the second stanza gives a hint of the poem's origin.

In the next two stanzas, however, de la Mare's typical symbolism breaks out, perhaps all
the more forcefully for having been repressed:

But not their way: the bow-legged groom,
The parson in black, the widow and son,
The sailor with his cage, the gaunt
Gamekeeper with his gun.

That fair one, too, discreetly veiled –
All, who so mutely came, and went,
Will reach those far nocturnal hills,
Or shores, ere night is spent.

For de la Mare, the railway junction is an emblem of exactly the strange meeting ground

that is life, where passengers from different origins, momentarily meet, converse and
interact, then take their separate ways to symbolic destinations. (He was to use the
junction several times more in his work, most obviously in the short story "Crewe" and in "Lichen," one of the vignettes from Ding Dong Bell.)

Thomas insisted on pursuing a more sober line of significance in his poetry.

When he wrote "The Path," he defies the kind of meaning de la Mare could find in tracks:

But the road is houseless, and leads not to school.
To see a child is rare there, and the eye
Has but the road, the wood that overhangs
And munderyawns it, and the path that looks
As if it led on to some legendary
Or fancied place where men have wished to go
And stay; till, sudden, it ends where the wood ends.126

Though the eye may yearn to discern a deeper meaning, to find purpose or destination.

Thomas insists that his paths lead nowhere. At other times, Thomas indulges, at least temporarily, in the dream image. In the poem "Cock-Crow," he allows himself to build up a fanciful scene, the sound of two cocks crowing at night transformed:

And bright before my eyes twin trumpeters stand,
Heralds of splendour, one at either hand,
Each facing each as in a coat of arms:127

But Thomas is not interested in prolonging the analogy or taking the dream to its resolution. Instead, he "awakes" to the real significance of those sounds with the next line, the last of the poem: "The milkers lace their boots up at the farms."

Some time after Thomas' death, de la Mare mused on the immense differences between Thomas' and his own practice of poetry. For, of the things Thomas loved — "England's roads and heaths and woods, its secret haunts and solitudes, its houses, its people" — he "pierced to their being, not through dreams, or rhapsodies, not by the strange light of fantasy, rarely with the vision that makes of them a transient veil of the
unseen.”128 In other words, he defines Thomas’ practice as the opposite of his own, and he seems rather abashed by his own symbolist bent and somewhat chastened by Thomas’ more forthright approach to his subjects. Even so, Jan Marsh makes brief note of a possible influence of style: “In several of his poems Thomas employs a form of childlike rhyming reminiscent of de la Mare, though without de la Mare’s whimsicality. In turn, some of de la Mare’s later verse seems to show the influence of Thomas.”129 Michael Kirkham, while noting the vast difference in the language, rhythm, and voice of the two poets, finds an occasional affinity of subject and effect. Writing of Thomas’ “Under the Woods,” he notes: “Like ‘The Combe’ the poem explores feelings of ancient time; the first line may even recall de la Mare’s ‘Very old are the woods’ from ‘All That’s Past,’ a poem that similarly makes ancientness seem like another order of existence.”130 Thomas was no doubt moved and animated by de la Mare’s visions, though he could not himself, in all poetic sincerity, create them. His was a different England. For his part, Thomas must have reminded de la Mare, once again, of the need to substantiate his visions, to base his dreams in the waking world.

Thomas and Brooke had confirmed, encouraged, and supported de la Mare in pursuing his singular vision: both died in the war. De la Mare’s loyalty to his dead took the form of the lecture on Brooke we have already considered and a continuation of that vein of children’s work that had pleased Thomas so much, as well as a deepening note to his adult poems. Although as time went on de la Mare was aware of the literary ferment
around him, of new fashions and theories in poetry, of the veering of other poets of his
own generation, like Yeats, away from an arcane and ornamented symbolism, he
continued resolutely in his own vein.

Of course, sales alone encouraged him in this direction. He had developed a wide
public readership through the *Georgian Poetry* anthologies which was helping sales of his
own volumes of work. Though Constable and Co. had initially been slow to accept *The
Listeners* and *Peacock Pie*, their attitude and that of other publishers to de la Mare
shifted quite radically around 1912. De la Mare began to be approached on a regular basis
by publishers with suggestions for books that he might like to write, many of them for
children. He frequently accepted, and commissioned work came to compose a large
portion of his output. As Geoffrey Faber has argued, such work should not be thought
of as disconcertingly mercenary: "Within my own experience as a publisher, among the
books published by my own firm, I can think of many which would probably never have
been written, if we had not planned them and found authors to write them. You must
take my word for it that they were all good books."\(^{131}\)

Unfortunately, de la Mare’s first commissioned work for Constable was a
commercial failure, and must be considered an artistic failure, too. In the year they
published *The Listeners*, Constable issued a book of photographs of children by Carine
and Will Cadby entitled *A Child’s Day*. The children are engaged in staged versions of
child’s play, and de la Mare composed verses to accompany the pictures.\(^{132}\) Evidently,
even though *Peacock Pie* had not yet been issued, Constable must have felt that he had an
established reputation as a children’s author on the basis of *Songs of Childhood* and *The
Three Mulla-Mulgars. But *A Child’s Day* did not sell as Constable had hoped, as one member of Constable’s staff reported to de la Mare: the book “did fairly well at Christmas, and I hope it will continue to sell. It was a difficult book to produce, and the reproductions do not appear to have created any great furore among buyers. Perhaps it was a little too novel in its appearance and unlike the average Christmas book.”¹³³ In fact, the problem lay much deeper than this, for the Cadbys’ images were coy and patronising, and de la Mare had been forced to follow their lead with his verses. When he put together his next volume of children’s verse, *Down-Adown-Derry* (1922), he thought it worthwhile to salvage only three of the twenty-three rhymes he had written as captions.¹³⁴

Despite this commercial failure, in August 1913, just a few months after the publication of *Peacock Pie*, Otto Kyllmann, one of Constable’s two directors, approached de la Mare, urging him to consider writing a book of Greek and Roman myths for children.¹³⁵ De la Mare was not enthused by the idea, but suggested that he might like to work on a volume of fairy stories. Kyllmann responded hungrily to the idea: “I suppose you have not by any chance got any of these already written?”¹³⁶ De la Mare had not, and he did not find the time and have the inclination to produce them until more than ten years later.¹³⁷ Nor was he producing poems at a fast enough rate to suit Kyllmann. In June of 1915, Kyllmann urged de la Mare to send him enough poems so that “we could make another volume like ‘The Listeners’ or ‘Peacock Pie.”¹³⁸ When it became clear that de la Mare could not deliver the requisite number (the next volume, *Motley*, did not appear until 1918), Kyllmann proposed that Constable reissue *Songs of*
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Childhood, which Longmans had let fall out-of-print. But Longmans were in the process of preparing a new edition of that book and would not give it up.

Nevertheless, Kyllmann had reasons to be content with the titles that Constable did have: Peacock Pie was selling very well. Both it and The Listeners had to be reprinted in March of 1916, and a new edition, with illustrations by W. Heath Robinson, was issued in time for Christmas that same year. In fact, so successful did this title remain that, in 1924, Constable put out a third edition with colour embellishments by C. Lovat Fraser, with 250 signed copies being sold at 42/- (the trade edition cost 12/-). In the last year of the Georgian Poetry series, 1922, sales of Peacock Pie peaked, producing more than £580 in royalties. And indeed, Peacock Pie became a definitive de la Mare title. In 1940, writing to J. R. Pinker with regard to the royalty statements for his numerous titles, de la Mare observed that very few of his works were doing as well as he had expected, with the exception of Peacock Pie, of which almost 40,000 copies had by now been sold. Thomas had persistently seen the children’s work as the very core of de la Mare’s genius, and sales seemed to be confirming the fact.

Kyllmann’s almost continuous demands on de la Mare for new work were a sign of the prestige and popularity that de la Mare had now attained. Not surprisingly, then, Kyllmann hoped that Constable might eventually publish all de la Mare’s poetry, as he proposed to de la Mare in September 1915:

I have been meaning to write to you to ask whether you would transfer to us your two volumes of poems one of which was originally published by Mr. Murray, and the one which we have had some correspondence about published by Messrs Longman, as if we had the two we should then, with the other volumes that we have already published, I think, have
all your published volumes. I should then like to publish a volume containing all the work which you wish to keep in print, and from time to time publish other volumes as you have them ready. It is my ambition to have your complete poetical works on our list, and I think it would be a pity to have one volume in another publisher’s hands.¹⁴¹

Constable never took over rights for *Songs of Childhood*, though they did secure an arrangement to publish future volumes of the poetry. In the decade subsequent to *Peacock Pie*, they put out four more of de la Mare’s poetry books: *Motley* (1918), *The Veil* (1921), and *Down-adown-Derry* (1922), as well as the collection *Poems 1901 to 1918* (1920). From 1920 on, so confident were Constable in the value of de la Mare’s name that these last three titles were issued in expensive signed editions. Kyllmann, in fact, became quite possessive of de la Mare as Constable property, fussing over rights and worrying about the deleterious effects that anthologies were having on sales. In 1915, he complained about the inclusion of de la Mare’s work in an anthology edited by Edward Thomas: “I think it only right to point out that the inclusion in anthologies on the scale on which it is being done at present, does of course materially affect the sales of an author’s original volume, and thereby prejudicially affects his royalties and also the publishers’ chance of sales.”¹⁴² When de la Mare asked if he might contribute poems to the fourth *Georgian Poetry* volume, Kyllmann could only begrudgingly assent: “As you particularly wish it by all means give Mr. Marsh the permission he asks for. Naturally I hope your (our) volume [*Motley*] will be published before ‘Georgian Poetry.’”¹⁴³

William Heinemann, too, was interested in commissioning work from de la Mare. In April of 1919, Heinemann asked de la Mare to look at the drawings of an American child prodigy, Pamela Bianco:
I know you will be delighted with the extraordinary drawings of a little girl whose father brings you this note. They are so delicious that I should be very glad if you would look at them with care and see if they appeal to you for any special mode of presentation. There is to be an exhibition of this child's work at the Leicester Galleries. I should not bother you if I did not think that you would be personally interested in the drawings.\textsuperscript{144}

But Heinemann already probably had more in mind than just soliciting de la Mare's advice. A few weeks later, the editor of the prospective book wrote to ask de la Mare for an introduction: "The matter of the text is still unarranged, but it has been our hope that we could have your name associated with her work in a book."\textsuperscript{145} Despite the supposed charm of the drawings themselves and the public exhibition of them, Heinemann evidently felt that de la Mare's endorsement would still be a great help. But a week later, the editor wrote again to de la Mare, with an enlarged request:

Her father and I talked very freely as to the best way of introducing the child's work to the public. As I think you said, it would be a mistake to over-emphasise her youth, and one wants to get away from the word and meaning of the word "prodigy": after all, beauty is beauty, and if it is presented, the question of youth or age does not come in. Bianco and I agree that the ideal we should aim at, is the collection of say, some 36 of her drawings with an introduction from you, but if in addition to this, the spirit moves you to write a verse or verses to some of the titles shown on the further enclosure, it would be the high-water mark of opportunity for getting a wide and good sale for the book.\textsuperscript{146}

Beauty may be beauty, but evidently the beautiful drawings alone did not make much of a commercial prospect. And the book subsequently appeared, later that year, as \textit{Flora}, with de la Mare's verses paired with Bianco's pictures.

Shortly after thinking of de la Mare in connection with this book, Heinemann also suggested to de la Mare that he write a version of \textit{Cinderella} that was to be illustrated by Arthur Rackham:
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Mr. Rackham and I feel, as apparently you do, that Perrault’s version is the universally accepted version, and that it would be advisable if possible to take it as the basis of the retelling of the story, with, as you say, an added English flavour. My idea would be to add to Perrault’s story all through whimsical ideas which he in his rather stern way, would never have thought of himself.  

Perrault’s original, late-seventeenth-century audience was, of course, very different from the early twentieth-century audience for fairy tales. Evidently, Heinemann considered de la Mare an author particularly astute with the “whimsical ideas” necessary to transform the rather abrupt style of Perrault’s original into something more lyrical and morally ambiguous.

By 1921, de la Mare’s correspondence and negotiations with various publishers was so prodigious (and his income substantial enough) that he took on a secretary. The increasing obsequiousness of publishers also allowed him to apply his own industry in a new direction. De la Mare began to propose to publishers various new publishing schemes of his own, the first of which was the anthology *Come Hither*, also published by Constable, in 1923. In 1924, this title alone earned de la Mare almost £1000 in royalties. And *Come Hither* stayed in print in one edition or another right up until 1986. Even after the initial surge of public interest when the anthology first appeared, sales in Britain remained steady at about 400 or 500 copies a year, and that number rose dramatically into the thousands towards the end of World War II. Perhaps it was precisely the success of this anthology and the particular public taste it fostered that prompted Laura Riding and Robert Graves to complain that the poems included “seem a
mere extension of the De la Mare atmosphere backwards through English Poetry. A tyranny which no personality has a right to exercise over the reader . . ."149

The “De la Mare atmosphere” was deeply appealing to the British public and remained so for many years, and de la Mare was profiting handsomely by it. In the early 1920s, as well as the volumes of poetry, he published a selection of his short stories and poetry for schools and colleges as *Story and Rhyme* (1921), his first collection of stories, *The Riddle* (1923), a new novel called *Memoirs of a Midget* (1921), and even a fairy play, *Crossings* (1921), which had a few performances on the London stage.

The idea of collecting the early stories came from de la Mare’s friend, Forrest Reid, at this point when de la Mare had achieved widespread popularity. *The Riddle and Other Stories* included four stories originally published in the Edwardian years, and many of the others had been written in the same period. The title story, as we have seen, had been written in 1898 or earlier. Even the new stories that he wrote for the volume follow the patterns of the older ones.

Selwyn and Blount, where Roger Ingpen was working, were keen to publish the book. Remarkably, for some of the published stories, de la Mare had kept neither copies nor accurate records of publication dates, so that Ingpen and a research assistant had to spend a considerable time recovering them. But this effort of collecting, rereading, and revising seems to have redirected de la Mare’s energy away from poetry and back into prose fiction. Some of this energy animated the introductory story to *Come Hither*. Some of it went into the production of new stories for *The Riddle*. But all in all, the effect on de la Mare of revisiting and revising his older work was conservative.
Thus, although the stories in the book were produced over a twenty-year period, all are pervaded by a singular atmosphere and recurring characters, as was pointed out in a review of the Canadian edition of the book:

_The Riddle and Other Tales_ are stories slight and musical and laid in a world of their own, full of candle-lighted drawing-rooms where frail gracious ladies entertain with small cakes a lonely little boy. In nearly all of them appears a sensitive, solitary child, who in his hours of serious play explores the mysteries of madness, of the supernatural, or of grown-up passions and jealousies. In most of them, the thread of narrative is frail and fine, the characters indistinct; the vignettes of description—twilight interiors and poetic landscapes—most arresting. The reviewer is willing to grant de la Mare a strong affective ability, and yet is critical enough to note the repetition of character and situation involved (which might suggest that England is composed solely of such scenes), the paucity of narrative, and the deliberate fuzziness of the actors in this twilight. But whatever censure might be implied in this Canadian review, the British response was less qualified. The most enthusiastic of reviews appeared in _The Bookman:_

... in these stories, as in all, how beautifully Mr. de la Mare has written his wisdom. It is the wisdom of a child, whose sensations are imaginative, not intellectual... Two stories here, both concerned with terrible things—"Seeton's Aunt" [sic] and "Out of the Deep"—are full of a rare beauty; they rank, I believe, with the best which have been written of the kind, better than anything of Poe's, at least as good as "The Turn of the Screw."... The most beautiful of the stories is perhaps the first, "The Almond Tree." It is a child's vision of the breach growing between his parents; and if you would see how any subject gains from treatment by a poet, you have only to compare this with that great novel, "What Maisie Knew."!

Again, the spirit of Poe is invoked, the comparison to Henry James is made.

Furthermore, de la Mare's own distinction between the child's and the boy's imagination,
outlined by him in relation to Brooke, is echoed by the reviewer. We may be wary of such effusive praise, emanating as it does from the pages of *The Bookman*. But J. B. Priestley’s review for *The London Mercury* confirmed de la Mare’s achievement: “This volume of stories by Mr. de la Mare is a further course of that feast in which Peacock Pie is one of the side-dishes . . . Mr. de la Mare has written a little masterpiece.”

Thus, de la Mare’s extraordinary reputation as a writer of poetry and prose, whether aimed at adults or children, was reflected in public demand, the clamouring of publishers for a piece of the profits from his work, and the praise of critics. The process by which de la Mare marketed his work was soon radically simplified with a serendipitous turn of events. Graduating from Oxford, de la Mare’s eldest son, Richard, entered the publishing world, joining Roger Ingpen at Selwyn and Blount in 1923, the same year that that firm published *The Riddle*. In coming years, through Richard, de la Mare was to have an unusually close relationship with a key twentieth-century publisher.
Chapter 4: A Reputation that Sells
De la Mare the Faber Poet

Modern Art is possibly in a very interesting stage; but one thing it very conspicuously lacks, and that is the power to please more than a very limited section even of the educated folk.

Geoffrey Faber

Faber & Faber is known in the literary world as one of the signal publishers of progressive twentieth-century poets and draws instant associations with T. S. Eliot and Ezra Pound, amongst others. One could even say that the distinctive cover of the Faber & Faber poetry edition has developed an iconic status, certifying the contents as being representatively modern. In thinking of those covers, one thinks of Eliot and Pound, of Auden and Spender and MacNeice, of George Barker and Philip Larkin, of Ted Hughes and Thom Gunn and Seamus Heaney – in a word, some of the most accomplished poets of their generations. The prestige attached to Faber & Faber is evident in Heaney’s reflections on how he became a Faber poet, after publishing three poems in the New Statesman of 1964: “Then inside six weeks or so I had a letter from Fabers. I just couldn’t believe it, it was like getting a letter from God the Father.” Of course, one of the crucial factors in establishing the awesome prestige that Heaney identifies had been Eliot’s presence as a director at Faber & Faber. As Peter Ackroyd notes in his biography of Eliot, “With his own strong convictions, he was able to form the literary taste of a generation, and under his aegis Faber and Faber... were until the mid-nineteen-sixties the pre-eminent publishers of twentieth-century poetry.” Thus, both Eliot and Faber & Faber were inextricably bound to the idea of the progress of poetry in the twentieth
century. Amongst the list of Faber publications, from 1928 on, were an increasing number of de la Mare titles; a few of these remain in print today.

How was it exactly that the 55-year-old de la Mare was taken up by a publisher as progressive as Faber & Faber and has come to be preserved like an archaic fragment of the Georgian past in the sleek edifice of Faber’s modern poetry list? Given Faber’s devotion to decisively modern works, one may wonder why they chose to publish de la Mare at all since he was an author with a well-established reputation as a traditionalist. There are three answers to this question and perhaps we should begin with the most facile.

Richard de la Mare, who had begun his career in publishing at Selwyn & Blount, had been taken on as an editor at Faber & Gwyer in 1925, the same year that T. S. Eliot came to the firm. Richard was deeply involved both with the “recruitment” of his father by Faber & Faber and with all subsequent publications of de la Mare’s work by the firm. Strictly speaking, Richard de la Mare was responsible for developing the art and gardening list. But in practice, the duties of the editors were not this compartmentalised, and he inevitably had much involvement with the publication of his father’s work.

Indeed, in his short history of the firm, J. O. Baylen asserts that “Unlike other publishing houses, Faber and Faber allowed the sales department to participate in deciding what books were to be published.” (And it is worth noting that the de la Mare family maintains a stake in Faber & Faber today. Giles de la Mare, Richard’s son, is on the Board of Directors and the family owns about 8 percent of the firm.)
Nevertheless, de la Mare’s work would surely not have been taken on by Faber & Faber without the approval of both T. S. Eliot and of Geoffrey Faber himself. Thus, the more elaborate answer to the question of how de la Mare became a Faber author is tied up in the issue of the firm’s cultural mission and business strategy as these were defined and controlled by these two men.

Geoffrey Faber directed his publishing firm so that it had an incisive cultural mission while still being a feasible business enterprise. The legacy of his direction is that the company remains one of the most important of independent publishers in Britain in an age of media conglomerates. From an academic point of view, perhaps the most visible aspect of this legacy is Faber’s poetry list, and that was originally given its trajectory by Eliot. But Faber’s ideas about publishing extended far beyond the creation of a highly visible poetry list, encompassing a general philosophy of culture and the place of the publisher within it.

Faber recruited T. S. Eliot and Richard de la Mare, along with a range of other talents, including Frank Morley and C. W. Stewart, as part of an aggressive expansion plan in the mid-1920s through which he aimed to take the former publishing firm, called the Scientific Press Limited, and turn it into a bold and progressive general publisher: Walter de la Mare was to be part of this expansion. From 1924 to 1929, the firm operated under the name Faber & Gwyer. On 1 April 1929, Geoffrey Faber bought out the company’s original owners, Maurice and Alsina Gwyer, and changed its name to Faber & Faber, establishing a board of directors composed of himself, C. W. Stewart,
Richard de la Mare, T. S. Eliot, and F. V. Morley. While the familial connection between author and publisher may have prompted the idea of taking on Walter de la Mare, Faber himself must have felt that de la Mare’s solid literary reputation would help to stabilise and sustain the company as it set off in its new direction.

In subsequent years, as Geoffrey Faber’s influence and prestige as a publisher grew, he delivered a number of lectures in which he aggressively championed his style of publishing and urged booksellers and the reading public to support this noble project: “To raise the general standard just as far as you can raise it without frightening the buyer away – to educate him insensibly to expect something a little better than he used to be content with – and to do this without losing money: this is the fine art of publishing, and its final justification.”

Yet Faber quickly realised that this “fine art” was beset by problems. The most obvious of these was the economics of the supply and demand for books in his day: “the extreme smallness of the book-reading public; the microscopic, almost ultra-microscopic, smallness of the book-buying public; and the preposterous overproduction of books.”

In a series of lectures he delivered in the 1930s, Faber elaborated on these problems and identified some of their effects, the greatest of which was a dangerous homogenising tendency in the books that were being published. From a naive perspective, one might think that such a problem lay with the publishers themselves. But in a paper that he read to the Society of Bookmen in 1931, Faber argued that the blame lay elsewhere; that while publishers occasionally took risks in publishing the kind of books they would like the
public to read, booksellers seldom made a similar effort in trying to sell books, preferring
instead to let the bestseller and the recognized form or author sell itself:

Every reputable publisher deliberately publishes every year a few books
on which he has no hope whatever of making anything but a loss. How
many booksellers make any equivalent contribution towards the cause of
good literature? How many booksellers, for example, make any effort at
all to sell the verse of any modern poet except the half dozen or so whose
names are universally known?10

Indeed, Faber complained that the cultural significance of bookselling has not really been
recognised: "The underlying cause of all the trouble is the general absence of an adequate
sense of the national importance of bookselling."11 And this continuing disregard for the
essential cultural mission achieved by booksellers will ultimately not just limit the books
which come to be published and sold, but will shape the very nature of authors’ work, for
"it is true to say, on the kind of opportunities which we publishers and booksellers are
able to offer to the writers of books depends the kinds of books which come to be
written."12 By implication, then, the marketplace, as it is conditioned and influenced by
the purveyors of books, ultimately determines the quality and nature of literary
production. And this production, Faber warned, was tending toward a dangerous
homogeneity because of certain social developments:

I confess that the rise of book clubs and book societies, and the increasing
monopoly of the mass-sellers, fill me with foreboding for the future of
English letters. The cultivated aristocracy whose patronage made the
English literature of the great ages has gone long since; and even the
educated, reasonably leisured, middle class, with plenty of money to
spend on decent books and some inclination to spend it, which maintained
the Victorian age, has all but gone too.13
Clearly, the blame in this last statement is aimed not just at the booksellers, but at these new literary institutions of the mass market and at the gullible public who subscribe to them.

For if the booksellers were to blame for making the easiest sales, the reading public were also culpable in their reading choices. In a paper read to the Oxford University English Club, Faber as near as damned them:

There is sometimes a nightmarish quality about publishing, which reminds me of Alice's game of croquet with the Queen of Hearts. The object of the game for the better sort of publisher is to make good books pay; the rules which make this object so difficult to achieve are derived from the prejudices, the apathy, the laziness, the stupidity and the niggardliness of the public.14

By "niggardliness," Faber is presumably referring to the refusal of the majority of the public to purchase their own books. Although the cost of books had been significantly reduced since the Victorian triple-decker was the norm and there had been a corresponding increase in the number of people who could afford books, Faber found that the general tenor of an increasingly consumerist society was all against him: "People want to have motor cars and radio-gramophones, they want to eat and drink and smoke, they want to have that Kruschen feeling. They do not want to buy books."15 The majority of readers of literature were still borrowing their books from circulating libraries, and these libraries were the main customers for the novels of the day. But naturally, this structure limited the nature and number of books on offer; the libraries had to accommodate a general, conglomerate taste.
Faber’s attempt to restore a more sophisticated public appetite for books involved a complex strategy which would valorize difficult new authors, approaches, and subjects. This strategy involved creating a strong blend of books and subjects which would form complex but ultimately self-supporting associations with each other, and using the sales of established authors that would appeal to the “microscopic . . . book-buying public” to underwrite the publication of more daring titles. For Faber had come to understand that it was the long-selling book, rather than the flash-in-the-pan sort, that typically kept a publisher solvent. In one of his lectures, he demonstrated quite compellingly that many publishers depended upon sales of their backlist to turn the loss on the publication of new books into a slim net profit for the year.16

In taking on T. S. Eliot as literary adviser, Geoffrey Faber did not particularly intend to make Faber & Gwyer into the vehicle for the modern movement. Indeed, in Peter Ackroyd’s analysis, Faber was attracted by Eliot’s experience as both a poet and editor and banker, and by his reputation and connection with younger writers.17 Eliot was to be a business ally as well as a literary visionary.

And, in fact, Eliot did not edit Faber’s poetry list into a sleek modernist canon. Certainly, he used his position to publish some controversial figures. His own collection Poems. 1909-1925 appeared in 1925, Ash Wednesday in 1930, Herbert Read’s Collected Poems in 1926, Pound’s Selected Poems in 1928, Joyce’s Anna Livia Plurabelle in 1930, and Wyndham Lewis’ One-way Song in 1933. In 1930, a crop of younger poets was added to the poetry list, including Auden and Roy Campbell.18 In other words, Eliot played a crucial role in expanding the readership of the moderns, as Ackroyd has pointed
out: if Pound was the catalyst for the modern movement, “what Eliot did was to make that movement accessible and, in the end, respectable to a larger public.”

But the means to generate that respectability lay in associating the name of Faber & Faber not just with young, innovative authors, but with older, established authors whose reputation would reflect on all of Faber’s publications. Indeed, the best-selling poets of the late-1920s were closer to de la Mare’s own ilk: Robert Bridges (with Testament of Beauty, and to whom the first Georgian Poetry anthology was dedicated), Thomas Hardy, and Rudyard Kipling, as well as fellow Georgians John Masefield, Siegfried Sassoon, Edmund Blunden, W. H. Davies, Rupert Brooke, and Rudyard Kipling. Poetry anthologies were also extremely popular, including the Oxford Book of English Verse and de la Mare’s own Come Hither. If we look at the early publications of poetry from Faber, we find that the radical is offset by the entirely traditional: by Swinburne, Henry Newbolt, Belloc, and Harold Monro. In particular, the Ariel series of poems, published as Christmas pamphlets and including a number of poems by Eliot himself, gave the firm the opportunity to raise its profile as a publisher of tasteful poetry. Because these were single poems rather than volumes, Faber could draw on a very wide range of poets whose work typically appeared through other publishers. The series was extensive and included poems by Thomas Hardy, W. B. Yeats, Siegfried Sassoon, James Stephens, G. K. Chesterton, Edith Sitwell, and Humbert Wolfe. One of de la Mare’s poems appeared in this series in each of the years from 1927 to 1931. Thus, although Faber was only publishing a few books of poetry each year, the Ariel series was creating the impression that poetry was one of its central concerns. As
Richard wrote to de la Mare in 1931 about the importance and marketing of the Ariel series:

I think I tell the same old story every year, that it is important to get them out early, if they are to do really well. Well, it is really important this time, because we are going to make a real drive and we are going to see what can be done about getting them a much wider distribution, and, I hope, a far bigger sale.\textsuperscript{23}

The Ariel poems were to be Faber & Faber’s poetic envoy to the public. By way of such strategies, Faber & Faber provided Eliot with the vehicle to give his own view of poetry a wider public airing.

To Eliot, de la Mare was clearly one of the reliable, established authors, working within the boundaries of a traditional poetic, whose reputation and steady sales would underwrite the untested work of younger writers. It became clear, in fact, that Eliot and Faber & Faber had no interest in publishing poets who did not fit one of the two categories of the old and established or the young and experimental. By 1936, de la Mare was firmly ensconced as a Faber author (though not yet one of their poets) and felt that he could recommend various other poets to Richard. But his son resisted many of the recommendations his father made, and in doing so, implied Faber & Faber’s strategy. For instance, with regard to the poems of Eric Batterham, Richard replied to Olive Jones, de la Mare’s secretary, at a time when de la Mare was suffering from a protracted illness:

I don’t think that it would be very much good sending us the manuscript, as we don’t really want to consider publishing them seriously. I think we did actually see some of them once before, when poor Batterham was alive, but we turned them down. You see, they don’t fit in very well with the other young poets that we publish already. I am sure my father will understand this, though I don’t want to bother him with a letter now.\textsuperscript{24}
De la Mare may have understood, but even in his state of ill-health, he felt obliged to object to Faber’s principles, replying the following day: “Olive has given me your letter. I didn’t foresee any chance that you would want to consider E. B.’s poems, even though I am convinced that his kind is likely to outlive some of the more modernistic varieties.”

And the rejection did not, in fact, discourage de la Mare: he persisted in recommending writers and Richard patiently considered each, though rejecting nearly all. Occasionally, de la Mare came across work that he thought would appeal directly to Eliot’s tastes, such as that of William Jeffreys, a poet writing in both English and Scots vernacular dialect. He sent Jeffreys’ *Fantasia Written in an Industrial Town* to Richard, noting that “Just a cursory glance at the book suggested that T. S. E. might be interested in it.” And, in this case at least, it took Richard several months before he could reply with a decision, asserting his interest at the same time as reasserting Faber’s exclusive strategy for publishing poetry:

> We have pondered long and deep on William Jeffreys, and I am sorry that we have now decided not to do him. He doesn’t really quite fit in with the other verse that we have published recently, and you know what a flukey business it is publishing new poets. I am very sorry about it, because I certainly think he has got some talent.

Richard’s statement implies that a publisher’s poetry list should present a united front and, by extension, that the publisher is as important as the poet in selling the book.

But if Faber’s plan for poetry excluded these unknown poets who did not fit with the rest of their younger poets, the possibility of having the mature de la Mare as a Faber author must have been particularly attractive for both Eliot and Geoffrey Faber. De la Mare had proved his reliability as a producer of his own brand of literary goods through
the Georgian years. For Eliot, de la Mare’s sturdy reputation as poet, story-writer, and children’s author would inevitably reflect on the younger poets that he wanted to promote. For Faber, sales of de la Mare’s work would stabilize the company as it sought to develop a direction and a presence in the publishing world. As for de la Mare, the connection with Faber & Faber would simplify the process of publishing his work, and the strong presence of his son at the firm would allow him to have even more control over its publication.28

Faber & Faber made heavy use of de la Mare in the first few years of his association with the firm, publishing his new work so that he would be perceived as a Faber author, commissioning him to write introductions and other kinds of commentary for other Faber books, and reissuing his previous works in new forms to create a backlist. Thus, at least one new volume of de la Mare’s work appeared from Faber every year from 1928 to 1937, and in the war years of 1939 to 1945, they were to publish fourteen de la Mare titles. But in 1928, the year in which Faber & Gwyer published their first de la Mare book, de la Mare was still trying to recuperate from a protracted illness that had severely depleted his energy for writing. He had no new fiction or poetry to offer the firm, and the first three de la Mare titles that the firm published are, as a result, rather eccentric volumes. The first of these, published in 1928, was a reissue of *The Riddle*, the collection of stories originally issued by Selwyn and Blount just five years before.29 The other two, *Stories from the Bible* (1929) and *Desert Islands* (1930), were new volumes, exclusive to Faber, but they also represented a new direction in de la Mare’s work.
For *Stories from the Bible*, de la Mare rewrote stories from the Old Testament for child readers. The project was initiated by Richard, and written to order by de la Mare, probably with the idea that his reputation in combination with the edifying subject matter would ensure the success of the volume. By now, de la Mare was surely one of those “whose names are universally known.” The public were acquainted with him as an approachable poet, novelist, and storyteller whose perennial themes intertwined spirituality and Englishness, as a reliable purveyor of myths, fairy tales, and other traditional stories, and as an enchanting and insightful children’s author whose fairy play, *Crossings*, had appeared on the London stage just a few years before.30

But there were a number of worries surrounding the production of the book. De la Mare was reluctant to rewrite the Bible since “he generally held all modernisations of the Bible in utmost scorn – the exact wording of the Authorised Version was almost mystically sacrosanct to him”31 Yet as Whistler suggests, because de la Mare had been suffering from a long, debilitating illness which had depleted his creative juices, the “suggestion that he should try versions of his beloved Old Testament stories must have seemed to offer a ladder back to his own story-writing.”32

As de la Mare warmed up to the writing, he seems also to have been cheered by the commercial possibilities of the book. The opportunity for a simultaneous American edition published by the Cosmopolitan Book Corporation of New York was particularly encouraging. This firm, which had never published de la Mare before, offered de la Mare not just success with the Bible stories, but greatly increased sales for all his work. As de
la Mare considered his options and dithered over the nature of his contract with the firm,

Joseph Anthony of Cosmopolitan wrote to him:

I'll be eager to see the stories. As far as we are concerned here, we have no doubt whatever that the contract will be a fine thing for us, but I respect your reason for holding it up. It would be very good news to me if you should decide to publish a volume of poetry with us. In that case, I feel that we should give you a definite guarantee that we should expand your sales by fifty percent; and indeed I don't think we would have any difficulty in doing that.

Our new publishing program is being very favourably received, both by the booksellers and the reviewers.

De la Mare must have been enthused by this news of a large U. S. market awaiting not just the Bible stories, but any book from his hand. Nevertheless, he made a display of his difficulty in writing the current book: "I am still moiling away on Moses, and hope to send you this and the Garden of Eden pretty soon. As I think I told you I started in rather a silly way by writing the stories that appealed to me most first. The consequence is that I have Saul and a good deal of David done, but not Abraham or Isaac." And when he did submit the stories to Anthony, he included disclaimers about their poor quality, to which Anthony responded with more encouragement: "Your version of the story of the flood strikes me as pretty vivid and strong. I am sure that you have a book that children will like." And although Anthony was having trouble placing the stories with serials like Good Housekeeping and Woman's Home Companion, he remained convinced of the book's long-term prospects: "As far as the book is concerned, I don't see how you could possibly have improved on what you have done. We are going to go at its publication with a great deal of enthusiasm, in the belief that it can be established as the standard book in its field, and one to have a steady sale for years to come."
Despite the commercial possibilities and encouragement, de la Mare remained hesitant about the subject matter and feared that the critics would attack his presumption in rewording the Bible. Publication in the United States was delayed. But as publication in Britain became imminent, de la Mare wrote to Anthony about this particular fear, to which Anthony simply responded: “I’ll be blowed if I can see how you could have written the book any more conscientiously or sensitively.” De la Mare allayed his own conscience by adding an introduction – surely not directed at children – in which he offered a rather learned apology for the book.

But a similar problem lay in the question of the book’s illustration. Geoffrey Faber himself seems to have been sensitive to this issue, perhaps even more so because this was to be the firm’s first new de la Mare title. How Faber made use of de la Mare was critical. He wrote to Richard de la Mare about it at the end of August, 1928:

I had a talk with Paterson yesterday about the best way of handling your father’s book. He entirely agrees with me that it would be very much better to begin with an unillustrated edition at seven-and-six, getting the widest possible sales at this price, and then bring out an illustrated edition for the Christmas market. We both feel that if we are to start off with an illustrated edition it becomes of enormous importance to get the illustrations absolutely beyond criticism; and I feel that this is a practicable impossibility. Otherwise the book would fail of making the general appeal that it ought, and the value of your father’s own work would run the risk of being obscured by the likes or dislikes excited by the pictures.

We can detect numerous strains of interest in the letter. If Faber clearly has an interest in the commercial success of the book, both immediate and over the long-term (those Christmas sales), he is also concerned with the effect of its publication on de la Mare’s reputation: “the value of [de la Mare’s] own work would run the risk of being obscured”
by a hasty choice in illustrating the volume. What was required, he felt, were illustrations with as universal an appeal as the book itself:

I still have the feeling that an original illustrator of the right sort will be awfully hard to find. Modern Art is possibly in a very interesting stage; but one thing it very conspicuously lacks, and that is the power to please more than a very limited section even of the educated folk. For a very idiosyncratic piece of work that doesn't perhaps so greatly matter, but the whole point of the Bible book is its universalism. Your father, it seems to me, has been wonderfully successful in preserving this. The pictures will have to do the same or they will be failures both commercially and, as I think, artistically. For that reason the employment of a style or manner which is at all experimental or transitional or 'odd' would be fatal.39

Faber is looking for “an original illustrator of the right sort,” a phrase that suggests that de la Mare was an original writer of the right sort: that is, one who was original while still appealing to a wide audience. For “Modern Art,” with its obsessive focus on originality, had lost most of its audience, an interesting observation from a publisher who was doing a great deal to promote innovation in both the literary and visual arts.

The alternative, as Faber suggested, was to bring out the book unillustrated, then issue a second, expensive edition for the Christmas market, an edition for which he proposed colour reproductions from “Raphael’s Bible” or from paintings of equal antiquity. Illustrations derived from such classical sources, so deeply a part of cultural consciousness, so firmly connected with the Bible and its stories, he felt, would be “beyond criticism.”40 In short, Faber shared de la Mare’s apprehensions about meddling with the most sacred text in the Western literary tradition. A false step in the publishing of such a work would damage not just Faber & Faber’s reputation, but de la Mare’s as well. By taking on de la Mare, Faber was acquiring an author whose name alone was a
kind of guarantee of quality and tradition and, of course, a book of Bible stories for
children carries at least some of the prestige of the original. All aspects of the book had
to reinforce that perception.

Whatever artistic doubts de la Mare had about writing these stories, he laboured
diligently through them, then sent them to Richard, mentioning his expectations for
royalties:

The terms we discussed, I think, were a royalty of 20% on the first so
many thousand copies, but I can’t remember how many, and 25% after
that, and a royalty of 25% (this is the usual arrangement with Constables)
on a limited edition of not more than 250 to 300 copies, if Mr. Faber
considers that this would be practicable, and an advance to the amount of
subscription sales on the date of publication.

Would you let me have a line if this is all right, and would you have a
word with Mr. Faber about the title of the book? The alternatives were, I
think, “Stories from the Bible retold by . . .”, “Stories from the Holy Bible
retold . . .”, and “Stories from the Old Testament of the Bible retold . . .”

It was certainly astonishing that de la Mare expected royalties this high on the regular
edition of the book, but this was to be the pattern with many of his Faber books and one
that set new standards for his publications with Constable.

The delay in the U.S. publication of the book had been entirely due to the timing
of the market. As Anthony wrote to de la Mare, “The booksellers have this type of
book so definitely classified in their minds as belonging to the autumn season that there is
no doubt that it will get off to a much better start at that time.” And in any case, the
delay gave de la Mare some breathing room between the response of the British and
American critics. He was happily surprised by the British response, writing to Anthony
after the British publication: “Up to the present the reviews have been far more
favourable than I even hoped . . ."43 And although the cost for corrections to the page proofs of the book had already been surprisingly high, the delay also gave de la Mare the opportunity to suggest a few last minute alterations for the American edition, including a change of title, and to muse on a new problem he was facing in Britain. His reworking of fairy tales, first suggested by Otto Kyllmann in 1913, had finally been published by Blackwell in 1927 as Told Again, but may have affected the reception of Stories from the Bible:

The subscription sales [of Stories from the Bible] were rather disappointing, but this seems to have been due in part to the fact that “Told Again” was pushed too much over here at the beginning, though it sold in the aggregate, considering it was only a collection of familiar folk tales, fairly well. As the intention of the “Stories” is rather a novelty booksellers may of course have been a little cautious. Anyhow Dick and Faber’s chief traveller are confident and have printed a very large first edition.44

The overabundance of books from de la Mare’s hand was becoming a problem; the public enthusiasm for his work, especially for books like Told Again and Stories from the Bible that were not entirely original, was momentarily waning.

Nevertheless, Richard seems to have been right in printing a large edition and Anthony correct in predicting that the book “can be established as the standard book in its field, and one to have a steady sale for years to come.” From royalty statements, it is clear that Stories from the Bible delivered these steady sales from its publication in March of 1929 until Faber finally let it go out-of-print in 1990. In this period, it had gone through numerous editions with various illustrations, though never with the Old Master paintings that Geoffrey Faber had recommended.45
To a great extent, then, Faber & Faber were primarily using de la Mare’s reputation as a children’s author rather than as a poet. In the 1930s, they further capitalized on this aspect of his reputation, publishing his collection of fairy tales, *The Lord Fish*, in 1933, and a volume of *Animal Stories*, edited and introduced by de la Mare, in 1939. At the same time, however, both de la Mare and Faber & Faber realized that the public perception of him as a children’s author might have a negative effect on the perception of his adult literature, and they worked carefully to make the books appeal to the largest possible audience without affecting the prestige of his name. Of course, it is not content alone that determines a book’s audience: title, design, and price are also important cues to a book’s market. The directors at Faber discussed title in relation to the first of these volumes, as Richard wrote to de la Mare:

> We had a talk yesterday about the title, and we all of us agree that it would be much better policy to choose one that didn’t at once suggest a book for children. I agree with this opinion myself, and I am hoping that you will too, because I did remember your saying that you didn’t want the physical appearance of the book to label it as a children’s book.  

The book was originally entitled “The Magic Jacket,” and, in response to Richard’s suggestion, de la Mare thought of changing it to “The Jacket,” as part of what he called “a deliberate deception” that would “delude the old creatures into being so silly as to read ‘juveniles.’” Looking at a few specimen pages, though, de la Mare insisted that design would be just as important in defining the audience: “A somehow doesn’t suggest a book that is intended (also) for grown-ups so much as B does.”

*With The Lord Fish*, then, publisher and author were aiming at a combined audience of children and adults. In a sense, they were attempting to create instant classics
of children's literature, those phenomena that are defined by their ability to appeal to both audiences. But de la Mare worried that, with title and design, they might be leaning the book too much towards the adult audience, and he proposed a corrective measure in terms of the book’s pricing, writing to Richard:

You know best, of course, about the price of the book, and I suppose if you publish at half a guinea you are depending roughly on the same number of readers as bought my other books. The question therefore is whether the public beyond these could be similarly deluded if the price were the usual seven and sixpence. I think it might be, as owing to anthologies and The Teacher's World and so on, the name of the author has become linked to children's books, and I have done a good deal of lecturing at schools. 49

Quite simply, the children's literature market, with which his name was becoming more and more associated, demanded cheaper books. De la Mare could appreciate the other issues involved in publishing his work. Because of his reputation as an author of both adult and children's literature, he could see that the publishing of each of his books demanded the weighing and balancing of sales and reputation. But in all of this, he never lost sight of the reader: “As you know, I agree that it would be an excellent thing if we could persuade grown-ups to read the book for their own sweet sake. But the stories are in every respect aimed in the first place at children, and therefore, don't you agree, the book must be.” 50

With Animal Stories, too, Faber & Faber aimed at a dual market of adults and children. Geoffrey Faber wrote a blurb for the book, in which he noted that the book was a collection of stories “with imaginary animals for characters, not anecdotes about real ones.” Thus, it was clearly aimed at the audience for such beast fables – children. But as
Geoffrey's Faber's preliminary advertisement for the book suggested, de la Mare's hand in such a book ensured a kind of finality: "'Well' – the publisher is inclined to observe – 'that's that. What more can you want to say?'" However, some space must be filled by the usual effort to gild the lily or paint the rose." His implication is that, once de la Mare takes on a subject, it is definitively and artfully treated. De la Mare has, he implies, summed up all that needs to be said about animal stories, both with his selection of stories and his introduction to them. And this supposedly definitive quality of the volume was surely meant to give it an appeal to adults rather than children. To add to the adult appeal of the book, Faber also proposed that the illustrations should be taken from a seventeenth-century volume, Topsell's *Historie of Foure-Footed Beasts*.

*Stories from the Bible* and de la Mare's other children's books that Faber published were very conservative titles from a publisher whose mission was innovation and who, through the direction of T. S. Eliot, was to publish a whole crop of ingenious young poets. And of course, the generic conventions of children's books (including elements of fantasy or nonsense) remained more or less stable through the inter-war years, despite radical redirections in adult literature during the same period. If the publication of children's books and other conservative titles helped to support Faber's more daring ventures, Faber also had another strategy at his disposal. As well as publishing books that were innovative in form or subject, he could publish books that
explained these new directions, that mediated between the innovators and a wary and sometimes hostile public.

As we have seen, many of de la Mare's books after *Peacock Pie* had been written at the prompting of publishers. The idea for *Stories from the Bible* had come from Richard himself. But such books were written and published to fit a ready market: strong and steady sales merely confirmed the fact. But in publishing innovative young poets, Geoffrey Faber was largely defying the market. He needed to condition that market, to educate the public about the context on which modern art was based, to explicate more fully its peculiar strategies. In the early days of the firm, Faber helped to bolster public understanding of modernism by inviting R. H. Wilenski to write *The Modern Movement in Art*.

Wilenski's book, published by Faber & Gwyer in 1927, was dedicated to Faber and attempted to explain and evaluate the "Modern Movement" in the visual arts. Although Wilenski urged his readers to abstain from comparisons with the other arts, his argument inevitably reflected on them. His protest begged the question of the connection between the arts of this aesthetically difficult age. The argument of the book follows what we now view as the standard rhetorical defence of modernism. In view of the degeneration of nineteenth-century art, Wilenski argues, artists felt that "a new art must be created on the basis of the old idea that Architecture is the Mother of the Arts." And while Wilenski attempts to classify the various directions that these artists took, to describe and explain their technical experiments, he also prescribes the role of the critic and, by extension, of the larger public: "The only critic who can tell us anything about a
work of art is the man who has discovered the attitude, motives and procedure of the artist; and that discovery I hold to be the function of artistic criticism." Here, in essence, is the New Critical argument: only the critic/reader who is fully immersed in the work of art, who is able to view it from the perspective of the artist, is capable of speaking about it; the imposition of outmoded or irrelevant criteria to the judgement of a work of art will not do; the only criteria that matter are those implied by the work of art itself; each work must be understood and judged on its own terms. But of course, Wilenski’s argument contains that essential modernist contradiction: modern art is classical in its foundation on architecture, perhaps the most public of the arts; and yet each work of modern art makes the world anew, in its own image. Wilenski’s description of the various strands of the visual arts may not relate to the literary arts. But his prescription of the role of the art critic certainly has implications for the literary critic, as we shall see.

Wilenski’s book and others like it in the field of literary criticism seem to have been so successful in convincing portions of the population about the value of the “Modern Movement” that artists and writers in more traditional modes began to come under critical attack, including de la Mare. We will explore the nature and source of these attacks fully in the next chapter. But for now, we should note that just a few years after Wilenski’s book, Faber felt it wise to publish a book-length study of de la Mare’s work, Forrest Reid’s Walter de la Mare: A Critical Study (1929). As well as conditioning the ground for reception of works of the difficult and innovative modernist variety, Geoffrey
Faber was now faced with the problem of maintaining the critical reputation of his more traditional authors.

In 1930, Faber published two more prose works of de la Mare's. The first of these, *Desert Islands*, presented de la Mare's readings and musings on *Robinson Crusoe* and other tales of adventure, interspersing long excerpts with his own comments. This is, really, nothing less than a commonplace book which had, as Whistler notes, "developed by incrustation out of a lecture on *Robinson Crusoe".*\(^{55}\) If the publication of *Stories from the Bible* was motivated and supported by de la Mare's reputation as a children's author, *Desert Islands* would draw on his reputation as a belle-lettrist, a preserver of literary tradition, and the compiler of *Come Hither*.

In a market where the majority of novels were purchased by circulating libraries and the general public "do not want to buy books,"\(^ {56}\) *Desert Islands* would appeal only to the highbrow reader and collector, and Faber consequently issued an expensive signed edition of 650 copies at 4 guineas. Even the regular edition was priced at 21/-.

A portion of this rather extraordinary price was a result of the great expense of producing the book, but the price was even more exaggerated by de la Mare's expectation of a large royalty. Although James Wells at the Fountain Press of New York agreed to publish an American edition, he wrote to Eric Pinker asking why they should have to pay higher royalties on the limited edition, which would severely limit their profits:

> At a discount of 40% per volume [to retailers] our income per volume is $15, less our expenses per volume of $10.54, or a profit of $4.46 per volume. This would be a fair profit if we had any assurance that we could
sell out the edition, but I am almost positive that we will never sell more than 200 copies, at least not for a period of several years to come.⁵⁷

But despite Wells’ misgivings, the book did have a surprisingly strong initial sale, at least in Britain. It was published there in April, and by July, Faber was writing enthusiastically to de la Mare, “DESERT ISLANDS has been very successful – at least we think so. We have sold over two thousand copies of the ordinary edition, and it is still going strong.”⁵⁸

Despite this surge of interest, the price must have been a severe handicap to a wider market for the book. When a second edition was published in 1932, the price was 7/6d. And even so, Richard wrote to de la Mare a few years later, suggesting a third, even cheaper edition. De la Mare bristled somewhat at the suggestion: “Does this mean that it now has no decent chance at seven and sixpence? Do you think the sales of a cheaper edition would justify this reduction in price?”⁵⁹ Richard placatingly replied:

We shouldn’t be considering reducing DESERT ISLANDS to 5/- if it were not for our new Rose & Crown Library, which we are just starting this Spring with the two volumes of MEN AND MEMORIES and with Chesterton’s CHAUCER and with Belloc’s JAMES THE SECOND. It seemed to us all here that DESERT ISLANDS would have a much better sale if it were included in the new series. The sales at 7/6d haven’t been very fast lately, and there is no doubt that the new issue should give it quite a fillip. I do hope that you will agree to our doing this.⁶⁰

But despite the chiselling away of the price, the commercial viability of such a book evidently set de la Mare thinking about the possibility of creating other such books on his favourite themes.

De la Mare’s apparent turn away from original poetry and fiction and Faber & Faber’s willingness to support these new directions was a result of complex
circumstances. Constable still held the rights to the volumes of poetry. And while Faber were free to publish de la Mare’s prose, he had not been producing stories for several years. Besides the physical setback he suffered in 1927-8, he apparently felt that his world had been irreversibly altered by the deaths of Edmund Gosse, Ellen Terry, and Thomas Hardy, all friends of his, though of the previous generation.61

The publication of Desert Islands can be read in a number of ways. Faber & Faber now had an ongoing relationship with de la Mare, one that rested on Richard’s relationship with his father and on Geoffrey Faber’s tremendous respect for the author. But the relationship still needed to be nurtured, and it was evidently important to de la Mare that he had a ready market for his work. Admittedly, Desert Islands came to ripeness in this period of relative weakness and it was not typical de la Mare fare. But Geoffrey Faber believed in the responsibility of the publisher to nurture authorial talent, professing, as we have seen, that “on the kind of opportunities which we publishers and booksellers are able to offer to the writers of books depends the kind of books which come to be written.”62

Faber & Faber’s commitment to publishing all of de la Mare’s work was soon to pay off. Faber had established de la Mare in their catalogue by publishing whatever of his they could – the new edition of The Riddle and Other Stories, the commissioned Stories from the Bible, and the commonplace book Desert Islands. In 1930, de la Mare finally had a volume of his more typical fare ready for market. On the Edge was a
collection of eight stories on recognisably de la Marean territory, most of which had been serialised and written from the mid-1920s on. If On the Edge represented a return to fiction-writing form, both to the convalescing de la Mare himself and to the public, its publication in a rapid succession of de la Mare publications threatened to saturate the market for his work. As with Stories from the Bible and Desert Islands, On the Edge was to be issued in a limited signed edition. The number of copies and the timing of the market for this edition were something that de la Mare himself had in mind in writing to Richard:

I suppose you haven't heard anything from Edbridge Adams on the question of an American limited edition? If he decides against it, or if there is any difficulty with Knopf about it don't you think the English limited edition might consist of a rather larger number of copies (say a hundred or so) than you otherwise intended?

... As regarding the date, October is a very full month, I suppose. The R. S. L. volume [The Eighteen-Eighties], which I am editing, is to be published about then and also the collection of children's poems. Is January a good or bad month? Anyhow, Pinker will be telephoning, and then you and I can talk it over.

One other point has just occurred to me. Constables may be publishing a limited edition of the children's poems, and Holts in any case are doing so. Apart from the limited edition of Desert Islands, too, there was the Christina Rossetti limited edition. In that case if the short stories are published in October there will be three limited editions in one year.63

Three limited editions in one year were perhaps more than even the most avid collector of his work could be expected to bear. And in fact, the Poems for Children were published by Constable later in the year, to the effect that de la Mare actually had four limited editions (including the Christina Rossetti volume, which he had edited) issued in one year.64 At this point, it is perhaps worth recalling that Geoffrey Faber had identified
overproduction as the chief evil that publishers themselves were contributing to the
deplorable bookselling situation.

But of course, aside from the limited editions, a collection of de la Mare stories
would be expected to have a different audience than either *Stories from the Bible* or *Desert Islands*. And given a secure audience of readers hungry for the de la Mare of the earlier
collections of stories *The Riddle*, *Ding Dong Bell*, and *The Connoisseur*, it is surprising
that the greatest problem besetting the publication of this new volume was the question
of the title!

When de la Mare sent back the galley proofs of the book to Faber, in June 1930,
he wrote: “It has been definitely arranged that the title shall be ‘The Orgy and Other
Stories’. 65 Although the book did indeed include a story entitled “The Orgy,” Geoffrey
Faber seems to have had some qualms about publishing the book under this title. He
wrote to de la Mare: “About ‘The Orgy’. Do you feel perfectly sure that you have
chosen the right title for this volume? I was disappointed by the change from ‘On the
Edge’, which seems to me much more suggestive and striking . . .”66 An orgy might be the
last thing that comes to mind when reading a de la Mare story; the erotic is so definitely
absent from all his work. Of course, Faber had the tact not to say as much. (And, in fact,
the story “The Orgy” concerns the indulgences of an angelical but talentless young man,
who is on the verge [or “edge” perhaps] of being disinherited by an autocratic uncle.
Philip Pim’s indulgences are not sexual, though they are sensual: on a May Day of
glorious weather, he goes on a buying binge in a department store in London’s West End,
seduced by such fancy items as a dressing case made for the "Maharaja of Jolhopolluli" and glorying in his own performances before the wonderment of sales clerks.)

In the face of Faber's objection, de la Mare provided a lengthy rationale for the title of *The Orgy*, but one that clearly had very little to do with his own artistic choice. Without warning de la Mare or Faber, the American publisher of the book, Knopf, had already made up dummies of the book with "The Orgy" as title. Meanwhile, de la Mare had decided not to include the story of that title in the book after all. But hearing of Knopf's advanced preparations, he felt he had little choice but to go with this title in both American and British editions and to put the story back in. He wrote to Geoffrey Faber:

"I entirely agree with you that "On the Edge" is by far the better title, and "The Orgy" a very stupid one. The only question then is whether it matters much about the book appearing under different titles, or whether seeing that the American edition won't appear until 1931 Knopf could make the change." So caught up in his publishers' decision-making process was he that, even if he thought the title of *The Orgy* "very stupid," he was still willing to go along with it for expediency and even to include a story which he evidently felt was of lesser quality! For de la Mare surely realised that a volume of his stories with *The Orgy* as title and no story of that name included (as explanation) would be a very odd thing indeed.

But the confusion over the book did not end here. Geoffrey Faber's next letter to de la Mare proved just how consistent is the world of the stories:

Dear de la Mare,

Thank you for your letter. I hadn't fully understood the course of events. As a matter of fact, I wonder if you have! Not until this morning,
when I got page proofs of the whole book, did I realize that not only had ON THE EDGE been scrapped as a title; but that the story itself has been omitted. And from your letter I imagine that you hadn’t realized this yourself – or at least that you had forgotten it.

I can’t help being worried about this. ON THE EDGE (I have thought since I read it in – was it? – the London Mercury) is one of the strongest and most characteristic things you have done; and to omit it from your new collection would seem to me to be a first-class howler.68

But the “first-class howler” was Faber’s: de la Mare never wrote a story of that title, though “on the edge” might serve to describe many of his stories, so persistent was he in evoking that sense of a threshold into a strange and terrifying other reality. Faber may have had in mind the story “Crewe,” which had appeared in the London Mercury in July 1929, and in which a traveller, waiting at the infamous rail junction for a connection, is approached by a stranger and forced to hear the man’s equivocal confession, perhaps to the murder of his wife.

When de la Mare wrote back, agreeing that “On the Edge” was the most suitable title for the volume no matter what Knopf’s preference, he tried to lessen the potential embarrassment to Faber by intimating that perhaps he would write a story of that name:

I am glad everything is settled now, and that you don’t think it matters even if Knopf cannot alter his title; though I should very much prefer that he did so. “On the Edge” does of course rather suggest a novel, as nearly every other collection of short stories is – “and Other Tales”. A wild hope sprang up in me that possibly there was another story called “On the Edge” that by a real feat I had completely forgotten. I shall have a shot at it later on – and then shall have to give it another title!69

Indeed, when the book was published as On the Edge, de la Mare may still have had some qualms about including the story “The Orgy.” He subtitled the story, “An Idyll,” perhaps to limit the potential connotations of the title. Even so, when he signed a copy
of the book for the Bishop of Salisbury and returned it to Richard, he wrote, “I am sending you back the copy of On the Edge, blushing at the thought that it is about to become the property of a bishop.”70

But with the matter of the title sorted out, the question of how to fit the book amongst all his other publications became the next problem. With regard to the limited edition of On the Edge, de la Mare told Richard: “The one important point, as I know you agree, is not to print too many.”71 At the same time, he was concerned that calling this limited edition the “first edition” would have a negative effect on sales when the ordinary edition was published and instead suggested this notation: “This edition of On the Edge which has been signed by the author is limited to three hundred copies of which this is Number__”72 De la Mare was typically paid a greater percentage on the much higher prices of these limited editions. In fact, limited editions had become a more and more important part of his market, beginning in about 1913 when C. Lovat Fraser published The Old Men in his “Flying Flame” series of broadsheets. And perhaps de la Mare’s involvement with such carefully crafted work had made him especially sensitive to issues of type, illustration, and layout. About the proofs of On the Edge, he testily remarked to Richard: “The type of the contents page seems to be rather on the large side, and I don’t much care for the type of the dedication, but if you prefer it so, be it so.”73

Faber & Faber’s success with their first de la Mare publications must have been encouraging, both to the publisher and to de la Mare himself. De la Mare wrote to his son at the beginning of 1931:
I am awfully glad that “On the Edge” is still alive. Did you see the mention of it in the literature summary of yesterday’s Times’ literary review of 1930? It is excellent news to hear that this last six months have turned out so well. We’ll have a talk about finance when next we meet, which I hope will be pretty soon.74

Indeed, the review he refers to made a point of highlighting de la Mare’s work amongst the otherwise poor crop of the year:

The literature of the year was strongest in history, biography and in philosophy. . . . A little weak in imaginative work, it has at least brought forth Mr. F. I. Lucas’s novel, “Cecile,” and Mr. de la Mare’s two books, “Desert Islands” and “On the Edge.”75

Such particular mention must have been very gratifying: de la Mare’s work was still recognised as solid literary fare. Even though none of his books of the year, including Constable’s Poems for Children, made the bestseller lists, slow but predictably steady sales were exactly what his publishers needed. And with a large list of titles in print, de la Mare could rely on steady sales of his earlier works, his own backlist, to sustain him.

In this regard, de la Mare’s involvement with Faber & Faber not only allowed him to have a very direct involvement with the editing of his own work and the production of his books, but it also enabled him to expand into other genres, as he had done with Stories from the Bible and Desert Islands. And while he did not continue much further with the practice of producing children’s books to order, he was particularly enamoured with the commonplace book form of Desert Islands, and he produced another three large volumes in that genre, all published by Faber & Faber.76

But while de la Mare was having a marked success as a Faber author, the problem remained that Faber & Faber were still restricted to publishing de la Mare’s prose, while
Constable handled the volumes of poetry. Theoretically, there was nothing wrong with this arrangement. Constable were still publishing and successfully marketing the poetry. De la Mare’s work fit very nicely with that firm’s “basically conservative and traditional publishing philosophy.” At the time Constable published The Listeners (1912) and Peacock Pie (1913), they were the publishers of the poetry of Henry Newbolt and Owen Seaman, and of the late George Meredith’s last volumes of poetry. With the promotion of Michael Sadleir to the board of directors in 1920, Constable did strike out with a new energy in social and political criticism, literary criticism, and biography, but not in its poetry list. Anthologies like de la Mare’s Come Hither and Naomi Royde-Smith’s Private Anthology (1929), translations of Chinese and Spanish poetry, and literary critical works like John Sparrow’s Sense and Poetry: Essays on the Place of Meaning in Contemporary Verse (1934) formed the core of their offerings.

While Constable were happy to have de la Mare as a central figure in a relatively small poetry list, Faber, as we have seen, were doing very well with the prose. But by late 1934, Richard and his father were discussing taking all of the work from Constable. De la Mare asked J. R. Pinker to find out how bound by contract he was to Constable, to which Pinker summarily replied: “It is true that to a certain extent an author gains from having all his work with one publisher, but I am by no means sure at present that we should be doing the correct thing, even if it were possible to make the transfer.” De la Mare wrote back: “if we do decide to suggest a transfer, we can at least make it clear that it is solely because Dick is in Fabers, and that it is probable that whatever books may be available in the future will be published by them (agreement with Constables themselves,
by the way, for Mr. Brush, and the next novel goes to Collins).“79 Nothing further was
done about the transfer at the time, but as the years passed, points of contention
inevitably arose between the publisher of the prose and the publisher of the poetry.

Faber & Faber were often interested in publishing selections of de la Mare’s
poetry and frequently asked permission from Constable to do so. On one occasion, in
1937, Richard asked his father to write verses for a children’s book of illustrations, but
Otto Kyllmann at Constable objected that this would interfere with Constable’s
publication of a new book of de la Mare’s adult poems (Memory [1938]). Of course, de
la Mare had an interest in seeing both books published, and he wrote to try to placate
Kyllmann, insisting that the Faber book was a children’s picture book to be published for
the Christmas market, which consisted of “a large number of full-page illustrations with
an extremely brief letterpress. My son sent it to me with the suggestion that I might
possibly write verses for it – the rhymes, that is, were to be for and to the pictures and
not vice-versa.” De la Mare could not imagine such a book competing with Constable’s
volume, but suggested that, if Kyllmann felt otherwise, he might delay publishing the
Constable volume: “wouldn’t it be practicable to publish the Poems either early in the
new year or early in the Spring. Isn’t it indeed rather an advantage for a book of this kind
not to appear during the spate of Christmas books in October and November?”80
Kyllmann later proposed that the book that had been agreed for first should have
priority. Even when he discovered that this was Faber’s book, This Year, Next Year, he
still hoped to publish the collection of poems Memory in the autumn of 1937, at the same
time as the Faber volume was scheduled to appear. But because de la Mare became ill
and was not able to deliver the full manuscript to Constable until November, publication was postponed until May of 1938. Throughout the whole incident, Kyllmann evidently felt that Faber & Faber were poaching one of his most valued assets.

There were to be numerous other occasions that provoked Kyllmann's spleen. Also in 1937, J. M. Dent proposed to publish a volume of de la Mare's stories, essays, and poems in their Everyman series of publications. The original plan was to include sixty of de la Mare's poems. Again, de la Mare was keen that the volume be published. But Kyllmann was adamant that the publication would interfere with sales of Constable's volumes of de la Mare's poetry:

Right from the beginning I had explained to Pinker that we did not think it was in our interest, and if I may say so, I doubt very much whether it is in your interest – taking the long view – that your work should be available in so many volumes other than in the original volumes. I understood that you were very anxious for the Everyman volume, and though I would have preferred to say we cannot consent to it, we were willing to go as far as we thought we ought to meet your wishes, and we have made concessions.

If the “Everyman” Library and the numerous anthologists and publishers of sixpenny books would publish work by unknown authors and pay them advances on royalties the position would be very different. But it is not till an author's reputation has been established that these reprinters come into the field.

The original publisher of “Everyman” established his business of reprinting non-copyright books, and now this firm is naturally obliged to pay for the use of copyright material.81

But while Kyllmann viewed the matter from the position of business ethics, arguing that Dent were relying on established authors to make profits which should rightly go to the publishers who helped establish their reputations, de la Mare clearly saw a different rationale behind the Everyman volumes. Before he composed a reply to Kyllmann's
objections, he wrote various marginal notes on Kylmann’s letter, one of which justifies the *Everyman* volume: "Isn’t it [published] in order to get a larger public -- those who seldom buy books on account of the expense? *I think so.*" When he did reply to Kylmann, this point was the crux of his argument:

> It is difficult to be certain, of course, but I should suppose that an Everyman selection might be beneficial to the sales of its author’s earlier books. Generally speaking, I suppose the books in this and similar ‘Libraries’ are bought by people who cannot afford books at a higher price, but a certain number of them may thus be persuaded to try! I see that a selection of Aldous Huxley’s has recently appeared, and I haven’t heard of any author who has refused to be represented.\(^\text{82}\)

While the *Everyman* volume would widen de la Mare’s book-buying public and would thus increase his own royalties, it would also lead more enthusiastic readers to Constable’s publications and would thus increase their sales. But Kylmann was not entirely consoled by the idea of these deferred profits. Despite the fact that the number of poems included in the volume was reduced to thirty, he insisted that Constable receive a third of the royalties for the book. And while the book was published under these terms, de la Mare still objected that the material to which Constable held the rights represented only one twelfth of the book’s contents.

Kylmann vented his resentment of other publishers on numerous other occasions. In 1938, Faber proposed to publish a volume of *Stories for Girls*, aimed at 12 to 16 year olds, to be edited by Kathleen Lines. De la Mare wanted to contribute “The Lovely Myfanwy” from *Broomsticks* (1925), but Constable asked for a fee of twenty guineas for such use. De la Mare was outraged, and wrote to Pinker: “I feel myself that this suggestion of twenty guineas for the use of ‘The Lovely Myfanwy’ was just
obstructive.” But Pinker, perhaps knowing Kyllmann a little better, suggested using a story from a Faber volume instead. Indeed, Faber had published de la Mare’s second volume of short stories for children, *The Lord Fish*, just three years earlier.

Such incidents recurred, at least on a smaller scale, as Faber & Faber asked repeatedly for permission to include portions of de la Mare’s work in anthologies. Perhaps Kyllmann really felt that Constable’s sales would suffer if de la Mare’s works were too widely available. In any case, by 1940, the situation had become so aggravated that Kyllmann offered to sell the rights to de la Mare’s poetry books to Faber & Faber.

First he approached Faber, then, a few weeks later, wrote to inform de la Mare of the potential deal:

> We are in negotiation with Faber as to the possibility of transferring your books to them. I do not know whether the scheme will go through, but I imagine they would be delighted to have all your books, and it is often a distinct advantage for an author to have all his books on one publisher’s list, and I imagine both you and Dick would welcome the arrangement. I need not tell you how sorry I shall be for old sake’s sake if the transfer is arranged.\(^{84}\)

But by this time, the news had already leaked to de la Mare through Pinker. Even this fact aggravated Kyllmann, who was then forced to apologize. He explained to de la Mare that he had proposed the transfer only after Faber had asked for permission to use yet another selection of de la Mare’s poems, this time in a new Faber imprint, Sesame Books.\(^{85}\) If Kyllmann thought that Constable would be better off selling their rights to de la Mare’s work outright, it was surely because he thought Faber & Faber would pay a considerable sum. Faber were evidently enthusiastic to publish de la Mare: they had
published ten of his books by this time, not to mention various anthologies and collections in which de la Mare had been included.

Indeed, Faber were interested in the offer, but for a fee far less than that proposed by Kyllmann. Even the presence of Richard at Faber & Faber did not drive the agreement on as Kyllmann had perhaps hoped. Negotiations turned rapidly into altercations. On the 19th December 1940, Kyllmann confirmed that he would be accepting the offer that Faber had made to take over all de la Mare’s titles from Constable with the exception of *Come Hither*. But by the 13th of January, he was writing to de la Mare: “After all, we are to continue to be your publishers! . . . . Sadleir and I have agreed that we cannot accept Messrs. Faber’s final offer.”

De la Mare was clearly shocked by this rapid turn of events. With Faber publishing all of his work, de la Mare would have been able to exercise a remarkable degree of control over his books, and the constant haggling and negotiation of rights between publishers could be avoided altogether. How alarming it must have been, then, that Kyllmann, now more aggravated and hostile than ever, should continue to be the guardian of his poetry. When de la Mare wrote to Kyllmann to ask whether it was some minor point of contention that had soured the arrangement, Kyllmann’s rage boiled over. He complained of the “extraordinary way . . . in which the whole matter has been handled by F. & F.” Faber & Faber had offered Constable “just half what we suggested,” but then whittled this figure down twice more. And although the negotiations were still unconcluded, booksellers had already become aware, presumably through Faber &
Faber’s traveller, that Faber would now be handling de la Mare’s books, a fact that Constable’s own traveller was not aware of:

I have never, so far as I can remember, been so affronted and humiliated. I think it is the most inconsiderate and discourteous experience that I have ever had. It came to our loyal and keen traveller as a bombshell. And apart from the damage it has done to C. & Co., I cannot help feeling that it is an affront to me personally. On the top of this I learn that your books are all to appear in F. & F.’s spring list. I prefer not to comment on this.

Faber had apparently refused to recognise that what was at stake was “The whole question of the rights and the prestige of publishing for Walter de la Mare.” For even if a publisher could not expect to sell many de la Mare volumes, the distinction of being the publisher of such a recognised author would attach itself to other publications. The public might buy books on the basis of their publishers’ reputation as well as on that of the books’ authors’. And this would be especially true of new and unknown writers.

Perhaps Kyllmann realised that, with Geoffrey Faber’s bold publishing mission, he was in great need of established authors to bolster the name of Faber & Faber and to support the publication of daring books and new or more obscure writers. In another letter, Kyllmann insisted on the importance of this issue:

I think one of the difficulties of these negotiations has been that all throughout Faber and Faber have regarded this primarily as a transference of stock, and I was considering it chiefly as the value to a publisher of the publishing rights of your works, present and future, and of the prestige attached to the publication of perhaps the most distinguished poet of his generation.

Although de la Mare’s books seldom made the bestseller lists, he had steady and enduring sales and a name that had been instilled in many readers’ minds in their school days. If de la Mare was “the most distinguished poet of his generation,” it was because his poetry
was about an enduring condition and his lyrical voice had little periodic stylization about it. De la Mare’s generation may have been quiet and reserved, their poetry nostalgic and elegiac, and not particularly radical in form. But de la Mare’s poetry was extraordinarily accomplished in technique and as a direct result transcended the limitations of other members of his generation. Constable had initially taken a chance by publishing de la Mare. And now, forty years into his career, Faber & Faber could clearly see de la Mare’s value. However, they were not willing to pay Constable’s price.

But the tide turned again. Somehow, Kyllmann’s outrage was calmed and a price was agreed upon. The negotiations were concluded later in 1941 and the rights for the poetry were transferred to the publisher of the prose. Walter de la Mare’s entire literary oeuvre, with a few exceptions, was in the hands of Faber & Faber. One of the exceptions was Come Hither, the single book which Constable refused to yield to Faber & Faber. This volume had turned out to be surprisingly lucrative for both publisher and compiler, as J. R. Pinker pointed out to de la Mare in 1938: “I don’t know whether you realize the money this book has earned us over the years. I have totted it up, and it comes to over £2000!” No wonder that Kyllmann wrote to de la Mare, “I am very glad indeed that, as you say, we still have Come Hither as a bond between us.”

Certainly, very few of his books were as successful. When J. R. Pinker sent de la Mare sales figures in 1940, even de la Mare was surprised by the distribution: “Some of the sales are a little surprising, e.g. only forty-three copies of ‘The Fleeting’ during the last three years. That seems very small. Also only twenty-six of ‘The Veil.’ I notice that ‘Come Hither’ hasn’t been included. ‘Peacock Pie’ I see is easily top – nearly forty
thousand copies." Peacock Pie was, and has remained, a perennial favourite. But Come Hither also had profuse and steady sales. Up until the outbreak of the war, it was steadily selling at a rate of more than 400 copies each year. Kyllmann’s decision to keep Come Hither as a Constable title paid off even more handsomely in subsequent years.

When war broke out in September of 1939, de la Mare was concerned about the effect that the war might have on the future of books in general and worried about the sale of his own work in particular. Just after the outbreak of the war, he had written to Pinker about this: “I wonder what you feel about the future so far as books are concerned. There was a rather sanguine article by Geoffrey Faber in the Spectator a week or two ago. Dick tells me that for the time being there is a considerable drop in sales by comparison with last year; but he, too, seems a little hopeful regarding the future” But Pinker felt that, “As far as established authors are concerned personally I believe they will not suffer.” During the war, the public would presumably find most comfort in authors they knew well.

Not surprisingly, then, much of de la Mare’s work and Come Hither in particular were among those books that would sell quickly and reliably. The greatest problem with the book was keeping it in print. De la Mare became so used to the substantial royalties from Come Hither that he was surprised when sales tailed off during 1941. He wrote to Kyllmann:

Many thanks for your account to December 31st of last year and for your cheque for £9.7.9. This amount is rather less than half of those for the two preceding six month periods, and I am hoping that the decline is due to the fact that COME HITHER was being reprinted in view of the increase of its price to 15s. This hope is based on what appears to be
certain, (a) that children's books owing to the enormous destruction of last year, must be in greater demand, and (b) that poetry in general apparently is being read much more widely than it used to be. I wonder if this is your experience?94

In his reply, Kyllmann said nothing about the increased popularity of children's books and poetry:

I am afraid the drop in sales was due to the fact that the book was out of stock for about three months, as we were not able to get it reprinted as quickly as we had hoped, although the printers and binders did the best they could considering the difficulties under which they are working due to shortage of staff and materials. However the book is now well on the market again, and is having as steady a sale as ever it did, if not better.95

Of course, the combination of damage from German attacks and the shortage of materials for the printing of books created problems for all publishers during this period. When de la Mare wrote to complain that his royalty accounts had not been settled promptly, Kyllmann described the difficult circumstances under which Constable & Co. were labouring:

I will try and have the account dealt with as soon as possible, but I must beg for a little further patience, as we have just had our fourth and most serious damage from enemy action. This is the third time we have been badly damaged. Some of our staff are working in the country, two others have been bombed out and another is not well enough to come to the office, and we are very much behind-hand in filling and despatching orders!96

In fact, aside from damage to stock and shortage of materials, the war forced publishers to be very selective in the titles they chose to publish. Given paper quotas and rations, publishers preferred to print relatively large runs of books that would sell quickly. As a result, books which were greater risks or which depended on long-term sales to show a
Chapter 4: A Reputation that Sells

profit had to be ignored. Although *Come Hither*’s price had jumped from 10/6 to 15/- with this new printing, sales soared: 375 copies were sold in 1941, as the book went out of print; the reprint sold 1484 copies in 1942, and that figure rose dramatically as the war dragged on. In 1945, Constable sold 4742 copies of the book.97

Kyllmann himself may have been surprised by the continuing popularity of *Come Hither* since, even after the war, Constable allowed the title to go out of print several times. In 1947, the book was still selling in the thousands and stocks ran out again. And although Kyllmann had made all the arrangements for the printing of the book by September, the book was not ready until sometime in 1949. The problem, Kyllmann insisted, lay with the printers:

My own personal view is that this particular firm [MacLehose] are working so hard for Dick’s firm that they cannot pay much attention to us. Apparently Dick has ‘a way with him,’ which apparently I have not. I am now writing to other firms to ask if we transfer the plates and paper to them they will be able to get on with it.98

Kyllmann’s grudge against Faber & Faber, with some animosity evident for Richard in particular, is still evident in these remarks.

When the bound books were finally delivered to Constable in September 1949, they sold very quickly. Constable reported to de la Mare: “according to our records we find that 5,359 copies of the new imprint of this book [*Come Hither*] were delivered to us in September . . . . Up to the end of October we sold 3,415 copies, leaving a balance of 1,944 copies in stock.”99 In December 1949, the Royal Society of St. George had proposed to buy a large number of copies of *Come Hither* to distribute to the “larger and more important of their affiliated organizations.”100 But the Society was asking for
subscriptions with which to purchase the books and therefore didn’t know if they could buy 500 or 1000 copies. Constable agreed to give them a one-third discount and de la Mare himself was willing to take a smaller (than his usual 3/-) royalty on these copies. But despite these arrangements, de la Mare was still surprised at so rapid a turnover and suspected that many of the volumes were sitting in booksellers’ shelves. But Constable & Co. sent a reassuring letter:

We think one reason for the large initial sale was that COME HITHER had been out of stock for about a year and a half, and we had a very large order from H. M. Stationery Office for distribution to the services. We do not think that the Booksellers are over-stocked.¹⁰¹

And in addition to the interest of institutions and societies in distributing the volume, Constable & Co. and de la Mare himself received frequent requests to reprint or record poems from the anthology (even the non-copyright material). De la Mare had somehow become the editorial guardian of the whole host of treasures included.

Clearly, it was not purely the influence of Richard de la Mare that brought his father’s work to Faber & Faber. By taking on de la Mare, the publisher was acquiring an author whose name was associated with the preservation and continuation of tradition at a time when tradition seemed to be under dire threat from foreign powers without and from innovative artists within. Geoffrey Faber saw de la Mare as a long-term investment, an author that would anchor the firm, deliver solid sales, and presumably would thereby allow the firm to make more adventurous forays with the works of other authors. T. S.
Eliot had at least a cordial relationship with Walter de la Mare and must have approved of the arrangement, recognising the value of associating new poets with old.

(T. S. Eliot himself was interested in de la Mare: as early as 1920, he had hoped to meet the older poet. But their relationship, according to Theresa Whistler, was always courteous rather than deep: “Neither Eliot nor de la Mare could be expected to have great admiration for the other’s poetry, but on occasion they exchanged gifts of it.” Eliot considered de la Mare’s poetry to be “chamber music – but the best kind of chamber music”; and de la Mare confessed, in 1950, that he had read neither Eliot’s *Four Quartets*, nor the whole of *Paradise Lost*.)

But the third and final answer to the question of how de la Mare became a Faber author and, ultimately, a Faber poet lies in the fact that Geoffrey Faber had a personal respect for de la Mare and sympathy for his work and the tradition to which it belonged. In fact, Faber was much less enthused by the modernist poetry that his firm had championed. He was himself a poet and had published two books of verse during the Great War. In 1939, he discovered that the very favourable review of the first of these books (*Interflow*), which appeared in the *TLS* in 1915, had been written by Walter de la Mare. He wrote a kind of confessional letter to de la Mare, remembering “how my spirit soared as I read your generous praise.” He goes on to say that a succession of chances turned him from a poet into a publisher, but adds one signal qualification:

I couldn’t have resigned my desire to be a poet – the dominating desire of my life for many years – unless I had felt myself to be living in a world unresponsive to the kind of poetry I wanted to write. The poetic revolution which developed after the war was all against me – it is an ironic fact that, as a publisher, I should have done so much to promote a
movement for which I have little personal sympathy. (I understand, or think I understand, its necessity, and I can admire it, at its genuine best; but it isn’t my meat.)

Faber had been done in as a poet by the younger generation of poets that he was championing through his publishing firm. For Faber, then, de la Mare was a kind of substitute, a representative of a tradition of poetry that he himself had had to abandon.

Indeed, the correspondence between Geoffrey Faber and de la Mare over this issue seems to have reawakened Faber’s poetic ambition since, in 1941, he published a collection of his own work, *The Buried Stream: Collected Poems, 1908 to 1940*. In the preface to that collection, Faber offers a more considered vision of the modernist project and the period that produced it:

However it may have been motivated, the intolerance of the nineteen-twenties and ’thirties was a marked character of the period, and served a vital purpose in protecting the new poetic growth. But now that this function has been performed, the need for intolerance has gone and there is no reason for compelling all poetry to wear the same badge. Indeed there seems good reason for encouraging every individual voice to speak in its natural accents.

Walter de la Mare had been speaking in his natural accent since the publication of his first book, *Songs of Childhood*, in 1902. No doubt his voice recalls the features of life as it had been before the disruptions of the Great War. Until Faber took control of all de la Mare’s work, that voice had interested different publishers at different times: Longmans, Collins, Murray, Duckworth, Selwyn & Blount, and Constable, not to mention the roster of American publishers. But Faber’s interest, personally and as a publisher, in de la Mare has resulted in a paradoxical situation: his work has been preserved for posterity, but in a context that cannot help but emphasise its anachronisms.
By this arrangement, de la Mare was surrounded by a host of authors whose work was inimical to his own, whose literary predominance, and the academic favour accorded to it, would eventually smother and obscure his influence and importance. De la Mare may have been a Faber author, but his work seems all the more outmoded by comparison with his Faber & Faber cohorts. One cannot help but wonder if Walter de la Mare would be a more highly-regarded writer today, a household name, and a writer of greater academic interest, if his poetry had continued to be published by other houses, by Macmillan, for instance, the publisher of Hardy, Kipling, and Yeats.\textsuperscript{107}
The judgment of posterity is only another name for the accumulated judgments of those who read most carefully and with least prejudice and preconception.

Michael Roberts

The curious position that de la Mare occupied amongst Faber authors became evident as early as 1936, when The Faber Book of Modern Verse appeared, excluding de la Mare entirely. De la Mare may have been in the “Modern” period, but he was not of the “Modern,” in editor Michael Roberts’ judgment.

Roberts was not the first to make this assessment. Ten years earlier, I. A. Richards had proclaimed the basis of a truly modern consciousness to be a “sense of desolation, of uncertainty, of futility, of the groundlessness of aspirations, of the vanity of endeavour, and a thirst for life-giving water which seems suddenly to have failed,” and disparaged poetry that failed to recognize or attempted to escape this condition. The Cambridge-based Richards and his colleague F. R. Leavis set out to reevaluate the place of poetry in a scientific world, to formulate a more rigorous approach to the study of poetry, and ultimately to champion the generation of technically innovative, conceptually and formally difficult younger poets who, they thought, successfully met the challenge posed by this modern condition. In the opinion of both critics, de la Mare failed.

While Richards and Leavis were explicitly attempting to increase the rigour and define the criteria involved in the criticism of poetry, they also appropriated for the academy what had formerly been a function of public opinion. Both in the original text
of *New Bearings in English Poetry* and in the “Retrospect 1950” which he appended twenty years later, Leavis referred to “the disintegration of the educated reading public,” and noted that, “It is only in such a public that critical standards have their effective existence.” He goes on to say, however, that such a public does still exist, presumably within the confines of the academy and amongst those trained by the academy, though it “cannot make itself felt” against the “mass-civilization,” the mob, produced by Lord Northcliffe, amongst others. Essentially, Leavis was pointing to a radical split between the kind of poetry valued and enjoyed by the “general public” and another kind that “the educated reading public” thought was meaningful. Different interpretive communities for poetry were forming.

While the importance for the “general public” of certain kinds of poetry, including de la Mare’s, reached a new peak in World War II but declined gradually thereafter, replaced perhaps by the lyrics of pop music, the study and valorization of poetry within academic circles actually increased in the post-World War II period. The so-called “modernist” poets, as well as the classical poets of the past that they championed, were celebrated in an academic discourse which thrived on grammatical complexity, formal difficulty, and dense webs of allusion. As John Bayley put it, “To get a great deal out of a poem is the justification for academic study of it, and an English School tends to set up, in self-defence, professional and mental disciplines which will compare with those required in other subjects.” Thus, it has largely been the academic view of what constitutes the important poetry of the twentieth-century that has persisted into the new millenium. Within the academy, the judgment made by Leavis on Eliot and Pound and
Hopkins became, for many years, an orthodoxy, as Leavis was himself to complain in 1950:

There has been a significant tendency in the literary-academic world – and not only in respect of Eliot – to substitute exegesis for criticism: the essential hazard having been taken [by Leavis in his much-resisted 1932 book] and the first-hand work of criticism done, the expositor can assume the essential judgements and let his expositions of structure, themes, and significances show his adequacy to the rare and difficult masterpiece.\(^8\)

Leavis meant this to apply to his own valorization of Eliot, but clearly his detraction of de la Mare has also become dogma. Given the “essential judgement” that de la Mare is an escapist, the “expositor” might support it with one of several claims: in terms of representation, de la Mare confused the realms of dream and waking, of romance and realism; in subject matter, he persisted in evoking the beautiful (the expositor ignoring his equal devotion to the uncanny and grotesque); in form, he maintained the tradition, rather than offering innovations essential to the contemporary consciousness.

In 1970, Geoffrey Grigson acutely delineated the opposition between an increasingly vague public awareness of de la Mare and his work and the long-assumed critical judgment of that work’s value:

There may be, I am sure there are, poems by de la Mare (that poetical name!) in the head of everyone at this moment who makes a habit of reading poetry, or writing poetry. But these current poems by de la Mare are few, and as if they had pushed long ago into heads which do not want them, are embarrassed by them, yet cannot get rid of them, a pontificator about the verse of our time never says ‘de la Mare!’ as he would shout Wallace Stevens, or Pound, or Heaven knows what other name at this moment, in a reflex action of intellectuality. He doesn’t even whisper ‘de la Mare’ as an afterthought.\(^9\)
De la Mare’s work is seen to be at odds with “intellectuality.” Nevertheless, as Grigson asserts, the musicality of those few of de la Mare’s poems still current – “the unique subtlety of rhythmical and formal invention, the ‘deceptive cadences,’ ‘the inexplicable mystery of sound’”\(^\text{10}\) – helps to lodged them firmly in the mind. But it has also been this aspect of the poetry that has lulled the general public into believing that the poems are simple and beautiful, and to allow his critics, following Leavis and Richards, to maintain the attitude that there is something both insidious and insipid about these easeful rhythms.\(^\text{11}\) As Grigson has pointed out, that musicality means that the poems must be “played” in order to be properly understood. And there is every chance that by the time of Grigson’s complaint many readers had lost the ability to play such finely wrought music or were immune to its particular harmonies and melodies.\(^\text{12}\)

The situation that Grigson described in 1970 has not altered significantly in the last thirty years, though de la Mare may have receded even further in public consciousness and critics’ attacks on his work have been replaced with an even more deadly silence. Though various disruptions of the canon and changes to the narrative of literary history have occurred, driven primarily by theoretical and political movements, as yet none of these movements has recovered de la Mare. Since Grigson, a few isolated critics have attempted to reevaluate the importance of de la Mare and to reeducate listeners’ ears to his music, showing that the dream-like state induced by de la Mare’s language and prosody is not a means of escaping from the “modern,” but a means of probing, not answering or evading, what remain the deepest mysteries of human life. A number of other critics have traced developments in the work, expecting to overturn the
charge that both de la Mare’s techniques and his ideas remained static throughout his long career, becoming moribund after the 1920s. But in spite of these attempts, Peter Scupham could only reiterate, in an article in PN Review in 1999, that de la Mare is “a poet who has moved, unjustly, to the far side of the moon in the current debate.”¹³ He is, as the metaphor suggests, completely invisible to all except those who break away from the gravity of current critical discourse and make their own voyage of discovery. The judgements of Richards and Leavis and Roberts, as misleading as they are about the precise nature of de la Mare’s work, and determined as they are precisely by “preconception and prejudice,” have become the “judgment of posterity.”¹⁴ (More disturbingly, this critical oversight is shared by bibliographers: as Arthur Sherbo has recently pointed out, the bibliographers of secondary works on Henry James, Tennyson, Hardy, Donne, Defoe, and Poe have overlooked de la Mare’s criticism of these authors, even though it was reproduced in the collected volume Private View [1953].¹⁵ Such omissions seem to be verging on outright prejudice.)

De la Mare’s work is now typically assumed to be childish and unsophisticated, “beautiful and agreeable,”¹⁶ particularly and parochially English, perhaps appealing to a limited public but not of serious import. Ironically, given his success in the Georgian Poetry series, he has come to be represented primarily by just a few poems appearing over and over again in anthologies. Between 1992 and 1997, Peacock Pie was the volume that anthologists most frequently drew from, while the poem that most commonly represented de la Mare was “The Listeners.”¹⁷ Even those familiar with his work tend to see it as disconnected from any historical moment or, at worst, as the epitome of
Edwardian and Georgian insincerity. Certainly a leading poet of the 1910s and early 1920s, if no later, and a considerable writer of short stories, de la Mare has either been relegated to the status of minor poet in literary history – even while consistently described as undervalued – or used within that history as the “negative space,” the “ground” against which the work of the literary innovators of the early twentieth-century could appear.

Quite simply, this judgment deserves reconsideration. Our view of de la Mare’s career has shown that he was an important writer, both popular and influential, in his own time. And we should understand that the lyric tradition maintained by de la Mare was an important inheritance for later writers: W. H. Auden, Philip Larkin, and Richard Adams are just three of those who have proclaimed the influence of de la Mare on their work. Furthermore, his preoccupations were of deep importance to, not simply a means of escape for, his audience. In this chapter, we will examine the “prejudice and precondition” that came to surround de la Mare’s work so that that burden may be lifted from it and we might see the work more clearly.

As we have seen, de la Mare worked quickly to modulate his early symbolist leanings into a decisively English mode, one that was nevertheless distinctively his own, and one which he maintained henceforth. He developed two parallel modes, in prose and poetry, but not always simultaneously. Beginning his writing life with prose stories, he turned to poetry around the turn of the twentieth-century. After the Georgian years, he
concentrated on prose again. This alternation continued throughout his life. Even so, his
two modes draw on one common set of symbols: the supernatural elements of the folk
and fairy tale. In the poetry, and to a lesser extent and less successfully in the prose, he
also developed a more oblique symbolism, drawing on that intense vision of the natural
world, a kind of heightened pastoralism, evident in the poetry of Keats and Tennyson.
Naturally, there are differences between his two modes in the techniques employed to
ensure his readers’ suspension of disbelief when confronted with the anachronisms of
ghosts and fairies, or even with just hints of supernatural visitants: the prose often uses
multiple narrative frames of the kind developed by James in *The Turn of the Screw* (1893)
and sometimes uses the child’s perspective; the poetry depends primarily upon precise
control of rhythm and syntax, but also on the licence granted to children’s verse and
nonsense rhymes.

By the time of the publication of *The Listeners* and *Peacock Pie*, critics identified
the distinct qualities of his work in terms of both theme and style. Now it was possible
to apply the adjective “de la Marean” to certain literary terrain. Reading de la Mare’s
stories, it is often difficult to tell which date from the earliest part of his career and which
belong to his very last collection. As Dylan Thomas observed sardonically about this
consistency: “The period and place about which he writes? Somewhere in the Southern
Counties, say anywhere between 1830 . . . and just before the after-life.”\(^{19}\) To some
critics (Thomas was not one of them), this is evidence that de la Mare failed to engage
with the changing conditions of twentieth-century life. In de la Mare’s poetry, too, the
themes remain consistent over the course of his life, even if the voice gradually modulates
to that of a recognizably old man in his last volume. One critic, surveying those volumes of poetry published over the course of fifty historically and politically turbulent years, remarks: "I feel a kind of awe-struck amazement that the attention he gave to night-thoughts, whispers and intimations should have been maintained with such a coherent intensity from his 1902 Songs of Childhood to O Lovely England and Other Poems published in 1953."²⁰

(The continuity of de la Mare’s work was, in fact, partly a result of his working method. He often recovered work that had been written many years earlier. As we have seen, his first collection of stories, The Riddle and Other Stories [1923], included stories written as many as twenty-five years earlier, some of which de la Mare had completely forgotten about. Many of the poems of Bells and Grass [1941] had been written around 1905 in a black notebook that de la Mare rediscovered during a move of house in 1940. De la Mare’s own note to one of his last books, Inward Companion [1950], points out that “One or two of the poems in the following collection were written as many as fifty years ago.”²¹ Thus, even the new work in some volumes reflects elements of the much older work with which it is paired.)

However, it is a mistake to suppose that this consistency, maintained in the face of radical social change and discontinuity, represents spiritual or ethical certainty. It is the consistency of uncertainty, of religious agnosticism.²² De la Mare refused the comforts that Yeats sought in Hermeticism or Eliot in Anglo-Catholicism. Before Richards made his attack on de la Mare, the relevance of this vision was widely
recognized by the reading public and the critics that were still representative of that public.

One of the first of these critics to have the chance to form a critical opinion about the range and scope of de la Mare's work was Percy Lubbock, reviewing *Henry Brocken*, as well as the books that followed in the next 10 years, for the *TLS*. Curiously, even in his review of *Henry Brocken*, Lubbock began by pondering a relationship that was to become crucial to all de la Mare's work: "The world of Romance, with its brilliant population, stands in a very bewildering relation towards our own. It is so real, so familiar, so continually present – and yet how remote, how shadowy, what a dream within a dream!"23 One of the grand conceits informing all that de la Mare did – in poetry, fiction, and criticism – is that these very different terrains actually permeate each other, that the real is informed by the imaginary as much as the imaginary draws upon the real. Thus, when he met I. A. Richards in 1913, de la Mare supposedly asked the young critic, "in a fashion that precluded any possibility of a joke, . . . 'Do you think that in the next world there is any chance that I may meet Hamlet?'"24 The superimposition of worlds that we normally think of as separated by time, by space, or by ontological status was to become a thread connecting all of de la Mare's work. Lord David Cecil has pointed out the confusion this attitude would create amongst critics:

The 'aesthetic' critic speaks as if art were more important than life: if a book is imaginative and well written, he cares not if it squares with the facts of actual experience. The 'rational' critic, on the other hand, takes for granted that life is more important: ultimately he judges an author by how far he does or does not give us a true view of what he calls the 'real' world. But Mr. Walter de la Mare does not see life and art as separate.
Chapter 5: The Vast Wreckage of Faiths

To him the world of imagination is just as ‘real’ as the world he sees round
him in the street.25

Within his fiction, this sense of a doubled reality was figured through the generic features
of the ghost story or the fairy tale. In his poetry, it was licenced and created by the
cadences of his rhythms, and to some extent by the assumption of subjects and features
belonging to children’s verse.

All of this was, more or less, noted by Lubbock. Thus, in reviewing The Return, Lubbock saw that de la Mare did not just aim at the typical goal of most writers of ghost
stories:

when the object is more complicated, when it is not merely to exploit the
capacity for unreasoning fear in the mind of the reader, but to appeal to a
less primitive sense of the nearness of the supernatural, then the problem
(which is Mr. de la Mare’s) becomes much more difficult. . . . We are to
be made to feel that the border-line is indeterminate – that spirit is not so
unreal nor flesh so real as we may vulgarly suppose.26

And Lubbock felt that, even in this, his first novel, de la Mare had been remarkably
successful in accomplishing this difficult end. With Peacock Pie, de la Mare had
employed an entirely different strategy, but to similar effect. As a result of being viewed
with an “entirely childish imagination” in these verses,

things are so detached from each other that they are not even connected by
cause and effect. This means that anything can happen at any moment;
and when it happens, though it may please or amuse or terrify, it can
never surprise – the strangest things are so interestingly mingled with the
homeliest.27

By implication, surprise comes about only when some rule perceived as inherent to the
world is violated or disrupted, and thus perhaps belongs properly only to the adult world
(as in the appearance of ghosts in the midst of the real, or in the disruption of one
identity by a ghostly other in *The Return*). The strategy in the children’s verses is simply to elide the force of rules, natural or social. But the means of creating these verses’ childlike vision of a world unconstrained by rules requires a brilliant artifice:

the least excess of smoothness and finish would make their wide uncritical stare at things seem an affectation. On the other hand, any carelessness of expression would damage their microscopic precision . . . All this is perfectly managed, and if the verses are properly read it will be found that what they say is constantly said more by the rhythms than by the words.

Although de la Mare may have succeeded in crafting his “verses,” they were not always to be “properly read” in coming years. In this early, perceptive criticism, Lubbock identifies and evaluates elements of de la Mare’s work—like his emphasis and dependence on the power of rhythm—that were to be misrepresented or reevaluated by later critics, as the literary and critical scene shifted.28

When Conrad Aiken reviewed *Peacock Pie* for the *Dial*, he echoed Lubbock’s judgment, but he also placed de la Mare in a very particular and limited context. His review is structured around a disparity, at the time becoming very evident, between English and American poetry:

While their more adventurous fellow-craftsmen [i.e. American poets] have been experimenting, perhaps a little recklessly, with narrative, epic, and symphonic verse, and with bizarre rhythmics and insoluble self-symbolisms of all sorts, the English poets, with one or two exceptions, have held more clearly to the lyric tradition.29

He acknowledges that within this lyric tradition, de la Mare has been particularly successful: “Mr. de la Mare, presumably, needs no introduction. His ‘Peacock Pie’ consists of lyrics ostensibly for children; in reality it contains some of the most delightful work he has done.” But Aiken also identifies limitations not just to that tradition but to
de la Mare’s work in particular: “Mr. de la Mare is not an innovator, and his scope is not great; but within his scope he has no superior.” Aiken was trying to qualify and contextualize his admiration for the book, but implied that de la Mare’s poems depend upon a kind of childish licence, that they are conservative in form, and that they are narrow in subject and theme. His qualification would form the basis for more solemn denouncements of a “degenerate” style in years to come.

Just a few years later, Louis Untermeyer also placed de la Mare in the context of a disparity between English and American poetic practice. Reviewing the American edition of The Listeners for Poetry in 1916, he noted that American poets “have been caught in the tremendous tide of new tendencies,” including technological innovations and psychoanalytic theory. They have been “so pushed and crowded with thoughts that they have had little time to be thoughtless.” England, on the other hand, “has fostered what amounts to a tradition of magic,” realized in the “curiously untimely and curiously beautiful poetry” of Ralph Hodgson, W. H. Davies, and de la Mare (313).

The idea that the English tradition represented by these three Georgians has less to do with thought and engagement with contemporary concerns than with subliminal suggestion is brought out more fully in Untermeyer’s commentary on de la Mare and his achievement with the volume The Listeners:

De la Mare’s distinction lies not so much in what he says as in the accent in which he says it. It is an utterance that lifts his work above its old-fashioned turns and archaisms. Nor do these poetic left-overs bother him; he uses inversions constantly and carelessly – one might almost say he uses them confidently, for, infusing them with new salience, he makes these old tags and makeshifts surprisingly fresh and alive. (315-16)
In particular, Untermeyer notes that the poem "The Listeners" is almost devoid of narrative and yet has the same effect as the ghost story of creating a sense of both "supernatural beauty and horror" (316). In fact, he sees most of the work as creating this balance: "his pictures are the reflection of a mood that is half lost in phantasy, half in fear" (317). As we have seen, it is precisely an alternation between entrancing fantasy and almost paralyzing fear that characterised the work in *Songs of Childhood*. But with *The Listeners*, Untermeyer believes, de la Mare manages to create these contradictory feelings simultaneously.

As de la Mare reached the apogee of his fame and influence in the Georgian years, both Edmund Gosse and John Middleton Murry celebrated the relevance of his work. Gosse, writing in 1921, could assert, "Of all English poets now on the happy side of fifty, it is Mr. Walter de la Mare who has had the most direct influence on the writers of his own day . . . His delicate, cool music runs in an undertone at the root of everything that is produced in serious verse to-day . . ." Of course, Gosse knew the typical charges laid against the Victorian and Edwardian poets: "The real heresy about the Victorians lay . . . in supposing that they had exhausted Nature" (312). The poetry of Hardy and de la Mare, he feels, reveals the heresy: "In ethical respects extremely unlike the verse of Mr. Thomas Hardy, that of Mr. de la Mare, especially in its earliest manifestations, has this in common with it, that it examines with scrupulous care little phenomena of Nature, and of Nature acting upon the soul, which had appeared too insignificant to attract the attention of other recent poets" (312). The crucial factor, for
Gosse, is that other poets do not recognize or are unable to mine the significance of such details.

But Murry’s critique of de la Mare’s importance is even more revealing, almost astonishing, in fact, in delineating the relevance of de la Mare to his world. When Murry considered “The Poetry of Walter de la Mare” in an article he originally published in 1920, he found that work absolutely characteristic of a society that had had its hopes shattered and its faith shaken by the First World War. He asserted that de la Mare had “given a perfect expression to some of the deepest and most characteristic moods of his generation.”

For Murry, the lyric poet’s project can always be viewed in Platonic terms: how does the mundane world of fleeting existences and transient beauty relate to an eternal and ideal world of permanent beauty? How does the lyric poet relate the movements of his own consciousness and the accidents of his own experience to some more universal pattern? How does he inflect the chaos of the real with meaning? It is, perhaps, curious that Murry could acknowledge the spiritual devastation of the war and still assert that, “In the vast wreckage of faiths with which the modern consciousness is strewn, there remains one thing in which we may believe without fear or disillusion; we may believe in beauty” (131). But now, he says, beauty is not found in a vision of an immutable world or a supreme and benevolent creator. This new consciousness of beauty admits spiritual longing and finds sustenance in the earthly realm, but can no longer believe in these earthly elements as symbols of an eternal realm: “We may even in the exaltation of despair, say with conviction that the wreckage of our hopes and the ruin of the world is beautiful” (131). We are caught between our longing for an ideal and our
awareness of the intransient reality of our lives. And as Murry points out, de la Mare's poetry manifests both the yearning towards some immutable world – conjured, for instance, in his realms of Alulvan, Arabia, and Tartary, and especially prevalent in the children's verse – and acknowledges the suspicion that beauty may exist only in the transient, the fleeting, that nothing lies behind the veil of appearances: "In Mr. de la Mare's poetry we discover a trembling poise between the longing for an eternality of beauty and an acquiescence, an almost ecstatic acquiescence, in its transitoriness" (132-33). And it is precisely this uncertainty and tension that Murry considers characteristic of the age.

Within de la Mare's work, Murry acknowledges the special import of childhood and children's verse. For it is in childhood that those intimations of immortality come to us most strongly, that we were able to apprehend "a realm where all perfections and splendours and beauties persisted without change" (129). De la Mare's use of the themes and approaches of children's verse, even in his adult poetry, marks that yearning for the immutable: "Therefore, his rhymes for children take a definite place in his poetry as a whole, and are also essentially different from other rhymes of the kind; they are the natural, inevitable expression of the poet's deepest feeling" (130).

Many other critics in years to come were to agree about the centrality of childhood to de la Mare's work, but inevitably some of them saw this as a limitation as well as a source of the imagination's strength. As J. B. Priestley asserted, de la Mare is one of those "artists who remember Eden." But Priestley believes that de la Mare associates Eden with childhood, so that exile from Eden is analogous to our distance from
our own childhood experiences. Priestley’s 1924 consideration of de la Mare’s prose and poetry in his *Figures in Modern Literature* begins with a defence of de la Mare against the prejudice that he is “the latest and most delicate of nursery poets” (32). As Priestley points out, much of the subject matter of his work alone should dissuade us of this notion:

> We could point out that his work is really unbalanced, decadent, unhealthy, poisonous fruit for any child’s eating . . . The poetry is filled with madness and despair, wonders, and witchcraft, lit with a sinister moonlight; some crazed Elizabethan fool sitting in a charnel-house might have lilted some of these songs. (33)

Yet at the same time, and rather unfairly, Priestley characterizes all of de la Mare’s work as informed by childhood experience, reading, and imagination: “The world he prefers to move in is one that has been pieced together by the imagination of childhood made up of his childish memories of life and books, nursery rhymes, fairy tales, ballads, and quaint memorable passages from strange old volumes” (38).

According to Priestley, de la Mare does not just invoke the child’s sensibility but depends too much upon the limited range of experiences of childhood. Priestley questions whether the images and symbols drawn from this early experience, though sometimes producing a visionary intensity, are really adequate to deal with the realities and ideas of the contemporary world and of adult experience. De la Mare’s work, he notes,

> will not describe with success, despite its author’s knowledge of his craft, those things that only enter into adult life and the imagination of a mature man; it will fail, as I have already suggested, with the so-called normal, in which there is no easily recognizable element of the strange, the beautiful, the terrible, the grotesque; and in the poetry, this work will have strange
weaknesses, at first unaccountable, because, though it is so concrete, like all good poetry, and dramatizes so exquisitely the fluctuations of the spirit, it will break down and lose itself in woolly abstractions when trying to express certain partly philosophical ideas, simply because such ideas are outside the range of that imaginative world. (44)

And this is a limitation that places him among the "lesser order of geniuses who create worlds for themselves that have a distinct life of their own, but are obviously different, running obliquely, from the actual world we know" (35). He suspects that de la Mare's work is not entirely engaged with a contemporary reality, and suggests that de la Mare, unlike Yeats, is incapable of modulating his symbols to encompass different aspects of this reality. Yeats can take off the trappings of Celtic mythology and his mystical symbols as easily as he could a coat. But the fairies and ghosts and witches of de la Mare's work, which might seem to align him with Yeats, are the very fabric of de la Mare's being: "they are part of a world to which his imagination instinctively turns, in which it probably actually lives, not so much a beautifully embroidered coat that his Muse wears for a season, but her actual form and presence."34

In 1918, when Virginia Woolf reviewed de la Mare's volume of poems Motley for the TLS, she saw de la Mare as highly relevant and necessary to his world. De la Mare's, she wrote, is a "sharply . . . individual voice" which "has said what was hitherto unsaid," speaking on "a characteristic theme without a name to it."35 Though she cannot reduce his theme to a word, she acknowledges his mastery of certain terrain: "above all, perhaps, he is the poet who rouses us to an expectation of something that we can neither hear nor see," and who "is able in a few verses to make full contact between the reader and some intangible feeling of mystery, wonder or fear." Furthermore, she defies those
who think his work is purely fanciful: "it is a mistake to suppose that because the whimsical and fantastic are specially akin to him he is therefore to be banished until the moon is up and the flowers of a June night are whispering their phantoms." And quoting from his poem "Vain Questioning," she asserts, in contradiction to Priestley, that his work is solidly grounded: "He proves once more that the essence of reality is only to be reached through the substance."

In 1924, R. L. Mérooz published the first critical monograph on de la Mare, *Walter de la Mare: A Biographical and Critical Study.* Mérooz was a young writer keen on psychobiography, who had been plying de la Mare with questions about his work for several years, and who was later to write books on Joseph Conrad, the Sitwells, and Francis Thompson. His study of de la Mare is quite positivistic, using a framework of Jungian and Freudian ideas to explain the dreaming and childlike states evoked by de la Mare.

Mérooz begins by acknowledging a problem surrounding de la Mare and his work and announcing his intention to overcome it: "I have been chiefly at pains to show the poet of dream in a human light and in relation to the rest of society, and also to contradict the too common belief that he is narrow in range of thought and interests and technique" (viii). For Mérooz, the point is to reconcile the dream mode and childlike aspects of de la Mare’s work with the author’s full-blown engagement with the world. His first chapter, "Personal Impressions," is an attempt to do this from direct observation and commentary on the man himself, who, far from seeming a frail emanation of the otherworldly, appears more like a "hard-thinking scientist taking a brief social recreation" (3).
In the rest of his study, analyzing de la Mare's work into two strains, "Poetry of Dream" and "Poetry of Life," Mégroz insists that the dream strain addresses the deepest of human concerns. Through a psychoanalytic reading of this poetry, in particular "The Listeners," Mégroz finds that, through dream-like images, connections, and language, such poetry addresses as directly as is possible a central human yearning that underlies all our quests in this world: "According to the psychoanalyst it is, in fact, the longing for atonement (at-one-ment) with the mother, which is the undying urge in every one from birth to death, from complete separation from mother to absorption in mother-earth." (115). Of course, this yearning typically cloaks itself in other forms: "the immediate objects of this unsatisfied desire may . . . vary from the normal sexual union to that of an undiscordant solitude or a perfect communion with God. Very often the dream may come from buried memories, not of childhood, but of that remote race-childhood of life."38 In short, Mégroz feels that de la Mare's tendency to draw on antique scenes is a kind of reversion through racial memory to some primal moment of oneness. That de la Mare's particular use of such scenes is dissimilar from that of other dream poets is surely a mark of the particularities of his ancestry, of which Mégroz provides some detail in his biographical introduction. As for the "Poetry of Life," that is hardly less romantic than his "Poetry of Dream," and yet it is imbued "with a more elaborate conscious stucture of historical and lifelike detail" (154). Indeed, Mégroz places many of the stories, as well as *The Return* and *Memoirs of a Midget*, in this category.

(De la Mare himself gave no particular precedence to the psychological explanations of dreams. In fact, he resisted the rigidity of such systematization. His own
ideas on dreaming were not a submission to the modern science of dreams, but an
accumulation of the "wisdom of the ages," fragments of prose and selections of poetry
from the Bible on, gathered together in Behold, This Dreamer [1939]. In the introduction
to that volume, he pointed to the self-deception involved in schemes like Freud's, quoting
from Professor Saurat: "The thinker is the dreamer who does not realise that he is
dreaming, and does not know how to make the effort towards waking . . ."
On the other hand, his lengthy footnote on the Unconscious admits some common ground with
such thinkers. The Unconscious, he writes,

is a convenient but unanimiting term for the reservoir of elixir vitæ from
which, throughout the waking day 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.

In shifting the metaphor from iceberg, isolated and alone, to that of the archipelago, de la
Mare shows a closer allegiance with Jung rather than Freud. De la Mare's difference from
both psychologists is that he ultimately prefers the metaphor to any more "scientific"
delineation and description.)

By the close of his study, Mégroz is ready to announce a second romantic revival,
a resurgence in the importance of poetry, and names de la Mare as one of the chief poets
of this new age: de la Mare is "one of the living poets whose work has been undermining
the artistic supremacy of the novel in literature and restoring it gradually to poetry"
(274). De la Mare's emphasis on dreams, ghosts, and above all, on the music of words,
provides the evidence for Mégroz's thesis. Even the author's prose fiction is essentially
poetic, he argues. In a time of uncertain values, of shattered tradition, we must necessarily tend more towards romanticism than classicism in our art (for art must always maintain some faith and hope). The essential aspects of the modern world are not to be found in its mundane details, and “The poet as prophet derives his divine right from oracular intimacy with the environing mind of society, not the mind expressed in its Parliament or its newspapers, but in the secret reactions to experience which reveal themselves fitfully in dreaming” (285). Thus, for Mégroz, it is highly appropriate that “the growing fame of Walter de la Mare has been coincident not merely with the development of his art, but with the culmination of modern disillusionment” (283).

Despite Mégroz’s claim for the central importance of de la Mare and his “dream work” at this time of disillusionment, and the fact that public respect for de la Mare’s work was at an all-time high, just two years later, in 1926, the critical reception of de la Mare’s work suffered a severe setback from which it has never fully recovered when I. A. Richards called for a radical shift in the paradigms through which poetry might be understood and judged. 41 Richards had referred to “the exquisite poetry of de la Mare” in Principles of Literary Criticism (1925), but had completely contradicted Mégroz’s sense of a romantic revival with de la Mare at its centre, instead designating de la Mare (and Yeats, too) a minor poet because his work was not consistent with the “general development” of the time. 42 In Science and Poetry, however, de la Mare was directly rebuked, mainly because Richards was trying to develop a critical apparatus adequate to
the poetic practice of a particular group of poets almost completely inimical to de la Mare. (It is clear, from the expression of Richards’ ideas, that T. S. Eliot is chief amongst these. For instance, Richards’ description of the mature human psyche — “a vast assemblage of major and minor interests, partly a chaos, partly a system, with some tracts of his personality fully developed and free to respond, others tangled and jammed in all kinds of accidental ways”43 — surely rests on Eliot’s invocation of the squirmings of J. Alfred Prufrock. And Richards actually footnotes *The Waste Land* as the effective expression of his own “sense of desolation, of uncertainty, of futility, of the groundlessness of aspirations, and of the vanity of endeavour, of a thirst for life-giving water which seems suddenly to have failed” [70], all of which are part of the inevitable experience of a thoroughly contemporary consciousness.)

In order to understand how de la Mare fares in Richards’ judgement, we must consider the larger project on which Richards is engaged. For his book is both a defence of contemporary poetry and an attempt to define a new poetics. He begins with a rather gloomy diagnosis: “Man’s prospects are not at present so rosy that he can neglect any means of improving them” (7). Poetry, we are to understand, may provide a means of improvement, or at least of sustaining us through a period of rapid and unprecedented change. At the same time, crucial shifts in our way of seeing the world and ourselves necessitate a new kind of poetry. We are no longer capable of maintaining a “Magical View” of the world, “an interpretation of nature in terms of man’s own most intimate and most important affairs, [which] suits man’s emotional make-up better than any other view possibly can” (54). On the other hand, we must still find some way of creating a
balance between the multiple and increasingly conflicting interests that are an inescapable part of our psyches. Without projecting these interests outward, reifying them within nature, how are we to balance them? Most people are forced to create order within themselves through repression of some interests, a kind of self-conquest which “might equally well be described as . . . enslaving themselves” (39). Ideally we should conciliate our interests rather than reducing ourselves through repression and for the sake of mental order to the most narrow of existences. The poet, Richards insists, is capable of creating balance between interests within the body of his poem, primarily through rhythm and cadence, the sounds which give a poem its body, and secondarily through the symbolic meaning of the words themselves. The poem is a record of the poet’s self-conciliation and may also serve to reorient the interests of the reader.

For Richards, then, poetry does make something happen, at least at the level of the mind, and ideally it reorients us towards our present situation and prepares us for the future, rather than soothing us with dreams of a simpler, more childish past. The best kind of experience, including the poetic experience, will be defined by expansion rather than contraction: “if the mind is a system of interests, and if an experience is their movement, the worth of any experience is a matter of the degree to which the mind, through this movement, proceeds towards a wider equilibrium” (34).

Nevertheless, Richards warns, some people are still capable of a false kind of reconciliation of interests by confusing the now entirely separate functions of poetry and science: “an important branch of criticism . . . consists of the endeavour to persuade men that the functions of science and poetry are identical, or that the one is a ‘higher form’ of
the other, or that they conflict and we must choose between them” (68). Under the
Magical View, of course, the kinds of knowledge provided by science and poetry were
thought to be the same. Poetic truth could be taken for literal truth; the world can be
imbued with human meaning: “if we can contrive to believe poetry, then the world
seems, while we do so, to be transfigured. With the extension of science and the
neutralization of nature it has become difficult as well as dangerous. Yet it is still alluring;
it has many analogies with drug-taking” (68).

De la Mare is one of those whom Richards believes is “drug-taking” himself and
providing opiates to induce forgetfulness in his readers. Richards claims that, even when,
in the content of his poems, de la Mare seems to be recognizing

the indifference of the universe towards “poor mortal longingness,” a
curious thing happens. His utterance, in spite of his words, becomes not
at all a recognition of this indifference, but voices instead an impulse to
turn away, to forget it, to seek shelter in the warmth of his own familiar
thickets of dream, not to stay out in the wind. (78)

We must remember that, according to Richards, a poem is doing most of its work through
rhythm and cadence. In the case of de la Mare, “His rhythm, that indescribable personal
note which clings to all his best poetry, is a lulling rhythm, an anodyne, an opiate, it gives
sleep and visions, phantasmagoria; but it does not give vision, it does not awaken.”

As nearly all critics before him, Richards is particularly aware of the connection of
de la Mare’s technique to the poetry of childhood and, like Priestley, he can see this as
both the source of the poems’ strength and their limitation:

In his best poetry, in The Pigs and the Charcoal Burner, in John Mouldy,
no intimation of the contemporary situation sounds. He is writing of, and
from, a world which knows nothing of these difficulties, a world of pure
phantasy for which the distinction between knowledge and feeling has not yet dawned. (78)

It is, of course, crucial to his argument that Richards chooses two poems that de la Mare actually directed to a child audience as examples of his “best poetry” and carefully avoids offering any analysis of them.

These two poems may have been placed in books for children, but they are far less simple than Richards implies. In “The Pigs and the Charcoal-Burner,” from *Peacock Pie*, a family of pigs, rooting for “truffles and mast” in the forest are observed by the charcoal-burner, who is there tending the “sullen blaze” of his charcoal.45 Two entirely different apprehensions of the forest – that of the hungry pigs intent on their stomachs and that of the contemplative human whose mind wanders amongst the “starry ways” of night – are brought together in this misleadingly simple narrative. “John Mouldy” is one of de la Mare’s earliest poems, from *Songs of Childhood*, but it is equally rich. The poem offers an unflinching observation of death in the figure of John Mouldy, a vacantly smiling, lifeless, and anonymous human figure surrounded by living rats. One of these scavengers is transformed into a character in the space of a few words – “a slim brown rat of Norway” – but then “creeps” over the human body.46 The implication is that death is in our midst, open to our observation. And yet, like that “slim brown rat,” we go about our business, feeding off, while at the same time insensible to, the figure of death. We can only assume that Richards, who was to demonstrate himself an acutely sensitive reader in his *Practical Criticism* (1929), purposely elides such meanings in order to simplify his own argument.
Chapter 5: The Vast Wreckage of Faiths

For Richards, this de la Marean world is both a previous cultural era and the period of childhood. By implication, the progress of science is creating a greater gulf between childhood and adulthood. Indeed, Richards echoes Priestley in asserting that, when de la Mare attempts to incorporate an "adult" vision of the world, such as the nihilism of Thomas Hardy, whose poetry clearly influenced de la Mare, he inevitably fails. For the gulf between childish and adult things is now unbridgeable.47

One could say, that, in Richards' eyes, the post-World War I age had achieved a new and unhappy maturity and that the adult readers of this age would require a new kind of literature. But de la Mare as a poet of childhood, could only serve a younger audience, children with their more narrow range of experience and interests and their lack of distinction between knowledge and feeling, who had not yet had to face this new condition of disillusionment. For as Richards explains the innate psychology of the young, "The child comes into the world as a comparatively simple arrangement. Few things affect him, comparatively speaking, and his responses also are few and simple" (22). Likewise, de la Mare seems to have regressed from adulthood, to have retreated from the complex consciousness that Eliot evokes; he "takes shelter in the dream-world of the child."48 The reason for his continuing popularity with many adult readers is, by implication, the wish of these readers to revert. But to an "experienced reader," any reader genuinely and acutely conscious of the modern situation, "shaped by and responsive to a wide variety of the pressures from the contemporary situation, and familiar also with many different modes of the poetry of the past" (49) - and here
Richards must be using himself as the epitome of such a reader – de la Mare’s poetry will be unsatisfying, incapable of balancing their interests and reorienting their attitude. This astonishing misrepresentation of de la Mare’s actual readership – neither Murry nor Gosse nor the many readers they represent could be described as naive – is an obvious flaw in Richards’ argument. And it is indicative of the fact that the theory of poetry with which he beats de la Mare is entirely prescriptive. When Lascelles Abercrombie wrote his *Theory of Poetry* in 1924, he took an empirical approach, drawing on “what poetry is in fact” rather than what he should ideally like it to be. Fifty years after *Science and Poetry*, Richards admitted the fault in his “Reconsideration” of de la Mare: “I undervalued some poetries – not for being poor in themselves – but for not being other sorts of poetry I then thought mattered more.”

But more importantly, in his urge to value poetry that “mattered more,” Richards actually misrepresented de la Mare’s poetry. In fact, “feeling” does not completely displace “knowledge” in the poems, nor does poetry stand in for the truth of science. On the contrary, the equivocation that Richards himself had detected in the poetry is exactly the point that de la Mare hopes to make, as Murry had noted. Recently, Michael Kirkham has reinforced this point in de la Mare’s defence, pointing to “the gesture made by so many of de la Mare’s poems – questing and questioning, balanced between doubt and hope.”

The doubt comes from our knowledge of a world that remains unresponsive to our desires.

Richards’ misrepresentation of de la Mare’s work was quickly taken up by other critics. Edgell Rickword, a young disciple of Eliot’s brand of poetry, edited *Scrutinies* by
Various Writers (1928), a volume in which he lamented the dismal state of poetry in England in the post-war period and led an attack aimed to demolish “the distinguished reputations” that “have stood like an avenue of cyclopean statues leading to a ruined temple.” There is in England, he felt, “a sluggishness in the communication of ideas,” and, due to both this and the effects of the war, “the information that it is necessary to travel in some other direction for enlightenment has been carefully withheld” (v-vi). A new direction will only be found, though, once the “cyclopean statues” have been demolished, and these include J. M. Barrie, Arnold Bennett, G. K. Chesterton, John Galsworthy, Rudyard Kipling, John Masefield, George Moore, G. Bernard Shaw, H. G. Wells, and Walter de la Mare.

Douglas Garman leads the assault on de la Mare, claiming that de la Mare constantly tries to evoke a “poetic state” and relies on the belief of the reader to do so, “for without it his poetic consciousness is a world of tinsel, based in no fundamental part of general consciousness.” We are asked to become drunk with fairy wine, administered, in the poetry, by “imagery, metaphor, music,” and in the prose, by a typically bizarre intermediary narrator whose “abnormal vision prepares the transition of the reader’s consciousness from the real to the unreal, and serves as a filter through which the streams of raw life may be strained” (44). Garman calls de la Mare’s appeal to magic that has no ground of belief behind it “degenerate,” and complains of his use of poetic qualities of language that are actually detrimental to expression: “His extreme sensibility to the jingling value of words often leads to an invertebrate style; he sacrifices coherence to a meretricious effect”; and “His use of inversion has the same result of weakening his
meaning by flouting the intellect” (49). Undoubtedly, de la Mare has moments of weakness, and he may have come to depend too much on the stilling ability of those inversions. But Garman does not bother to analyze the effect of the “jingling” or the inversions.

In any case, ultimately, Garman feels that it is de la Mare’s symbolism that damns him. Rather than drawing upon “direct sensuous experience,” de la Mare employs instead a “storehouse of wishy washy dreaming” (49-50). The values that de la Mare invokes are, therefore, derivative and ungrounded. “It results in the divorce of art from life, for the poetry which it dictates is incapable of creating a valid attitude to life and does not, therefore, fulfil its essential function” (50). And even though de la Mare seems to have been struggling to include more of this “direct sensuous experience” in his work, particularly in his stories, Garman felt that “by excluding from his work humanity, the passions and ethics, he has rashly limited the modes of perceiving beauty to a single factitious aspiration” (44).

That Garman should insist, without elaboration, that poetry’s “essential function” is “creating a valid attitude to life” is evidence enough of his dependence on Richards’ ideas. What Garman himself might mean by a “valid attitude” is revealed in the comparison, central to his critique, of de la Mare to the character of Anthony Lispet in de la Mare’s story “Lispet, Lispett & Vaine.” After seeing a wondrous vision in a field, Anthony devotes his life and the entire resources of his millenia-old family business to serving that vision, even to the point of bankruptcy. Drawing on this situation, Garman assumes an identity between de la Mare and his character: “From the beginning, de la
Mare postulated two independent worlds, Anthony's and reality, not spontaneously, but from necessity born of a distaste for the one in which he found himself." And so, Garman insists, both Anthony and de la Mare find solace in a dream world created by fancy, a world which is ultimately "bankrupt."

But to suppose that de la Mare was identifying with Anthony Lispet as an ideal, a figure for his own yearning to escape the modern world of facts and commerce, is a ridiculous mistake on Garman's part. The story of Anthony's decline comes to us by way of a first-person narrator, "K ---", who is himself reporting the words of his friend Maunders. As one critic was to point out in the year after Garman's attack, "the effect of Lispet, Lispet & Vaine depends largely on our grasping the fact that Maunders is improvising the whole thing." Though "K ---" (and Garman) does not understand this, Maunders' story of Anthony is ironic, a warning against the dangers of reading all literature as a presentation of facts. One exchange in particular between Maunders and "K ---" reveals their entirely different modes of understanding:

"... What's more, they knew in those days [the eighteenth-century and earlier] that objects are only of value when representative of subjects. Has it never occurred to you (no, I suppose not) that the Wisest's apes, ivory, and peacocks were symbolic? The apes representing, of course — "

"Of course," I interrupted hurriedly. "But what I'm after, Maunders, is something faintly resembling matter-of-fact. These Lispet people — what is really their history? ..."

Symbolism, Maunders' words suggest, is a means of thinking and representing that includes the emotions, the subjective experience. We must read it with this in mind. Symbolism's advantage is that it is more truly representative than the stuff of history, which amounts only to ""mummified fact; dessicated life; the irretrievable"" (100).
Despite these various warnings, "K ---" insists on making sense from the facts alone, and mistaking symbols for facts. And evidently, Garman was taken in to the same degree as "K ---." The very convolution and far-fetched fantasy of Maunders’ descriptions of Lispet, Lispett & Vaine’s lineage and its products – for instance, “the tanned Barbary kid cuirass of steel and emeralds in which Saladin met his end” (101) – should have been sufficient clue to the irony.

This is not to deny that there are numerous unironic stories in The Riddle and Other Stories, the volume in which “Lispet, Lispett and Vaine” appeared. But this story provides the key to reading such unironic narratives as “The Tree” or “The Bowl.” It guides us in the reading of symbols. That de la Mare included such a key in The Riddle volume is not a sign of his awareness of the inadequacy of his own method, though it may reflect his sense of a shift in audience interests and perceptions and a frustration with the tendency of some readers: they misread the symbol at their own peril, he warns.

To de la Mare’s generation – to Gosse and to Murry – de la Mare’s symbols were a means of maintaining, of remembering, the deepest and most valuable aspects of their inheritance in English literature. Evidently, to younger critics like Richards, Rickword, and Garman for whom the war had been the central event and consuming reality of their lives, these symbols inevitably seemed like evasions, fairy tales in the sense of being childish fantasies incapable of effacing or transforming the massive horror of reality. The coincidence of de la Mare’s success with the Peter Pan “craze” surely did not help his
case in the eyes of these critics. They diagnosed what they felt was an intolerable situation and attempted to clear the ground. But neither Richards nor the critics led by Rickword had discussed the poet heroes who could rectify the situation. It was left to F. R. Leavis, a few years later, to deal more fully with the new direction and potential that poetry was taking with the work of Eliot and Pound, and through the influence of the publication of Hopkins’ work. In *New Bearings in English Poetry*, Leavis develops a narrative and evolutionary notion of poetic development, consigning de la Mare to a transitional moment in poetry, coming after the tired Victorians but before the revolution initiated by his poetic champions. Leavis explicitly takes many of his cues from Richards’ *Science and Poetry* and bases many of his assumptions and judgements on the theory of poetry that Richards had promulgated in that book.

Leavis begins his book with an echo of Richards and Rickword, lamenting the lack of import that poetry has, the want of a serious reading public, and this he attributes to the irrelevance of much recent poetry to life as it is actually lived. “All that we can fairly ask of the poet,” he writes, “is that he shall show himself to have been fully alive in our time. The evidence will be in the very texture of his poetry.” Surveying the poetry in *The Oxford Book of Victorian Verse*, Leavis is inclined to see it all as a poetry of dream and withdrawal. The techniques and subjects established by the Romantic poets have been adopted by the Victorians, but to completely different effect:

It was possible for the poets of the Romantic period to believe that the interests animating their poetry were the forces moving the world, or that might move it. But Victorian poetry admits implicitly that the actual world is alien, recalcitrant, and unpoetical, and that no protest is worth making except the protest of withdrawal. (18)
Even such a pragmatic and politically active man as William Morris “reserved poetry for his day-dreams” (22). A true poet of the modern world will be possessed by “the need to communicate something of his own” (15), and given the changes in the social and political fabric of the world of which this new poet is a part, genuine communication will necessarily entail “the invention of new techniques” (22). Thus, it is not enough to include the details of modern life in the subject matter of one’s poetry. Just as Richards had insisted, Leavis believes that the rhythms and techniques of the poetry must be ingrained with the sensibility that lives and the body that breathes in such a world. And here Leavis refers to Eliot’s dictum “that probably the modern’s perception of rhythm has been affected by the internal combustion engine” (24).

Leavis discusses de la Mare’s work in the chapter entitled “The Situation at the End of the First World War,” which begins, “There were writing at the end of the war three poets in general acceptance who really were considerable poets: Hardy, Yeats, and de la Mare” (26). Indeed, his view of the qualities of de la Mare’s work is little different than those of the critics who preceded him, and in his attack on de la Mare, he admits he is depending explicitly on Richards, “who acutely diagnoses the trick” of de la Mare’s poetry (44). Like Murry, Priestley, and Richards, Leavis also sees the connection of the poetry to childhood as crucial: “He has written poems from the child’s consciousness; poems that recapture the child’s mentality as he describes it” (42). This forms the basis of Leavis’ questioning of de la Mare’s value for an adult world with certain contemporary concerns. De la Mare is, he says, “frank about the aim of his poetry and about his relations with childhood. He finds the modern world, with its science and its civilization,
as uncongenial as Mr. Yeats found it. It is impossible either to conquer it or to become reconciled with it..." (43). And so de la Mare regresses to his own late-Victorian childhood, carrying himself and his reader away from the noisy phenomenal world with which they are now faced, through the "enchantment" and "potent spell" of his rhythms.59 Having established this notion, Leavis triumphantly proclaims: "His poetry, then, is by admission a poetry of withdrawal, cultivating a special poetical 'reality': his world of dreams, nourished upon memories of childhood, is for him the intrinsically poetical" (43). Because of the earlier context in which Leavis had used precisely the terms "dream" and "withdrawal" in relation to Victorian poetry, de la Mare necessarily appears in this argument as disengaged and regressive. Leavis believes that de la Mare has failed to deal with the contemporary scene, except to offer his readers a means of temporarily escaping from it. But this is to ignore the fact that, as William Blake had discovered and Wordsworth had celebrated and lamented, childhood can offer a clearer (not simpler) vision of the world, equally intense in its wonder and its terror.

As we have seen, J. M. Murry had described how de la Mare's poetry evinces both a yearning for eternal beauty and, sometimes simultaneously, an acknowledgement that no such permanence lies behind the fleeting beauties of the phenomenal world. This contradiction leads, Murry asserts, to a heightening of our sense of beauty. Leavis, however, follows I. A. Richards, assuming that de la Mare is trying to express the spiritual desolation of the modern world, and yet paradoxically offering consolation:

He has formed habits that make impossible such a frank recognition of the human plight as he seems to offer. The apparent recognition is not the frankness it pretends to be but an insidious enhancement of the spell,
which is the more potent to soothe and lull when it seems to be doing the opposite. Mr. de la Mare’s poetry cultivates subtler and more dangerous illusions than it professes. (44)

In short, Leavis believes that through the incantatory quality of his verse, de la Mare is subscribing to some form of religious faith, a belief that there are “listeners,” though they may refuse to answer our call. Hardy, by contrast, accepts the desolation with which he is faced and does not attempt to spell himself beyond it. Presumably for Leavis, such images as de la Mare’s “listeners,” as equivocal as they are as a symbol of faith, are evoked through rhythms that are far too confident. Indeed, Leavis believes that even de la Mare must have realized the inadequacy of his own poetic, since he has not produced a new volume of poetry since The Veil (1921):

In The Veil the poignancy turns into a duller, heavier desolation; the dream takes on a nightmare quality, and the unwholesomeness of the fantasy-habit is, implicitly and explicitly, admitted. It is as if the disastrous consequences of drug-addiction were being recognized. (45)

Certainly, de la Mare’s production of poetry slowed after The Veil, but the reasons for this were far more complex than Leavis could imagine (see chapters 3 and 4). And in any case, his new collection of poems, The Fleeting (1933), appeared in the year after New Bearings, proving that he had not written himself out.

(Leavis’ implication that de la Mare had reached an impasse with his poetry was picked up again in 1970 when I. A. Richards offered his “Reconsideration” of de la Mare. Here, he declared The Listeners and Peacock Pie to represent the height of de la Mare’s powers: “It is hard to believe that such epoch-making things can happen, in poem after poem, and go on. Turning those pages again, after over 50 years of knowing most of
them by heart I have at times found myself trembling.” On the other hand, Richards can find nothing of equal value in later volumes: “The poet of Peacock Pie, after adding ‘The Song of Finis’ to close that, never wrote any I have yet found with the originality, the uniqueness, the perfection, of those in the 1912-13 volumes” [33]. He feels that de la Mare must have suffered some great disillusion, some loss, with the war: “Could it be that . . . the freedom he may have lost in 1914 [World War I could do anything to anyone] came back to him in so changed a form?” [33])

Of course, at the time, Leavis could not anticipate how de la Mare might develop in the future. And yet Yeats’ self-transformation from his early symbolist mode through the increasing admission of the objectively observed scene, which was evident as early as In the Seven Woods (1904), might have provided him with some clue as to how such a romanticism could develop and maintain relevance. As Michael Kirkham has shown, de la Mare had several periods of “maturity,” which parallel Yeats’ development. Kirkham shows that the poems of de la Mare’s “first maturity” – those in The Listeners and Peacock Pie – employ a kind of symbolism, driven by elision and association, that has similarities with dream, but which is actually far more cogent and searching. The darker mood of Motley (1918) and The Veil (1921), the attenuation of the symbolist mode, represents a transitional phase which would eventually lead to the “second maturity” of the later volumes Memory (1938) and The Burning Glass (1945). Some of the poems in these late volumes are characterised by “a reflectively conversational, quietly intimate voice”; others, “in Hardyesque or Edward Thomas fashion, interpose a realistic surface between the reader and a submerged meaning”; many “show that de la Mare has learned
how to use images from the untransformed, natural, everyday world to embody his sense of life’s enigma” (125-26). Leavis and Richards were focused on the transition between those mature periods. And yet the judgment they formed on this basis was to have both immediate and very long-term effects.

Directly following the publication of Leavis’ study, de la Mare suffered a dramatic loss of income. In the taxation year of 1930 to 1931, just as he was beginning to make a showing as a Faber author, de la Mare’s income from writing was once again at a remarkable peak, £3641.12s.11d. By the taxation year of 1932 to 1933, it had sunk to £1323.10s.2d. De la Mare had lost about two thirds of the income from his own work. And even though Constable published The Fleeting in 1933, Faber put out The Lord Fish, and Collins issued a Walter de la Mare Omnibus including his three adult novels to date, his royalties dropped even lower in the subsequent year of 1934 to 1935, to £933 16s.3d. The “de la Mare atmosphere” was clearly out of favour. Leavis either severely damaged de la Mare’s reputation or reflected a more widespread loss of taste for de la Mare’s work.

Faber & Faber must have been dismayed that the highly reputable author they had just taken on seemed now to be the focus of some critics’ malignity. Perhaps in an attempt to bolster the reputation of one of their key properties, the publisher had issued the second critical monograph on de la Mare in 1929, just after Garman’s attack had appeared. In Walter de la Mare: A Critical Study, Forrest Reid addresses the central
issue of the relation of dream to reality, but he also notes variations in the voice of de la
Mare’s work between intensely literary and more orally inflected style, and he critically
defines de la Mare’s originality.

Drawing on the late-eighteenth century distinction between fancy and imagination,
Reid insists on de la Mare’s imaginative power: “Imagination is the power by which we
grasp reality. An imaginative man is less a dreamer than a seer. It is when the
imagination weakens that we sink into dream” (43). This is surely the crux of all
arguments about the relevance of de la Mare to a modern world. Do de la Mare’s visions
actually contain enough of the substance of actuality so that they transform that actuality
for his readers, or do they occupy some personal dream space, evanescent, vague, a
“parallel world,” as Priestley had put it, that does not impinge at all on our own? The
answer, for Reid, is more complicated. Whether the work is fantastic or realistic is not
the issue. In the case of Songs of Childhood, Reid felt that de la Mare had embodied the
real, despite the ubiquity of supernatural machinery in that book: “We can, in fact, just
as if we were criticizing a short story, say that the child in these poems lives” (39). By
the time of Poems, Reid notes, de la Mare had repressed the supernatural trappings, but
with the specific purpose of creating a greater sense of unease: “Houses, woods, and
rivers are still haunted – only the haunters now are invisible. It is this uncertainty that is
disquieting” (105). We are left without names or symbols for our dimmest apprehensions
of a further reality, apprehensions which are nevertheless evoked again and again in de la
Mare’s poems. This effect reaches its height, Reid claims, in The Veil: “Everywhere,
from the hills and the streams and the woods, voices call; but they may be mocking
voices, and are never the clear, assuring voices Wordsworth heard in Nature” (175).

Reid sees de la Mare’s poetry and prose as of a piece. In all, de la Mare is
attempting to give body to a vision: “their purpose is to weave the dream fabric into the
solid substance of actuality” (244). Thus, the fiction also works to create a sense of
disruption of the mundane, of embodiment of the fantastic. The stories set in a
recognizable suburban world are also highly effective, “partly because of the contrast it
affords, and partly because the marvellous, or the merely horrible, becomes much more
authentic when it happens, as secretly we should like it to happen, next door.”66 In The
Three Mulla-Mulgars, de la Mare creates a sense of actuality around his monkey
protagonists through the very intensity and texture of the literary language, and the
figures of Tishnar and Immanâla in that book are powerful symbols of good and evil,
rather than just fanciful creations.67 The other romance of the same year, The Return, is
not fantastic at all: “It is the story of a spiritual upheaval such as might be produced by
any violent crisis, religious or otherwise. The actual cause, in comparison with its
consequences, is unimportant” (131). In Memoirs of a Midget, de la Mare uses the
perspective and character of his extraordinary protagonist, the narrator of the story, to
render reality in the most imaginative terms. In short, Reid acknowledges a consistency
of purpose in all de la Mare’s work, but denies that this could be called a narrowness of
vision: “I am really only referring to a singleness of vision that has always seen all life as
a spiritual quest and adventure. There is no monotony.”68
Dr. F. T. Wood, writing in the *Poetry Review* in 1933, likewise proclaimed that the value of de la Mare’s work lay precisely in the alternative it offered to the “scientific,” post-war view, as promulgated by Richards. De la Mare, he insisted, “is the representative figure of an age which is rapidly turning away from the purely mundane, materialized, circumscribed view of life and under the influence of a new sense of infinitude and eternity, is attaching a fresh meaning to spiritual values.”

When de la Mare collected together work for *Poems 1919-1934*, he offered his own response to the claim that he purposely evaded “reality,” in a new, dialogue poem entitled “Romance.” He begins with an evocation of what he considers the real:

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Well, then, you ask me what is real,
   And I - poor thief - I say,
See, what wild gold the tide-drifls steal
   To pour into this bay!

Those emeralds, opals, pearls to land
   Washed in by wave on wave;
That heat-struck swoon of shimmering sand,
   That music-echoing cave!
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But to this fanciful interpolation of a beach scene the realists will obviously object:

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Salt? Bubbles? Cheating mist and light?
   Quartz ground by surge to dust?
Call me mere brittle bones - and sight -
   Illusion if you must;
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With this, de la Mare recognized the problem of the opposition between a world given animation and human meaning by imagination and a world reduced to a list of its elements, an insoluble problem that was one of the grand themes of the poetry of Wallace Stevens: “Was reality the world seen without imagination? If so, was imagination the
world seen without reality?" But for de la Mare, the reduction of all reality, including
the poet, to purely materialistic terms, some substance devoid of consciousness and
emotion, obviously fails the fact of human experience:

Yet still some seraph in my mind
   His praises cries, has flown
Into a region unconfined
   Man, baffled, calls the unknown.

Desire leaps up, and poised on high
   Love’s gaze – from eyes askance –
Scans in delight of sea and sky
   The vineyards of Romance.

What is left out of the materialistic version of the real is, precisely, desire and all the
images that desire will conjure through the agency of the imagination, drawing on a host of
literary and personal memories. And yet neither de la Mare’s own defence nor those of
his supporters seem to have been immediately effective in restoring sales.

It was perhaps partly this state of affairs which caused such controversy between
Constable and Faber & Faber when it came to negotiating for the transfer of de la Mare’s
poetry. Constable, relying on their sense of de la Mare’s success with the volumes
published during the Georgian years, inevitably saw the poetry as a very valuable
commodity. Faber, on the other hand, recognised the decreasing critical status of the
poetry in the 1930s. As we have seen, however, Faber did eventually take the poetry
from Constable. They issued de la Mare’s *Collected Poems* in 1942 and *Collected
Rhymes and Verses* in 1944. (And from the first of these, de la Mare omitted thirty
poems appearing in earlier volumes in an attempt to strengthen his hand against his
critics, even while claiming: "Nor have I attempted to sift out what I should like to exclude."²²)

At around the same time as Faber published these two volumes of collected poems, they also published a book which offered another kind of answer to the critics of de la Mare's poetry. In Art and Scientific Thought: Historical Studies towards a Modern Revision of Their Antagonism (1944), Birmingham University physicist Martin Johnson attempted to deal with the question of different kinds of truth, of the disparity between science and poetry identified by Richards.

Johnson had begun to read de la Mare's poems in his youth, at the urging of his friend, none other than F. R. Leavis, and had maintained strong interests and critical abilities in the arts throughout his specialisation in the sciences.²³ Johnson finally met de la Mare in 1940 and the two found, in subsequent meetings, that they had much to discuss about both science and literature. For Johnson's book, de la Mare contributed a foreword, and Johnson included a chapter, "Fantasy and a Real World, in the Poetry of Walter de la Mare," that specifically answered the charges laid by Richards and seconded by Leavis.

In Science and Poetry, Richards had insisted that poetry could create a psychological truth, but that this should never be confused with a statement about nature itself, the fabric of the non-human world. He complained not only that the kinds of knowledge made available through science and art were incommensurable, but that the practitioners of one branch of knowledge seldom crossed over, in any deep way, into the other branch. De la Mare, however, put Johnson forward as his champion precisely
because he does cross over, because his viewpoint is "that of a man of science who is also a devotee of music, painting, and poetry." And when Johnson comes to address explicitly Richards' critique, he begins by qualifying Richards' acquaintance with and knowledge of science: "it is not science but a particular metaphysical interpretation of science which seems to have interested Mr. Richards." Richards' credentials are questioned on the very basis which Richards had used to disqualify the truth value of de la Mare's and others' poetry: Richards is seeing science through the imaginative constructs of philosophy, and particularly of his own philosophy of materialism and scepticism.

Johnson also defended de la Mare's use of fantasy against the prejudice that was evident in Leavis' comment that de la Mare "is exploiting the fairy-tale stratum of experience." Fairy-tale faith, for Leavis and Richards, is not adequate to contemporary experience. Johnson insists that de la Mare's fantasies, rather than evading reality, equip us to face it squarely and courageously. Indeed, Johnson's measure of the value of works of fantasy is the degree to which they help us deal with very real situations, rather than enable us to escape from them:

When a form of art exhibits preoccupation with dream or other fantasy, I suggest that it is most relevant to ask whether our sympathetic understanding of the more acute crises in human feeling has been heightened by that art, and our impulse towards practical courage in such crises thereby stimulated. (68)

Thus, even though the content of much of de la Mare's work is entirely fanciful or fantastic, "the art is essentially realist in the effect of its structure or its symbolism upon the imagination" (68). For the structure of de la Mare's fantasies mirrors our experience
of the real world: "it is a part of the sternest realism to see an alternating succession of fear and tranquility as a common feature in human experience" (68). Likewise, de la Mare's recurrent use of certain visions of the natural world - the world starlit or moonlit, the moment before sunrise or after sundown - is not an attempt to see nature in anthropomorphic terms, with the Magical View, but to find moments that offer the "genuine realist's mingling of disquiet and peacefulness . . ." (72).

Studies such as Reid's and Johnson's implicitly argue for the value of a diversity of literary modes. But around the time of their studies, a prescriptive and decisive criticism seems to have defined the highbrow and academic point of view from the middlebrow and popular. Certainly, the dogmatic arguments made by Richards and Leavis about the requirements for a "modern" poetry were picked up by Michael Roberts in the editing of the *Faber Book of Modern Verse* (1936), a volume which has had a powerful influence on the "canon formation" of modern poetry. Roberts' volume is entirely programmatic, aimed as it is to give context and sense to "a considerable body of poetry which excites an active animosity, not because it states opinions and expresses feelings which are repugnant to the ordinary man, but because the reader feels compelled to argue that it is not poetry at all."77 Roberts had previous experience with such polemical projects: he had edited *New Signatures* in 1932 in an attempt to catch public attention with the work of left-wing poets. His 1936 volume, too, both demonstrated and attempted to overcome a growing gap between a certain kind of poetry and the
reading public. There was no such gap in the case of de la Mare's work, but this was represented by Roberts as a fault rather than a virtue. Remarkably, de la Mare was excluded from this anthology (though Roberts did include many other Faber authors) at the very same time as Faber & Faber were making efforts to publish a wide range of de la Mare titles as well as the critical studies of Reid, and later of Johnson, designed to bolster de la Mare's work.

Roberts selected poems for his volume which demonstrated "notable development of poetic technique," as defined in his lengthy introduction to the volume, a criterion which he admitted would exclude some of "the best poems of our age," de la Mare's among them (1). His elaboration of the value of innovation is more troubling: "I have included only poems which seem to me to add to the resources of poetry, to be likely to influence the future development of poetry and language . . ." (2), and he has chosen 1910 (the same year of demarcation noted by Woolf for the evolution of a new kind of "human character") as an "arbitrary" cut-off date for inclusions. Furthermore, he asserts an identity between these innovative poems and those the public rejects as non-poetry, defending a highbrow critical position:

If a poet is incomprehensible to many people, but clearly intelligible to a few, . . . it may be because he is speaking of things not commonly experienced and is using subtleties of rhythm and imagery not used in ordinary speech, and therefore not widely understood. If it can be shown that a poet's use of language is valid for some people, we cannot dismiss his way of speaking as mere 'obscurity' and idiosyncracy . . . (3-4)

Where Richards and Leavis had insisted on the need to ground poetry in common experience, Roberts can now reject such a notion outright, concentrating instead on the
development of linguistic resources. He suggests that perhaps poets are bound to become as much specialists as scientists, using a poetic “notation” and rhythmic techniques that preclude widespread public interest: “it is as necessary that some members of the community should explore the possibilities of language and use it to control and clarify emotional, spiritual and sensuous experience, as it is that others should use their mathematical notation to codify and organize our scientific knowledge” (32). By implication, then, no poet who is popular with the public can be of much deep value. His explanation of the value of such a specialist poet follows Richards’ notion of the use of poetry to balance conflicting interests: he speaks of the poet’s “need for that accuracy of speech which itself lessens the tension it describes” (4), and says of the poem created under this rubric that “it may change the configuration of the mind and alter our responses to certain situations” (5).

Roberts also used a variation of Priestley’s argument to differentiate Yeats’ method from de la Mare’s. Yeats is included in Roberts’ anthology because he has contributed to the development of the language, influencing the younger generation of poets in his “poetic” use of myth and legend: “The word ‘poetic’ is here used to describe a special concentration of sensuous impression, idea and evocation in a word or phrase. The word ‘poetical’ is used to describe an attempted evocation by conventional symbols, of a state of mind sometimes called mystical” (2). De la Mare, we are to assume, is guilty of the “poetical.”

Roberts also turns the question of popularity and engagement with the contemporary situation into an opposition between “English” and “European” poets, the
latter attempting to further the resources inherent in the language while preserving and extending a pan-European tradition. Meanwhile, the work of the “English” poets is necessarily more accessible, since it does not have the need to draw on a wide range of cultural allusions, but instead springs from the individual mind employing “an intensification of qualities inherent in the English language itself.” Since the European tradition is in a state of crisis, its poets will also necessarily be forced to deal with that crisis. The technique required to encompass such a range of culture will be a kind of poetic shorthand, involving extremely compressed metaphor and allusion, amongst other things. Thus, for his popularity, his English frame of reference, and his use of “conventional symbols,” Roberts excludes de la Mare from the “Modern.”

Roberts’ anthology included only thirty-seven poets. Yeats’ competing anthology published in the same year, The Oxford Book of Modern Verse, 1892-1935, included ninety-six poets, de la Mare amongst them, primarily because Yeats used a period definition for modern verse: “I have tried to include in this book all good poets who have lived or died from three years before the death of Tennyson to the present moment, except some two or three who belong through the character of their work to an earlier period.” De la Mare, then, belongs to the “Modern” period not just by virtue of his birthday, but also because of the character of his work.

Although Yeats’ anthology might have rescued de la Mare and a host of other poets from the more prescriptive definition of “Modern,” the value of his anthology is severely hampered by the eccentricity of his editing. With Wilde’s Ballad of Reading Gaol, Yeats “plucked . . . its foreign feathers” (vii). He began his selection with a passage
of Walter Pater’s essay, but curiously altered: “Only by printing it in vers libre can one show its revolutionary importance” (viii). He omitted the war poets on the grounds that “passive suffering is not a theme for poetry,” but “substituted Herbert Read’s End of a War written long after.”80 De la Mare is not so brazenly mistreated, though he is not happily placed either. He is included in Yeats’ anthology amongst a group who “descended not from Homer but from Virgil, [who] wrote what the young communist scornfully calls ‘Belles-lettres’” (xvi). Yeats includes Laurence Binyon and Sturge Moore in this group, as well as Sacheverell Sitwell, and designates Robert Bridges the “patron saint” of their “movement” (xvii). And he has a happy prognosis for their future reputations, defying Roberts: “None of these were innovators; they preferred to keep all the past their rival; their fame will increase with time” (xvii). But of the six de la Mare poems included, one is from Poems, three from The Listeners, one from Motley, and one from Songs of Childhood. Nothing came from the gloomier, but more recent volumes, The Veil (1921) and The Fleeting (1933). And in his selection, Yeats seems to have deliberately evaded the darker strain of this earlier work, as Geoffrey Grigson remarked: “No mortuary for Yeats: the earthy, the passionate, however old he was; not abandonment, disillusion, or even the most exquisite resonance, on strings, of desolation or defeat.”81

In the cases of both Yeats’ and Roberts’ anthologies, de la Mare’s work was not accurately represented. Roberts refused to acknowledge de la Mare’s technical virtuosity and the uniqueness of his symbolism, or to admit his importance on the basis of public acclaim. Yeats, following an even more personally eccentric narrative of what constitutes
the "Modern," makes de la Mare into an earthier, less pessimistic poet. Thus, the poetry anthology, responsible for bringing de la Mare a large public in the Georgian years, was also, to a large extent, the vehicle that would misrepresent him to the future.

The notion that de la Mare had written himself out long ago, as both Garman and Leavis had claimed and as was implied by Roberts' omission, became a commonplace amongst certain critics at about this time. When Memory appeared in 1938, Geoffrey Walton could dismiss it in this one short paragraph in Scrutiny:

Mr. de la Mare's admirers cannot help being disappointed by Memory. He long ago gave us the essence of his poetic vision, and here again he merely repeats the well-known themes, reminiscence and foreboding, wistful aspirations and unaffectedly exotic descriptions.  

Clearly, Walton has adopted the criterion of formal innovation as the mark of a poem's success and thematic development as an imperative he would impose on the poet. Since de la Mare's theme had been from the first the ultimate, unanswerable question of the meaning of our life's journey, there really could be no development. Vita Sackville-West noted as much when she presented her lecture on The Traveller (1945), though she insisted that de la Mare, "with his own peculiar gift and outlook, has pushed the frontiers of consciousness a step farther back for us."  

In the long poem The Traveller, de la Mare returned to allegory, combining the journey of man and faithful horse that he had used in Henry Brocken with the import of Pilgrim's Progress. But the end of this traveller's increasingly desolate journey is no Celestial City, as de la Mare's critics might have suspected. Death comes to him in the
desert, and his starving horse, perhaps a symbol of the soul, abandons the terrifying corpse. The conclusion is entirely equivocal, as in so much of what de la Mare had written before:

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

Punctuation carries a great weight here. That last colon, like the dark window pane in which we can see only ourselves reflected, throws us into uncertainty: are inn and rest what the “grave” offers, or are they merely what we “crave”?

In the month after de la Mare’s death in 1956, Alfred Noyes voiced a bitter complaint, using de la Mare’s example in a vigorous polemic aimed at those poets who “turn to ugliness and the more congenial task of disgusting our neighbours in the name of Reality.” For two thousand years, he pointed out, poetry has been thought of as song, its music echoing the harmony of the Cosmos as well as the rhythms of our own bodies. Yet he contrasted the music of de la Mare’s poetry against “the odd lengths of bad prose which are sometimes called poetry to-day, and which in their general movement suggest the jerks of locomotor ataxia on the road to general paralysis of the insane” (70). The expression is extreme, but the point is invaluable. Noyes points to a radical disparity between that harmony in the Cosmos and the fracturing of the body and mind under increasingly unbearable stress. In the years since de la Mare’s death, and in marked contrast to Richards’ characterisation, science has revealed an even more intricate harmony in the Cosmos. On the other hand, there is no doubt that technology has put
the human body and consciousness under brutal degrees of stress. But technology is a very different thing from science.

The arguments made against de la Mare’s work on the issues of poetic “engagement,” thematic development, and formal innovation really amount to a single argument that he should reflect, with his work, the human under this technological stress. Richards and Leavis may have been honest enough in expecting this. The critics who followed them and who accepted and repeated their judgment are more suspect. The advantages of the “technological poem” to the critic, especially the academic, were identified by John Bayley in *The Romantic Survival: A Study in Poetic Evolution* (published by de la Mare’s former publisher Constable). In this study, Bayley reevaluates the place of the romantic impulse of de la Mare, Yeats, and other poets of the early half of the twentieth-century. He argues against anti-romantic attitudes both in poetry and in academic discourse, suggesting that the question posed by academics like Leavis and Richards is really whether a poem should be a consciously designed and built device, a “machine poem” which can, consequently, be dismantled and analyzed by a reader, or a phenomenon which has an effect on the reader but the origin of which is ultimately indeterminable. The Metaphysicals clearly tend to create the former type of poetry, and the rediscovery of these poets was directly connected to the growth of the academic study of poetry. But the critic who favours the “machine poem,” Bayley warns, may end up celebrating the “richly mediocre” because that is the kind of poem most responsive to his analysis. On the other hand, the critic who stands in awe of the ghostliness of the poem is in danger of being reduced to measuring the success of a poem
by the physical *frisson* it produces. In 1957, when his book appeared, Bayley believed that the tendency had gone far too much towards cerebration, and that this had infected the creation of poetry itself: “the solution must lie in a partial return to the critical premises of romanticism, in the whole-hearted submission to a poetic experience before we begin to analyse it” (72).

Fortunately, he pointed out, the romantic impulse had not died in the interim. Yeats, Auden, and Dylan Thomas had been able to combine a romantic element in a poetry that is nevertheless firmly grounded in contemporary experience. He also considers “two poets, not less talented than they, who also came to their powers at the time of greatest romantic meagreness and devitalisation – A. E. Housman and Walter de la Mare” (78). De la Mare, he admits, was restricted by his inheritance and circumstances:

> Even innocence, the positive quality which de la Mare touches on so continually and delicately, can only be evoked in the frailest and most oblique of images – ‘the secret of the child, the bird, the night.’. The human nature of ‘God's spy,’ who has apprehensions of innocence and can catch something of the mystery of things, is never indicated, indeed cannot be, for to anchor him firmly to the everyday earth as Kierkegaard anchored his ‘Knight of the Faith.’ who looked like a tax collector and enjoyed his dinner of sheep’s head, would be to destroy what had come to seem romanticism’s last stronghold in the aloof and disembodied and forlorn. (80)

Nevertheless, Bayley could see that de la Mare’s romanticism, developed and encouraged through the Georgian years, maintained through the inhospitable 1930s and 1940s by Faber’s support, had been an important example to at least one younger poet: “Auden’s poetry is no less under the romantic influence than is de la Mare’s, but between the two poets romanticism has anchored itself to the earth once more” (80).
Throughout his career, de la Mare had searched for symbols that, while embodying some spiritual meaning, would anchor his own work to the earth. Admittedly he had found intractable most of the material of the post-war world. But rather than depending upon the "poetical," the inheritance of "conventional symbols" as Roberts claimed, he had in fact found many unique symbols which were open-ended and marvellous with terrible meaning: the chest in "The Riddle"; the window at night which reflects back our own faces and leaves the dark beyond impenetrable; the railway line in many of his stories which, as Peter Mudford has observed, "becomes a metaphor too for what disappears into the distance, at a vanishing point: a track which leads 'nowhere,' and further than we think." In other cases, de la Mare used settings which, while being conventional, can still convey a great symbolic import in his work: the most obvious of these is the isolated house, either completely deserted or inhabited by a solitary figure. Admittedly, sometimes his symbols are bizarre: for instance, the massive diamond, taken from the heart of a meteor, that the narrator discovers, in the American-set story "The Lost Track," which is curiously connected with the beautiful but isolated woman who is one of the stone's guardians. But de la Mare was not so lost to the world that he could not see such failures nor mock his own symbolic tendencies with irony, as he does in "Lispet, Lispett and Vaine."

Ezra Pound made the claim that "No good poetry is ever written in a manner twenty years old, for to write in such a manner shows conclusively that the writer thinks from books, convention and cliché, and not from life . . ." De la Mare’s work may not be couched in a recognizably contemporary idiom nor his symbols be taken from the
detritus of modern living, but his mouldering bodies and the rats that creep over them are a persistent part of life.
Conclusion

If we are to break out of the non-historical fixity of post-modernism, then we must search out and counterpose an alternative tradition taken from the neglected works left in the wide margin of the century... Raymond Williams

The disparity between the current reputations of Walter de la Mare and W. B. Yeats is adequate testimony to the importance of ongoing critical discussion in keeping a poet’s work alive. The two poets were equally committed to romanticism, though Yeats grounded his work in the events of his own dramatic and sometimes public life and drew many of his symbols from what was then recently recovered and hence, politically charged, Celtic mythology. Yeats studies today represent a very large international industry with many books, several journals, whole university courses and conferences, and summer schools devoted to the examination of his work. By contrast, de la Mare is very occasionally considered in journal articles. There has been a critical silence about his work since his death more than forty years ago that has proved to be far more damaging to his reputation than the critical attacks and pointed omissions of the 1920s and 1930s. It is difficult to write about de la Mare not only because of the nature of his work, for which there exist no well developed and frequently used tools of literary analysis, but also because he has not been adequately represented in the shifting narratives of literary history. Without that web of allusion, every reading of de la Mare’s work remains an isolated reading.

Ian Hamilton, in editing The Oxford Companion to Twentieth-Century Poetry in English (1994), warned of too passive an approach to the writing of literary history: “I
have been wary of the passage-of-time school of literary judgement. It isn’t true that ‘if it’s good, it will survive’; someone, somewhere has to keep saying that it’s good – or if not good, exactly, then at least worthy of a small piece of the historical jigsaw, the map.”

Despite changes in literary fashion, de la Mare’s work has always been recognised as good (especially by those who denounced the effect of his work), though the number of readers aware of the fact is dwindling and the number of critics willing to say so even fewer. Nevertheless, certain authors, a handful of critics, many collectors of rare editions, and a small portion of the general reading public remain convinced of de la Mare’s worth. The recently inaugurated de la Mare Society is evidence of that.

However, the reception of de la Mare’s work, like that of nearly all poets in the current age, is split between two interpretive communities: the academy and the general public. The academy has a responsibility to reexamine de la Mare’s work and to admit his considerable right to be placed squarely in the centre of the “historical jigsaw” of the early twentieth-century. The public, of course, is under no such obligation. But when de la Mare began to write, in the 1890s, he had addressed himself quite directly to the public of the late-Victorian world. He had written short stories designed, more or less, to thrill and disturb the journal readers of the day, employing images from and allusions to his English literary inheritance, occasionally bursting into purple prose inspired by the example of the symbolistes, and beginning his exploration of those spiritual questions that were to be a central theme of his life’s work.

If the examples of his native literary tradition and the French symbolistes tended to encourage him towards the arcane, the esoteric, and the abstract, children’s verse and
folk story provided an important counter-influence. For in the simple expressions and concrete situations that these latter forms required, de la Mare found the most direct and compelling means of expressing his spiritual concerns. Henry Newbolt originally encouraged de la Mare to make the distinction between the two different tendencies in his work, sifting his early poems into *Songs of Childhood* (1902) and the sombre *Poems* (1906). From 1907 on, Edward Thomas encouraged the fantasies of the children's writer and chided the adults' author for his mannerisms, practically tutoring de la Mare in the country matters that would help him to substantiate his suburban dreams.

Shortly after de la Mare came under the 'hertelage' of Thomas, he made a radical change in his means of subsistence, from office clerk to literary critic. As a reviewer for the *Times Literary Supplement*, the *Saturday Westminster Gazette*, and the *Edinburgh Review*, de la Mare had the chance to consider his own literary inheritance, as well as key writers from other traditions, most notably Chekhov, and the examples provided by his contemporaries. What came out of this was not a systematic philosophy of literature and rigorous application of critical principles – to a certain extent he was an "impressionistic critic" of the kind deplored by T. S. Eliot – but an assuredness about his own creative path and, rather extraordinarily, certain images, metaphors, and symbols that migrated backwards and forwards between the criticism and the creative work.

The support of Newbolt and Thomas and de la Mare's own self-confidence gained from reviewing bore remarkable fruit in the poems of *The Listeners* (1912) and *Peacock Pie* (1913), the publication of which coincided most fortunately with the *Georgian Poetry* project of Harold Monro and Edward Marsh. The *Georgian Poetry*
volumes, as well as Monro’s recital series, brought de la Mare squarely into the public eye, where he remained throughout the war years as a key English poet of spiritual consolation. When his anthology of English poetry, *Come Hither*, and his first collection of short stories, *The Riddle*, appeared in 1923, de la Mare became an important arbiter of public taste in poetry and achieved extraordinary financial success and critical recognition.

The popularity of his work and the cachet of his name prompted Faber & Gwyer to take de la Mare on, in 1927, and to use him as a central support for a bold publishing enterprise. That publishing firm, built on Geoffrey Faber’s commitment to the cultural mission of publishing, the artistic vision and business savvy of T. S. Eliot, and the marketing acumen of directors like C. W. Stewart, needed authors, at its outset, that would give the firm visibility, a sense of integrity and continuity with the past, and of course consistent and substantial sales. De la Mare fit the firm’s needs perfectly, and Faber published both his prose and his eccentric anthologies as fast as he could produce them. Eventually, they took over his poetry from Constable, though their hesitancy over arranging the transfer indicates the problem that that poetry represented to a publisher committed to publishing daringly innovative contemporary poetry.

Indeed, the same factors that interested Faber and Eliot in publishing de la Mare’s work also attracted the attention and derisive criticism of a number of younger poets and critics who found, in de la Mare, a symbol of the degeneracy of public taste. Was not all de la Mare’s work and the public’s enthusiasm for it, they argued, symptomatic of an escapist tendency, an unlinking of literature from any real criticism of life? Certainly, de la Mare as visionary poet could have little to say to the immediate social and political
concerns of these fractious young men of the late 1920s and 1930s. But that some of these men were important and influential academic critics at a time when the evaluation of poetry was being appropriated as a function of the academy and that others argued for a particular social and aesthetic programme in poetry with such ferocity that their conservative adversaries could hardly be heard have proved to be crucial factors in the long-term reputation of Walter de la Mare. While poetry lost its popular market after the Second World War, the academy continued to follow a critical agenda set by such figures as Richards and Leavis, an agenda that responded only to the most vocal of arguments. In this context, the work of Walter de la Mare slipped quietly into the background of literary history, still there as part of the whole picture but not drawing any sustained attention.

The situation is ironic. Throughout his long career, it cannot be denied that de la Mare was above concerns of marketing his work: his familial connections, through his brother-in-law Roger Ingpen and his son Richard, allowed de la Mare to have an unusual degree of control over the nature of his own writing and over the production and marketing of his books. But on the other hand, having modulated his own spiritual concerns, finding rapport with the market of his early writing days, he refused to modify that work to fit the vagaries of literary fashion. Indeed, there are signs in his work that he was self-conscious about the increasing extent to which he was “out of key with his time,” viewing himself with irony as a kind of Anthony Lispet, lost to the present, whose “firm seems to have survived on the proceeds from merchandise intended for grown-ups which your cosmopolitan Croesuses snapped up for their children”; or like Philip Pim in
“The Orgy,” on the verge of being disinherited, but indulging to the last moment his infatuation with the most “unique,” the least “reproducible” of goods.

So much for the responsibility of the academy to recover de la Mare’s work or at least to examine the meaning behind his changing reputation. A question remains of whether there are aspects of de la Mare’s work which, if presented to the public today, would have a widespread appeal and import. De la Mare’s devotion to the supernatural, might be one such aspect. The recent explosion of interest, both of adults and children, in J. K. Rowling’s *Harry Potter* series of “children’s books” shows at least that wizards, witches, ghosts, and goblins still have the potential to work as a meaningful frame of reference. And yet such figures in these books are barely symbols at all, but a thin and alluring veneer over class inequality and social prejudice of all kinds. Even Voldemort, the dark magician, is not a deeply resonant symbol of evil. Of course, the folk tale from which such figures were drawn was addressing similar social issues amongst its original circle of listeners. And yet the key to the folk tale’s persistence and to its initial transformation into the literary fairy tale (at precisely the moment when wizards and witches and ghosts no longer presented any challenge to the established social order) lay precisely in the depth and open-endedness of its symbolism. The public itself is probably now split between a small reading public interested in such deep symbols and another much larger public more committed to the conventions and possibilities of visual media.
Of course, the appeal of the *frisson* has always been strong and remains strong even now. Might de la Mare offer something to a contemporary audience in this regard? In his 1924 *Theory of Poetry*, Lascelles Abercrombie considered whether the *frisson* might be the highest achievement not just of supernatural stories and poems, but of poetry in general: “we have been told that the highest art, in poetry as elsewhere, is known by the physiological disturbance it causes; especially by a certain thrilling shudder down the spine, or a chilly tingle over the skin of arms and legs: in fact what is vulgarly called gooseflesh. Accordingly, it is at gooseflesh that poetry should aim.” By the end of the twentieth-century, the production of fear has come to to be highly commodified. Scary movies (not terrifying or horrifying) involving the supernatural are almost exclusively commercially motivated. But a more ubiquitous and widespread production of fear occurs through the morning newspaper and nightly newscast. As Marshall McLuhan noted, here, we are faced with an almost incessant display of disease, crime, and death. Once asked if all TV news was bad news, McLuhan remarked that, on the contrary, the commercials provided the good news. Thus, another one of the reasons that it may be difficult to recover de la Mare’s work now is precisely because his particular domain – the rhythmical production of moments of fear and consolation – has been commodified and appropriated by commercial media. Literary visions of the sublime, of horror, promptings of fear, have been entirely supplanted by the hyperreality of movie special effects. And the image of the body under technological stress – what I have argued Richards and Leavis required in poetry – is the main theme of the action-adventure genre of film. The kind of fear and terror in de la Mare’s work is of a different, more existential
variety than the immediate visceral shock with which many of the public are now all too familiar. That may make his work unique, but perhaps too unique to be noticed or understood.

Furthermore, media critic Mark Crispin Miller has argued that it is almost impossible to produce a sense of the uncanny in a world where “ghosts” and other disembodied states of mind are a regular part of our electronically mediated existence. In an age of cellular phones, the uncanny is, in fact, our normal state of being. In this contemporary context, readers might see de la Mare’s work as far too elliptical an attempt at the grotesque, even though this is not de la Mare’s ultimate aim. As Graham Greene observed,

M. R. James with admirable skill invented ghosts to make the flesh creep; astutely he used the image which would best convey horror; he was concerned with truth only in the sense that his stories must ring true – while they were being read. But Mr. de la Mare is concerned, like his own Mr. Bloom, to find out: his stories are true in the sense that the author believes – and conveys his belief – that this is the real world, but only in so far as he has yet discovered it.

De la Mare does not simply use words to create fear or to “spell away the soldiers and the fright,” as Robert Graves described the “Cool Web” of language, but to bring us to the edge of language. He was clearly interested in liminal states, fantastic visions, and the childhood perspective or dream-like mood through which these may be more directly invoked. Inevitably, fear accompanies the equivocal situation.

But to the contemporary reader, de la Mare’s work may simply appear to be childish and hopelessly anachronistic. At the end of the Victorian period, the sensibility that de la Mare valued and tried to invoke through his work was relegated to the child.
While children’s literature of fairytale, fantasy, and nonsense rhyme flourished in the mid- to late-nineteenth century, it could do so only because childhood had been recognised as both a distinct and a limited stage of life. It is notable that Blake could write his *Songs of Innocence and Experience* exactly at the point when childhood was acquiring a special social status. Recognising the peculiar virtues of the childhood state, he could bewail its corruption. The Victorian concession to the ideas of Rousseau and the images of the Romantics — “The Child is father of the Man” — was to grant childhood a licence unthinkable in the previous century. Flights of fancy were acceptable in the nursery precisely because they marked out childhood’s limited duration. Fantasy must end where adulthood began, as Alice’s sister is so painfully aware after hearing of Alice’s adventures in Wonderland: “So she sat on, with closed eyes, and half believed herself in Wonderland, though she knew she had but to open them again, and all would change to dull reality.”

De la Mare’s practice of merging reality and fantasy was rooted in the experience of late-Victorian childhood. The kind of sensibility that he sought, the openness to all experience could now only be found in the child. Children had not yet grown into materially minded adults; they could accept that things might have a power beyond their practical utility, might be connected in irrational ways. And as the novelist Richard Adams mused in a recent talk on de la Mare’s poetry and its relation to his life, “if anyone ever had good reason to turn much of his mental energy and creative power towards fantasy, it was Walter de la Mare. With his life, where else could it go?”
Furthermore, unlike some of his younger contemporaries, de la Mare felt himself enmeshed in English language and tradition rather than a creator of new language and radical form. Through the period of innovations prompted by Continental and American influences of the earlier part of this century, de la Mare maintained the distinctly English version of romanticism, and he was a key example to the generation that followed the innovators. De la Mare kept working on the visionary core of romanticism.

But this is not to say that de la Mare’s sensibility is entirely an anachronism in the twentieth-century. The disparity between our sense of the current life of teeming detail and a time when all our projects will have been reduced to dust, to emptiness, is precisely de la Mare’s point. Hence, his use of antique places, of ruined castles, and abandoned houses, is not evidence of nostalgia, but of his need to look over a larger span of time than the day, or the year, or indeed, the individual’s lifetime. What, he asks, is the human project? How can any notion of present beauty stand against the vacancy of eternity?

But the best answer to those who disparage de la Mare’s poetry as merely an extension of late-Victorian poetry, viewing it as effete, whimsical, childish, simple-minded, or disengaged, is a careful reading of the poems, which will inevitably reveal brilliant multivocal control and complexity of meaning, even in the children’s verse. Likewise, the deep symbolic resonance of the stories also awaits the patient reader.

De la Mare was writing of an unsettled world, a world where, if it was not exactly God that was immanent, there were certainly strange beasts lurking at the edges of consciousness, only just out of the reaches of our five senses, dimly sensed by the sixth,
amplified in the narratives of de la Mare’s stories, invoked by the spells and incantations of his verse. But de la Mare resolutely refused to name this unsettling presence either as God or as Unconscious. When he compiled his anthology on dreams and the imagination, Behold This Dreamer (1939), he had the perfect opportunity to align himself with one camp or another. But as anthologist, his own view remains speculative. Following his justly named volume of essays Pleasures and Speculations (1940), de la Mare found his pleasure in undecidability, in the indecipherable. In fact, he objected strongly to symbolism when it became systematic, a quality he found even in Eliot’s The Waste Land: “What I have against T.S.E. is that in The Waste Land he felt it necessary to give precise meanings and correspondences.”

Lord David Cecil summarized the unique ability that de la Mare had as a critic:

By concentrating always on the individual author and not wasting his time in vague, high-sounding generalizations on the nature of art, he directs our eye to the fact that every genuine work of literature is of its nature unique, and must be judged as such. Most critics forget this. They erect iron laws of what is good and bad which involves them in condemning one artist for no better reason than he is unlike another. How few critics, for example, seem able to admire both Donne and Bridges; for they judge Bridges’s poetry by a standard acquired by reading Donne’s, or vice versa.

Clearly, this critical generosity has not been practised by those who have focused their attention on Yeats or Eliot to the utter exclusion of de la Mare. As the silence about de la Mare continues and theories and strategies of reading evolve which are responsive only to certain (canonical or newly canonized) authors, de la Mare’s novels, stories, and poems will become less and less readable and appear more and more eccentric.
Citations for first references to de la Mare’s work and to the work of critics are given in the notes. Whenever possible, parenthetical citations are used thereafter.

Unless otherwise noted, quotations of de la Mare’s poems are from Complete Poems (ed. Richard de la Mare. London: Faber & Faber, 1969); quotations of de la Mare’s stories are from Short Stories 1895-1926 (ed. Giles de la Mare. London: Giles de la Mare publishers, 1996). References for de la Mare’s numerous reviews in the Times Literary Supplement and the Saturday Westminster Gazette are given in the notes.

The following editions of de la Mare’s work or that include de la Mare’s work have also been used:


Archival Sources:

The main archival source that I have drawn on for letters from and to de la Mare, mss. and tss. of his various works, royalty statements (see also the Society of Authors below), tax returns, and other personal papers are the de la Mare papers, Bodleian Library, Oxford.

Other Archival Sources:

Bodley Head File. Reading University Library Archive, Reading.
Chatto & Windus File. Reading University Library Archive, Reading.
de la Mare, Walter. Letters to Mr. Mason. MS 1794. Reading University Library Archive, Reading.
de la Mare, Walter. Letters to R. L. Mégroz. Reading University Library Archive, Reading.
Hogarth Press Files. Reading University Library Archive, Reading.
Longmans, Green & Co. Files. Reading University Library Archive, Reading.
Society of Authors. Royalty statements for Walter de la Mare. Society of Authors, London.
Works Consulted

Bibliographies of de la Mare's Work and of Studies of de la Mare:


Times Literary Supplement Database. London: News International plc, 1997. Bibliography for all de la Mare's contributions to the TLS.


Walter de la Mare: Complete Poems. Edited by Richard de la Mare. London: Faber & Faber, 1969. Bibliography for all his poems


Other Works Consulted:


Faber, Geoffrey. *A Publisher Speaking.* London: Faber & Faber, 1934.


Works Consulted


Priestley, J. B. "Mr. de la Mare." *Figures in Modern Literature.* London: John Lane the Bodley Head, 1924. 31-54.


Rev. of *The Riddle and Other Tales.* *The Canadian Forum.* 4 (1924): 150.


Tribute to Walter de la Mare. London: Faber & Faber, 1948.


[Woolf, Virginia]. “Dreams and Realities.” Rev. of Motley and Other Poems, by Walter de la Mare. TLS. 30 May 1918. 253.


Notes to Introduction

1 “The literary fortune of Walter de la Mare is a curious phenomenon from the point of view of the psychology of the public in general, and in particular from those specialists the critics, and also a touching example of what one could call the fate of a writer” (Luce Bonnerot, L’Œuvre de Walter de la Mare: Une Aventure Spirituelle [Paris: Didier, 1969] 13).

2 This circumstance was related to me by Professor Russell Brown of the University of Toronto, who came across the book in question at Whitlock’s Book Barn in Connecticut, near New Haven, sometime in the late 1970s.


5 Graham Greene, “Walter de la Mare’s Short Stories,” The Lost Childhood and Other Essays (London: Eyre & Spottiswoode, 1951) 79-83.


7 Otto Kyllmann, letter to Walter de la Mare, 29 January 1941, de la Mare papers, Bodleian Library, Oxford.


10 Walter de la Mare, letter to Roger Ingpen, 22 December 1899, qtd. in Whistler 91-92.

11 “The Lesson of the Masters,” rev. of The Apern Papers, The Turn of the Screw, Daisy Miller, The Lesson of the Master, by Henry James, and of The Steppe and Other Stories, by Anton Tchekov, rpt. in Private View 11.


14 The efforts by Ph.D candidates to revive de la Mare’s reputation have depended on various strategies. Some have chosen to valorize a neglected branch of de la Mare’s work, arguing for a reconsideration of his importance on the basis of this “new” evidence. James Nerhood Degan, for example, argues that “the literary artistry [of the stories] equals or surpasses that of the poetry and novels” (abstract, The Short Fiction of Walter de la Mare, diss. U. Iowa, 1982). Others, like Mary Kaiser Loges, have tried to reposition de la Mare in terms of the debate over Modernist versus traditionalist writers: “de la Mare is a fully Modernist poet... [whose] work published in Georgian Poetry exhibits the irony, self-consciousness and

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"Thus those who, by temperament love the form, are not prepared to understand the depth, and those who would be able to understand the depth are baffled by the form and are alienated" (Luce Bonnerot 18).
Notes to Chapter 1: Pursuing Enigma

1 Theresa Whistler, *Imagination of the Heart: The Life of Walter de la Mare* (London: Duckworth, 1993) 3n. Whistler does not give a date for this change of spelling, noting only that de la Mare adopted the original spelling "as soon as he grew up."

2 Whistler 9.


5 Matthew Arnold, "Dover Beach."

6 Walter de la Mare, letter to Elfida Ingpen, 24 November 1894, qtd. in Whistler, 65.


8 Oscar Wilde may have also provided de la Mare with an important precedent, since his first published works were the fairy tales and ghost stories of *The Happy Prince* (1888) and of *Lord Arthur Saville's Crime* (1891).

9 Kent xvi.


11 Briggs 14.


13 Briggs 17.

14 De la Mare may well have derived the coincidence from Thomas Hardy's *A Pair of Blue Eyes* (1873), in which two former lovers of Elfride Swancourt's, travelling to her funeral, end up on the same train, along with her coffin.

15 Admittedly, in his story *A Recluse*, published in *On the Edge* (1930), de la Mare used ghostly figures, though he never simply employed the word.


17 Gross 203.

18 Walter de la Mare, letter to Elfrida Ingpen, qtd. in Whistler 72.

19 From an examination of de la Mare's letters of the time, Whistler concludes that de la Mare was quite self-conscious about the need for a degree of realism in his work: "De la Mare's attempts at 'life blood and bone'—at what he said Kipling had and Pater lacked—at the moment resulted mainly in portraits of motiveless villainy, like the random evils of a bad dream: stark and rather morbid extravaganzas" (73).

20 Whistler has examined the manuscript of *The Master*, which remains in the possession of the de la Mare family, and describes it thus: "The narrator is a young decadent eccentric, living in picturesque disarray in a wharfside warehouse, while squandering an inheritance. He sits naked over his charcoal stove, studying works of magic and metaphysics, or he plunges
out for adventure into a London of vice-haunted strangeness and gloom, a city of sailormen, vagabonds, aesthetes and ascetics, where absinthe is so much in evidence one might suppose it to be Rimbaud's Paris – did not the complete absence of sexual vice indicate a de la Mare district. The Master himself is a mysterious amoral being, possessed of secret powers, a kind of Nineties Prospero with a grotesque servant called Fat Baal, for Caliban. The studies into which the Master initiates the hero centre round the preoccupation of the Symbolists, the correspondence of the senses" (75-76). Whistler also notes that certain descriptions within the novel correspond very closely with Yeats' descriptions of W. T. Horton's drawings, so much so "that de la Mare's whole story must have its origins in his friendship with Horton" (76).

21 Whistler notes that a letter of rejection from James Payn, editor of the Cornhill, refers to an unnamed de la Mare submission as a fragment of a larger work. The Master was the only longer work de la Mare was writing at the time (73).

22 Whistler 72.

23 Rpt. in Walter de la Mare, Short Stories 1895-1926, ed. Giles de la Mare (London: Giles de la Mare publishers, 1996) 407-413.


25 Whistler notes that de la Mare received a £20 cheque from Strachey for “A Mote” and “The Village of Old Age” (79).

26 Qtd. in Whistler 78.

27 Cornhill Magazine, August 1896. Rpt. in Walter de la Mare, Short Stories 1895-1926 413-422.

28 Whistler notes that the idea for this story may well have been derived from an account in Cesare Lombroso’s The Man of Genius (70).

29 Walter de la Mare, letter to Elfrida Ingpen, qtd. in Whistler 77.

30 Cornhill Magazine, April 1897, rpt. in Walter de la Mare, Short Stories 1895-1926 429-439.

31 The Burning Glass and Other Poems (London: Faber & Faber, 1945) 19.


33 Whistler 80, 81. The correspondence associated with de la Mare’s early attempts to publish remain in the hands of the de la Mare family.

34 Walter de la Mare, letter to Elfrida Ingpen, n.d. but probably late 1895, qtd. in Whistler 78.

35 Whistler 83.

36 Whistler 84-85.


38 De la Mare changed the title to “Sleepyhead” for the 1916 edition of Songs of Childhood.

39 “The Hesperides” (1832).

40 Letter to Ella Coltman, [July 1909], qtd. in Whistler 152.
Isaac Watts, *Divine Songs Attempted in Easy Language for the Use of Children* (1715).

"The Buckle," *Songs of Childhood* 8.


"North-West Passage," *A Child's Garden of Verses* 51.


*Songs of Childhood* 37.

*Songs of Childhood* 75.

*Songs of Childhood* 6. A corrected ts. of this poem is included in the papers connected with *Peacock Pie* in the de la Mare papers at the Bodleian Library. It is unclear if this is part of the original ts. for *Songs of Childhood* that Andrew Lang corrected or whether it represents a later (carelessly typed) version, for it is entitled "Partary," and that word appears throughout, corrected to "Tartary."

*A Child's Garden of Verses* 60-61.

Whistler 93.

Whistler 95.

Whistler 97.


Walter de la Mare, letter to J. B. Pinker, 18 October 1901, qtd. in Whistler 97.

C. Longman, letter to J. B. Pinker, qtd. in Pinker, letter to de la Mare, qtd. in Whistler 99. No dates given for either letter.

The full title of this painting is "Under the Dock Leaves: An Autumnal Evening's Dream," and it is dated 1878. It is an accomplished watercolour and unusual, for Doyle, in the nature of the fairies. Rather than his usual elfish or impish figures, these are winged women who glide hand-in-hand in a long chain under the dock leaves, their dresses floating out behind. The painting is now in the collection of the British Museum. A colour reproduction appears in *Victorian Fairy Painting* 134.

Gross 132.

Lang's suggestions are marked in pencil on the ts. of *Songs of Childhood*, de la Mare papers, Bodleian Library, Oxford.

For instance, in "Haunted," the fourth stanza begins with "Moss and lichen the lone stones greened" in ts., the first few words of which were subsequently inverted to "Lichen and moss . . ." (ts. of *Songs of Childhood*, de la Mare papers, Bodleian Library, Oxford).

"The Dwarf," ts. of *Songs of Childhood*, de la Mare papers, Bodleian Library, Oxford.
The ts. of Songs of Childhood (de la Mare papers, Bodleian Library, Oxford) also reveals some last minute changes, probably de la Mare's own second thoughts rather than Lang's suggestions. He changed some titles, making them more evocative: "The Raven's Grave" became "The Raven's Tomb"; and "The Three Dwarfs" was retitled "The Isle of Lone." And to the ts., he added a number of poems in ms., presumably the most recent fruits of his labour: "Alulvan"; "Down Adown Derry"; "The Supper"; and an "Envoy." He had the opportunity to add these since, as the page-proofs show (de la Mare papers, Bodleian Library, Oxford), the book was originally to be published late in 1901, probably in time to catch the Christmas market, but was held up for some reason. Those proofs show, too, that no captivating title had yet been found. The collection was simply called "Children's Poems." It was apparently Charles Longman who hit on Songs of Childhood as the perfect title (Whistler 100).

Whistler 98
Gross 136-137.
Lang 479.
Whistler 108, 115.

During his lifetime, it was included, with only the slightest deviation from the original Horn Book version, in numerous collections: Story and Rhyme (1921); the collection of stories entitled The Riddle (1923); Stories, Essays and Poems (1938); The Magic Jacket and Other Stories (1943); Collected Stories for Children (1947); and The Collected Tales of Walter de la Mare (1950). And it has been included in most collections of his stories that have been published since his death in 1956.

Walter de la Mare, "The Riddle," Monthly Review, February 1903, 156-160. Rpt. in Walter de la Mare, Short Stories 1895-1926 159-162. I have quoted here from the latter source.

The idea of children living in the care or coming under the guidance of an aged woman who possesses strange wisdom is, of course, a staple of the fairy tale tradition. Marina Warner argues that such figures are an inscription, in the literary versions, of the original tellers of the oral folk tales (From the Beast to the Blonde: On Fairy Tales and Their Tellers [London: Chatto & Windus, 1994]). One may well ask why the original teller of the oral tale has to be preserved in the written form. In answering this, Warner cites Karl Capek's idea that fairy stories are defined by their origin and function, rather than their subject matter (Warner 17). They are tales told within a circle of listeners. Thus, the literary fairytale might include a frame story, like that of Arabian Nights, where the situation of the woman storyteller and her listeners is explicitly identified and supplies the rationale for the telling of the tales. These scenes act as thresholds across which the reader passes to enter the strange worlds of the tales themselves. Original nineteenth-century fairy tales like those of George Macdonald contain multiple storytelling frames or thresholds of this kind: the need for them may mark the growing skepticism of the Victorian audience towards folk tales and the literary genres derived from them. Henry James' The Turn of the Screw includes three levels of narrative framing around the original experience of the governess with the ghosts. Each level or threshold marks a stage in the suspension of disbelief as the reader "regresses" from rationalistic skepticism to childish credulity in fantastic fictions.

De la Mare's use of aged figures of wisdom and of the kinds of storytelling techniques traditionally ascribed to the old woman may have seemed more and more anachronistic as the nineteenth-century gave way to the twentieth. Certainly, Max Beerbohm focused on this
aspect of de la Mare and his work when he created the caricature, “Mr. Walter de la Mare gaining inspiration for an eerie and lovely story” (Max Beerbohm, Observations [London: William Heinemann, 1925] plate 3). In this illustration, we are given a flat-on view of a living room fireplace, symmetrically arranged pictures on the walls and candles on the mantelpiece. On the right, de la Mare sits attentively on a footstool, opposite an old lady in an armchair, knitting, bespectacled, respectable, a canary in a cage on the table beside her. De la Mare’s knees are drawn up, his elbows on his thighs, his fists under his chin, a look of studious concentration on his face as he attends to the nonchalant old woman. The humour of the picture derives not just from the varied attitudes of the character, but from the fact that the aged woman here seems more the epitome of middle-class respectability than fantastic storyteller.

72 Whistler 91.

73 Walter de la Mare, letter to Roger Ingpen, 22 December 1899, qtd. in Whistler 91-92.

74 Throughout this discussion of the help that Henry Newbolt offered to de la Mare in the early years of the century, I have relied on Theresa Whistler’s account, since she has had access to the correspondence between the two men that remains in the possession of the de la Mare family.

75 Walter de la Mare, [letter] to Henry Newbolt, qtd. in Whistler 109.


77 “The Village of Old Age” was the second of de la Mare’s stories to appear in the Cornhill, September 1896. It was also the first of his stories to be published in the United States, in the New York Evening Post, September 1896.

78 Qtd. in Forrest Reid, Walter de la Mare: A Critical Study (London: Faber & Faber, 1929) 53-54.

79 Whistler notes that a review by Francis Thompson appeared in Academy, another appeared in the Times Literary Supplement, and a third, by Newbolt, came out in the Monthly Review (115).

80 Whistler 115.

81 Walter de la Mare, letter to Roger Ingpen, 15 June 1903, qtd. in Whistler 110.

82 When de la Mare published his first collected Poems 1901 to 1918 (2 vols., London: Constable, 1920), he put the poems into sections, using several of the headings from the Monthly Review: “Lyrical Poems”; “Descriptive Pieces”; “Characters from Shakespeare”; “Sonnets”; and “Memories of Childhood.”

83 Walter de la Mare, Complete Poems, ed. Richard de la Mare (London: Faber & Faber, 1969) 59.

84 Complete Poems 59

85 Complete Poems 68.

86 Most of the best poems from this volume appear in the sections “Lyrical Poems” and “Memories of Childhood” in the 1920 Collected Poems.

87 Complete Poems 63.
Notes to Chapter 1: Pursuing Enigma


90 *Complete Poems* 92.

91 “Sorcery,” *Complete Poems* 62. Kenneth Grahame used Pan to similar purpose in *The Wind in the Willows* (1908), where the missing otter child is discovered sleeping at the feet of Pan.

92 *Complete Poems* 97.

93 *Complete Poems* 70.


95 Henry Newbolt, letter to Walter de la Mare, 4 July 1908, qtd. in Whistler 138.

96 Whistler 146.

97 Walter de la Mare, letter to Ella Coltman, October 1908, qtd. in Whistler 143.

98 Forrest Reid, *Walter de la Mare: A Critical Study* 128.

99 W. B. Yeats, introduction, *The Oxford Book of Modern Verse 1892-1935*, ed. Yeats (London: Oxford University Press, 1936) xvii. Ironically from our point of view in the post-Modern, Yeats felt that this was a positive strategy on the part of these poets, one that would ensure that “their fame will increase with time.”
Notes to Chapter 2: The Secret of the Memorable


3 Walter de la Mare, preface, *Private View*, xii.

4 Whistler quotes de la Mare as saying that his salary was £143 in November of 1905 (119). And she notes that de la Mare received a raise of £13 in August of 1908, just a month before he resigned (136).

5 Whistler notes that “Newbolt dispensed the final fifteen pounds of the Bounty in July 1910” (169).

6 Henry Newbolt, letter to Walter de la Mare, 7 April 1909, qtd. in Whistler 159.


8 The fees paid to de la Mare for his reviewing work for the *TLS* have been difficult to determine precisely. Nicholas Mays, the current deputy archivist at News International plc, reports that fees were paid based on column measurements rather than word counts. In 1909, de la Mare seems to have been paid just over £2 for a full column. On the other hand, a front-page review from that year, measuring 2 13/16 columns, earned him £6.11.3, instead of the £4.11.2 that the column measurement would justify.

9 Walter de la Mare, letter to J. B. Pinker, 9 June 1909, qtd. in Whistler 159.


11 In calculating this figure, I have counted omnibus articles as one review. It is worth noting, too, that there are some differences between the *TLS* database and Wagenknecht’s bibliography. I found the following differences in listings for the period from 1908 to the end of 1913.

For the edition of 27 October 1910, Wagenknecht lists,


The *TLS* database cites,

“People and Questions,” rev. of *People and Questions*, by G. S. Street, 402.

For the edition of 8 May 1913, Wagenknecht lists,


The *TLS* database cites,

“Come Unto These Yellow Sands,” rev. of *The Lore of Proserpine*, by Maurice Hewlett, 198.

For the edition of 13 November 1913, Wagenknecht lists,

“All Men Are Ghosts,” rev. of *All Men Are Ghosts*, by L. P. Jacks, 530.
The *TLS* database cites,


Also, the *TLS* lists no contribution by de la Mare on 7 August 1913, though Wagenknecht gives the following contribution for that date:


When, late in his life, de la Mare himself was faced with the task of editing his newspaper and journal articles down into a manageable and coherent volume, published as *Private View*, he found the task beyond him, mainly because of the sheer volume of his writing for the *TLS*, the *Saturday Westminster Gazette*, and the *Edinburgh Review*. Indeed, it is likely that de la Mare had forgotten the full extent of his contributions: for the purposes of compiling the book, Bruce Richmond supplied him with a list of those to the *TLS* that seems to have been as incomplete as Wagenknecht’s bibliography. Even so, faced with a “quarter of a million words,” de la Mare was happy to delegate the task to a willing friend, Alan Pringle, who, de la Mare claims, selected and arranged the material for the book (preface, *Private View* xi).

12 Whistler 189.

13 This number for de la Mare’s contributions to the *Saturday Westminster Gazette* is a minimum, established by counting those that de la Mare clipped and collected. These clippings are now in the collection of his papers at the Bodleian Library, Oxford. Note that page references and, in some cases, exact dates of appearance are not known.

14 William Heinemann, letter to Walter de la Mare, 10 October 1911, de la Mare papers, Bodleian Library, Oxford.

15 Whistler 189-190.


Despite the differences between the two writers, Lawrence’s letters suggest that he counted on de la Mare as a kind of literary agent in the years 1912-1913, while he himself was out of the country, and that he trusted de la Mare’s judgment. When de la Mare approached the *Saturday Westminster Gazette* with Lawrence’s poems, Lawrence wrote to him with some suggestions for revision: “If you don’t like these suggestions, and if you can think of anything better, do put it in. There’s no need to consult me” (19 April 1912, *The Letters of D. H. Lawrence, Vol. 1*, 385). Lawrence was apparently desperate for cash at the time, for he was certainly aware of a radical difference in their sensibilities. He wrote to de la Mare à propos of *Love Poems*: “Do you hate this formless poetry? It seems to me so truthful. I suppose you despise it” ([16 May 1912], *The Letters of D. H. Lawrence, Vol. 1*, 406). Admittedly, after *Love Poems* had been accepted and published by Edward Garnett, Lawrence seems to have lost faith in de la Mare, writing to Garnett: “De la Mare in his choice only wanted to please the exquisite folk” (3 March 1913, *The Letters of D. H. Lawrence, Vol. 1*, 522). De la Mare subsequently reviewed Lawrence’s *Love Poems* for the *Times Literary Supplement*, 13 March 1913.

18 Walter de la Mare, letter to Naomi Royde-Smith, 17 February 1912, qtd. in Whistler 191.
Even though Constable had agreed to publish *Peacock Pie* and *The Listeners*, this arrangement had only been reached through the influence of Henry Newbolt, after Methuen and Arnold had refused both books (Whistler 169, 189).


Whistler 79.

Walter de la Mare, “Some Threepenny Bits,” rev. of *Some Threepenny Bits*, TLS, 24 Sept. 1908, 307. In the preface to *Private View*, de la Mare claims that a review of *The Potters of Tadcaster* was his first review to appear in the TLS, on 1 October 1908. The TLS database, however, lists this earlier review, and the piece certainly bears his characteristic style and concern.

Edward Wagenknecht’s puzzlement over why de la Mare would be asked to review books about golf and the development of artillery is a result of a definite misidentification of de la Mare’s contributions to the TLS in the first case, and a probable misidentification in the second. See Edward Wagenknecht, “Walter de la Mare, Book Reviewer,” *Boston University Studies in English*, 1 (1955-1956): 211-236.

[Walter de la Mare], “Facts and the Poet,” rev. of *Interflow*, by Geoffrey Faber, TLS, 9 Sept. 1915, 301.

[Walter de la Mare], “Scenes and Portraits,” rev. of *Scenes and Portraits*, by Frederic Manning, TLS, 27 May 1909, 198.


As various psychologists have pointed out, in their earliest drawings, children use symbols rather than attempting to delineate their subject in “realistic” terms.

Jung’s *Psychology of the Unconscious* appeared in English in 1916. But even later, de la Mare never made explicit reference to him or to his ideas, not even in his 1939 anthology *Behold, This Dreamer*. The idea of the archetypes as channels of our psyche along which our psychic energy flows with the most vitality, since these channels represent the human condition in a more absolute way than the individual’s singular experience, is clearly echoed again and again in de la Mare’s elaboration of the relative importance of the symbolic and the actual.

De la Mare’s work would probably respond well to archetypal criticism, as a few lines from “The Imagination’s Pride” might indicate: “Sure shelter is thy heart. It once had rest | Where founts miraculous thy lips endewed, | Yet nought loomed further than thy mother’s breast” (*Complete Poems* 243).


“The Perfect Critic” 7


See Chapter 5, “The Vast Wreckage of Faiths.”


36 “Swift’s Poems.”


38 De la Mare also dismissed Pope’s poetry, but for slightly different reasons. When F. C. Hodgson tried “to prove Pope a true poet” and excused his “lack of a true eye for nature” on the grounds that invalids cannot spend much time outdoors, de la Mare countered: “‘Fancy, grace, wit, lightness’ no one will deny Pope. But none of these, nor all of them together, will necessarily lift exquisite verse into unquestionable poetry” (“Sweete Themmes,” rev. of *Thames-Side in the Past: Sketches of Its Literature and Society*, by F. C. Hodgson, *TLS*, 6 March 1913, 99).


41 Walter de la Mare, “Physic” 51. De la Mare has often been accused of avoiding or escaping from the conditions of life as it is actually lived in the twentieth century. This passage is one of the few in his work in which modern technologies feature, and also offers an explanation for his dislike of them. Undoubtedly, de la Mare viewed most modern conveniences, like electricity, as obscuring rather than clarifying the larger sense we should have of life.


47 “The Lesson of the Masters” 9.


49 “The Lesson of the Masters” 7.

50 “Tchekov’s Letters” 17.

Notes to Chapter 2: The Secret of the Memorable

Furniss Centenary Edition de Luxe of the Works of Thackeray, TLS, 29 June 1911, rpt. in Private View 43.

52 Walter de la Mare, "After the Wessex Edition," rev. of A Changed Man, by Thomas Hardy, Saturday Westminster Gazette, 1 Nov. 1913, rpt. in Private View 32.

53 "After the Wessex Edition" 33.

54 "After the Wessex Edition" 33.


56 De la Mare wrote poems throughout his life that express this possibility of discovering or rediscovering the language that will transform the world. Perhaps one of the most succinct is "Incantation" from the volume Memory and Other Poems (1938):

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 ruinous 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.

But to be precise — and de la Mare himself was precise about this throughout his life — the transformation occurs behind or after language, in the silences that follow "when its accents cease."


58 While Come Hither represents gleanings from the attic in the house of literature that would appeal to a youthful mind, by no means is it an anthology of children's verse. Nearly all of the poems included were written for an adult audience, and they range in period from Geoffrey Chaucer (given in the original Middle English) to Robert Graves. And the book's final section, "About and Roundabout," provides notes and anecdotes about many of the poems included while maintaining the fiction that these are the poems collected by Simon in Mr. Nahum's round tower. (Perhaps as a result of the seriousness with which Come Hither approaches its youthful audience, it remained a very popular anthology for fifty years.)


60 "The Dynasts" 27.

61 "The Lesson of the Masters" 10.

62 Corrected ts. of article for Film Scenario Magazine, headed "Hill House, Taplow," no date, but probably 1934, de la Mare papers, Bodleian Library, Oxford. Note that no record for a periodical entitled Film Scenario Magazine appears in either the British Library Catalogue or National Union Catalogue. In this article, de la Mare also offered a list of his favourite films: Mädchen in Uniform; Sous les Toits de Paris; Shiraz; and the two Chaplin films The Kid and The Gold Rush.
Given his allegiance to literature and his aversion to facts, it is perhaps surprising that de la Mare was sympathetic to the movies. Some aspects of photographic media were clearly detrimental to his imagination and he had noted that “cinematography is the handiwork of an agent far too callously truthful even in its wildest effrontery of deception to be human” (“Portraits and Sketches,” rpt. in Private View, 218). When he collaborated with the Cadbys on A Child’s Day, he produced some of the weakest of all his poetry. But the Cadbys’ photographs revealed none of those qualities that de la Mare found so compelling in the child’s world, and he was forced to follow their lead with his poems, which thereby became mere captions.

63 Walter de la Mare, “After the Wessex Edition,” rev. of A Changed Man, by Thomas Hardy, Saturday Westminster Gazette, 1 Nov. 1913, rpt. in Private View 30.

64 Corrected ts. of article for Film Scenario Magazine.

65 Corrected ts. of article for Film Scenario Magazine.

66 [Walter de la Mare], “‘Helen Redeemed’ and ‘Love Poems,’” rev. of Helen Redeemed and Other Poems, by Maurice Hewlett, and rev. of Love Poems and Others, by D. H. Lawrence, TLS, 13 March 1913, 108.


In calling this conflict between egotism and universalism a “Nietzschean paradox,” I am drawing on that passage in The Birth of Tragedy where Nietzsche speaks of the particular power of the lyrical poet: “the lyrical poet . . . himself becomes his images, his images are objectified versions of himself. Being the active center of that world he may boldly speak in the first person, only his ‘I’ is not that of the actual waking man, but the ‘I’ dwelling, truly and eternally in the ground of being. It is through the reflections of that ‘I’ that the lyric poet beholds the ground of being” (trans. Francis Golffing [Garden City, NY: Doubleday Anchor, 1956] 39).

68 [Walter de la Mare], “An Easter Anthology,” rev. of An Easter Anthology, ed. William Knight, TLS, 4 April 1912, 134.

69 “An Easter Anthology” 134.


71 “Tchekov’s Letters” 14.

72 [Walter de la Mare], “Stevenson’s Letters,” rev. of The Letters of Robert Louis Stevenson, ed. Sidney Colvin, TLS, 8 June 1911, 218.

73 “Stevenson’s Letters” 218.

74 [Walter de la Mare], “Dreams,” rev. of The World of Dreams, by Havelock Ellis, TLS, 30 March 1911, 127.

75 [Walter de la Mare], “A Book of Dreams,” rev. of A Dreamer’s Tales, by Lord Dunsany, TLS, 29 Sept. 1910, 347.

76 “Dreams.”
Notes to Chapter 2: The Secret of the Memorable


78 “A Book of Dreams.”

79 “Dreams.”

80 “Dreams.”


82 W. H. Auden, introduction, A Choice of de la Mare’s Verse 18.

83 [Walter de la Mare], “Rest and Unrest,” rev. of Rest and Unrest, by Edward Thomas, TLS, 10 March 1910, 82.

84 [Walter de la Mare], “The Twymans,” rev. of The Twymans, by Henry Newbolt, TLS, 5 Oct. 1911, 368.

85 “Rest and Unrest.”

86 [Walter de la Mare], “Semper Admirari,” rev. of I Wonder: Essays for the Young People, by “the author of Confessio Medici,” TLS, 12 January 1911, 12.

87 [Walter de la Mare], “Mr. Cunningham Graham’s Short Stories,” rev. of Charity, by Cunningham Graham, TLS, 9 May 1912, 191.


89 Walter de la Mare, Rupert Brooke and the Intellectual Imagination (London, Sidgwick and Jackson, 1919).

90 Rupert Brooke and the Intellectual Imagination 11. Although de la Mare says nothing about a “girlish” imagination, it seems that he uses the figure of the boy metaphorically, to stand for the explorative stage of youth. He was to insist on the particular importance of the feminine sensibility in his review of Edward Thomas’ Feminine Influences on the Poets (“Women and Poetry,” TLS, 1 Dec. 1910, 478), echoing therein Jung’s notion of the codependence of the animus and anima.


92 Rupert Brooke and the Intellectual Imagination 17.


95 [Walter de la Mare], “Tennyson,” TLS, 5 Aug. 1909, 281.


97 “‘Helen Redeemed’ and ‘Love Poems.’”

98 “‘Helen Redeemed’ and ‘Love Poems.’”
99 [Walter de la Mare], “The Dynasts,” rev. of The Dynasts, by Thomas Hardy, Saturday Westminster Gazette, 1910, rpt. in Private View, 23.

100 “Some Recent Verse.”

101 [Walter de la Mare], “Essays and Reviews,” rev. of Attitudes and Avowals, by Richard Le Gallienne, TLS, 9 March 1911, 94.

102 [Walter de la Mare], “A Victorian Georgian,” rev. of The Sea is Kind, by T. Sturge Moore, TLS, 30 April 1914, 208.

103 “A Victorian Georgian.”


105 “An Aftermath.”

106 [Walter de la Mare], “Demeter’s Daughter,” rev. of Demeter’s Daughter, by Eden Phillpotts, TLS, 2 Feb. 1911, 45.

107 [Walter de la Mare], “Edward Thomas,” rev. of An Annual of Poetry, Saturday Westminster Gazette, 28 April 1917.

108 [Walter de la Mare], “Mr. Stebbing’s New Essays,” rev. of Truths and Truisms, Part II, by Mr. Stebbing, TLS, 26 Sept. 1912, 384.


110 [Walter de la Mare], “Mr. Pound’s ‘Canzoni,’” rev. of Canzoni, by Ezra Pound, Saturday Westminster Gazette, 19 July 1911.

111 Whistler 211.

112 [Walter de la Mare], “A Hindu Play,” rev. of The Toy Cart, by Arthur Symons, TLS, 3 July 1919, 361.


119 [Walter de la Mare], “Mr. Rockefeller’s Reminiscences,” rev. of Random Reminiscences of Men and Events, by John D. Rockefeller, TLS, 3 June 1909, 205.

“A Friar Observant.”


[Walter de la Mare], “The Street of To-Day,” rev. of *The Street of To-Day*, by John Masefield, 30 March 1911, 128.

[Walter de la Mare], “Mr. Masefield’s New Poems,” rev. of *Philip the King and Other Poems*, by John Masefield, *TLS*, 1 Oct. 1914, 441.


“Clayhanger.”


Preface, *Private View*.

“Mr. Cunninghame Graham’s Short Stories.”

Notes to Chapter 3: Dreams into Gold

1 Rupert Brooke and the Intellectual Imagination 13.
4 [Walter de la Mare], “Hocken and Hunken,” rev. of Hocken and Hunken, by Sir Arthur Quiller-Couch, TLS, 7 Nov. 1912, 496.
5 Winston Churchill wrote Brooke’s obituary in the Times, and Brooke’s sonnet “The Soldier” was read in his memory in St. Paul’s Cathedral.
6 Walter de la Mare, foreword, Collected Poems, by Edward Thomas (London: Faber & Faber, 1979) viii.
7 Only one review for 1914 appears in the box of clippings of his Saturday Westminster Gazette articles, Bodleian Library, Oxford: “The Stars in Their Courses,” 10 January 1914.
8 Whistler 246.
9 These figures are given in de la Mare’s income tax returns for the years 1919 to 1922, 1921 to 1924, and 1923 to 1926, and represent the average for each of those periods. “Net income” refers to income after allowable expenses. De la Mare papers, Bodleian Library, Oxford.
10 I include in this figure only full-length books composed solely of de la Mare’s work, or of his work in collaboration with an artist or illustrator.
12 Emery 191.
13 Whistler 230-231.
14 I use the term “enduring” in an entirely empirical way to designate the poetry that remains in print in volumes or the individual poems that are most frequently reproduced in anthologies.
15 From an advertisement at the back of Georgian Poetry, 1913-1915 (1915; London: Poetry Bookshop 1918).
16 “The Three Friends” appeared in the Saturday Westminster Gazette on 19 April 1913; “The Vats” appeared in the same newspaper on 16 June 1917. See the “Chronological List of Earliest Known Printed Versions” of de la Mare’s stories in the appendix to Walter de la Mare: Short Stories 1895-1926.
18 Qtd. in Ross 15.
19 Walter de la Mare: A Critical Study (London: Faber & Faber, 1929) 149.
20 The poems are “Old Susan” (10), “Old Ben” (11-12), “Miss Loo” (13), “The Tailor” (14), and “Martha” (15-16). Page references given here are to the first Faber edition of The Listeners and Other Poems (London: Faber & Faber, 1942).
21 Peacock Pie (London: Constable, 1913) 50.
22 Peacock Pie 121.
23 Curiously, the size and appearance of the books reinforced this idea. Both books were published by Constable & Company. *The Listeners and Other Poems* was the first of the two to appear, in May of 1912. It was a diminutive (approx. 41/2 X 51/2 inches) though not unattractive volume which might easily be picked up by a child. De la Mare was, however, disappointed with the book’s physical appearance, complaining that it looked like “a provincial Sunday school prize” (qtd. in Whistler 201). *Peacock Pie: A Book of Rhymes* did not appear until midsummer 1913 and was a larger volume (approx. 6 X 8 inches) with a delightful peacock blue cover and a golden peacock feather embossed along with its title. There was, then, something more whimsical about this second book which accorded with how de la Mare had sifted out the poems for it: “He had selected the rhymes directed at childhood, centered right inside a child’s ‘Now’; nearly all those with a remoter, sadder note he had already put into *The Listeners*” (Whistler 213).

24 Whistler 169, 189.

25 A. M. J. Methuen, letter to J. B. Pinker, 4 August 1910, de la Mare papers, Bodleian Library, Oxford.


29 Ross 100.


31 Reeves xii.

32 Reeves xiii.

33 Reeves xiii.

34 But see also note 28 above.

35 *Poetry Review*, I (1912): 499, qtd. in Ross 61. It was in the *Poetry Review*, in fact, that Pound’s famous “Prolegomena” and “Credo” first appeared and that those whom Pound labelled “Imagists” had their first hearing.

36 Joy Grant, *Harold Monro and the Poetry Bookshop* (London: Routledge & Kegan Paul, 1967) 2. Indeed, Monro stood to gain very little from publishing *Georgian Poetry*. Although the financial liability for publishing was entirely his, Grant claims that he was only compensated with a ten percent sales commission on the books he sold through the Poetry Bookshop, all profits from the book being equally divided amongst the contributors. Robert H. Ross, on the other hand, claims that profits were split in half between the Poetry Bookshop and the contributors. Marsh himself received no fee or commission for his editorial work.
Grant 43. Grant cites these approximate figures for poetry volumes published with the author paying expenses.

Fraser printed de la Mare’s poem “The Old Men” in this series in 1913 (2d. plain, 4d. coloured, 2/6 signed copies on Japanese vellum).

Harold Monro, letter to Constable & Co., 22 October 1913, de la Mare papers, Bodleian Library, Oxford.

Grant 80.

But by all accounts, despite the public acclaim, de la Mare read deplorably on such occasions. Newbolt tried to prepare de la Mare for both public speaking and poetry reading up in the “Ark” at Netherhampton, but was dismayed by de la Mare’s efforts:

By some strange chance he is the most prosaic reader I have ever heard: when he reads prose he is almost unintelligible, so illogical is his accenting, but when he reads poetry he reads in a cold and excessively logical accent, as if determined to reduce all to the tone of common day . . . After two attempts the lecture came out more clearly but the poetry will take much more coaching [Henry Newbolt, letter to Alice Hylton, 24 January 1914, qtd. in Whistler 227].

And when de la Mare came to perform before the public, he disappointed even his devotees. Rose Macaulay was “intoxicated by the poetry of Walter de la Mare, which had, she said, ‘a magical, sad, unearthly quality which no other poet, writing then or since, has approached’” (Emery 142). However, when she went to the bookshop specifically to hear him read his own work, she “had to admit that he did so deplorably” (Constance Babington Smith, Rose Macaulay [London: Collins, 1972] 66). His poor performance on these occasions may have been the result partly of the nature of his work, partly of the style of his own voice and character, since the frequent radio broadcasts of his later life were much more successful:

He read much better for the microphone than in a public hall; the resonance and variety of tone in his voice showed in their beauty when the voice need not be raised. For an instrument close to him he could ‘think aloud,’ as if in privacy, gaining by this an impromptu, intimate, throw-away’ delivery that lets the reader efface himself [Whistler 429].

Nor was de la Mare the only poet to suffer in the spotlight at the Poetry Bookshop. According to Eric Gillett, Rupert Brooke himself, trying to deliver his poetry through a bad cold, was told by a partially deaf lady in the front row, “Speak up, young man” (Qtd. in Grant 81).

Sometimes at these poetry readings, Monro and his wife themselves read from a wide range of authors to illustrate a specific theme, like new American poetry or the poetry of the 1890s; sometimes they read from a particular poet of the past, such as Shelley, Monro’s great favourite. One reading, in particular, demonstrated Monro’s sensitivity to the various strands of poetry that had emerged in the period from the turn of the century until after the war: “In a ‘reading according to three periods’ Bridges represents the earliest, Brooke, Flecker, Masefield, De la Mare, Lawrence and Sassoon the middle, and Huxley and Eliot (‘The Waste Land’) – with a glance back at Hopkins – the most recent phase of twentieth-century poetry” (Grant 84).

Grant cites this figure without reference (96). However, the same publication figure appears in an advertisement for Georgian Poetry 1911-1912 at the back of the 1918 reprint of Georgian Poetry 1913-1915.
Despite Monro's concern about "Georgianism," when he set up another poetry journal after the war, to take up where *Poetry and Drama* had left off, he salvaged some of the Georgians for it. The first number of *The Monthly Chapbook* (later *The Chapbook*), which appeared in July 1919, included de la Mare and W. H. Davies, along with H. D., Siegfried Sassoon, D. H. Lawrence, Aldous Huxley, and Herbert Read. And despite Monro's criticism of de la Mare's rhythms, the influence of de la Mare—both the simplicity of approach and the fairy themes—continued to make themselves felt in Monro's own poems.

Ross 115.

For instance, Ross reports that, in 1921, Monro received an order for one hundred copies of each of the first four *Georgian Poetry* volumes from the Indian Army Education Office (107).

The other poets who appeared in all five volumes of *Georgian Poetry* were W. H. Davies, John Drinkwater, Wilfred Wilson Gibson, and Harold Monro. It is worth noting that D. H. Lawrence appeared in four of the volumes. Although Monro and Marsh abandoned their anthology in 1922 as the *Georgians* were eclipsed by the gathering strength of Eliot and Pound's style of modernism, J. C. Squire continued to publish Georgians and Georgian poetry in his literary journal, *The London Mercury*, until 1934. Monro started *The Monthly Chapbook* in July 1919 and salvaged what he thought were the best poets from the Georgian camp.

Other anthologies, no doubt inspired by the success of *Georgian Poetry*, appeared soon after the first volume. Two volumes of *New Numbers* appeared, in 1914 and 1917, and included poetry by W. W. Gibson, Rupert Brooke, Lascelles Abercrombie, and John Drinkwater. *An Annual of New Poetry* first appeared in 1917 and included Bottomley, Abercrombie, R. C. Trevelyan, W. H. Davies, John Drinkwater, W. W. Gibson, T. Sturge Moore, and Robert Frost, though the largest section was made up of 18 poems by "Edward Eastaway" (Edward Thomas).

In 1922, the year of the demise of *Georgian Poetry*, another anthology appeared which was to have a long run. This was the *Best Poems* series, edited by Thomas Moult and published by Jonathan Cape. Moult attempted to be more encyclopedic in his selection than Marsh had been, with the result that few poets were represented by more than a couple of poems per volume. But de la Mare was there, represented in five of the volumes that appeared every year, a testament to the anthology's popularity, between 1922 and 1943. Actually, de la Mare received more attention in the last three years of the anthology (1941-3) than he had in the previous 18 volumes. Poems published in the anthology were as follows: 1924 - "Epitaph"; 1933 - "Memory"; 1941 - "The Vision" and "The Storm"; 1942 - "To a Candle"; 1943 - "The Visitor."

Qtd. in Ross 206.


Ross 14.


Rupert Brooke, letter to Walter de la Mare, 20 November 1914, Rupert Brooke letters and postcards to de la Mare, 1913-14, Imperial War Museum, London.

On the other hand, de la Mare was not, at first, impressed by Brooke’s poetry. Naomi Royde-Smith had recommended Brooke’s early poems to him, but he had found these verses too polished for his own tastes. In any case, after meeting the man himself and publishing with him in the *Georgian Poetry* anthologies, de la Mare came to understand the peculiar nature of Brooke’s work and expounded on it publicly. His perceptive essay on Brooke, a lecture which was published in 1919 as *Rupert Brooke and the Intellectual Imagination*, is, as I have pointed out in the previous chapter, as important for the qualities it identifies in Brooke’s work as for the contrast it draws with his own.


This figure, which excludes American sales, is given in Christopher Hassall’s biography of Brooke (*Rupert Brooke* [London: Longmans, 1964]) and is qtd. in Whistler 253.

These figures appear as the averages de la Mare submitted on his income tax returns, the publication income for his own work representing British editions only. De la Mare papers, Bodleian Library, Oxford.

Again, these figures are derived from income tax returns, de la Mare papers, Bodleian Library, Oxford.

Whistler 253.

Qtd. in Read 247.

Sales of Brooke’s work rose even higher during WWII. Given the importance of his share of the royalties from Brooke’s work, de la Mare was greatly dismayed when, close to the end of that war, the publishers let Brooke’s titles go out of print. In the spring of 1945, de la Mare, as one of the executors of Brooke’s estate, had to write to Wilfrid Gibson to explain that Sidgwick & Jackson had let copies of all three of Brooke’s titles run out the previous May, and that the printers had not delivered new copies until January (30 April 1945, de la Mare papers, Bodleian Library, Oxford). Faber & Faber, where de la Mare’s son Richard was working, were keen to take over the publication of two of these titles, but de la Mare still felt obliged to Sidgwick & Jackson, as he wrote to his son: “they have tried to make good by advancing royalties from January 1 upto April 24. You will be interested to hear that they
have sold 1472 of COLLECTED POEMS, 7173 of COMPLETE POEMS and 7744 of TWENTY POEMS in these four months” (letter to Richard de la Mare, 30 April 1945, de la Mare papers, Bodleian Library, Oxford). Nor did demand cease with the end of the war. When Faber issued The Poetical Works of Rupert Brooke, edited by Geoffrey Keynes, in 1946, it sold 7900 copies by the end of the year.

Undoubtedly, de la Mare too benefitted from the increased consumption of poetry during the second war. Sales of his poetry volumes seem to have increased steadily throughout the war so that, in 1944, Faber sold 2172 copies of Collected Poems, 2874 of Collected Rhymes and Verses, 758 of The Listeners, 1714 of Motley, 829 of Memory, 717 of Songs of Childhood, 739 of Stuff and Nonsense, and more than 1800 copies of Peacock Pie; in addition, Constable sold 2259 copies of Come Hither in the same year. All of these figures represent at least a doubling of sales compared to the pre-war years. Thus, even though no single volume could hope to match the extraordinary sales for one of Brooke’s volumes, de la Mare had far more titles in print.

All of these figures are derived from royalty statements in the de la Mare papers, Bodleian Library, Oxford, and represent regular sales in Britain. Exact interpretation of changes in the sales figures during the war years is complicated by the fact that, in 1944, Faber & Faber took over publication of de la Mare’s poetry from Constable & Co., presumably along with stock of unsold copies. Amongst other things, this has made the sales figure for Peacock Pie somewhat uncertain.

69 Ross 145-6.

70 Walter de la Mare, foreword, Collected Poems, by Edward Thomas (London: Faber & Faber, 1979) viii.

71 Edward Thomas, letter to Walter de la Mare, 10 July 1907, MS. Engl. lett. c.376, Bodleian Library, Oxford.

72 Whistler 155.

73 Daily Chronicle, 14 August 1902.

74 Whistler claims that Thomas wrote to de la Mare in October 1906 asking for a few pieces from Poems for this anthology, and she cites a letter from Thomas to this effect. But when Thomas first contacted de la Mare about the anthology, it is clear that he had not yet seen Poems: “I thank you for your compliment & your kind permission to use poems from the ‘Songs of Childhood’ in my Anthology. I wish I could insert half the book – ‘Henry Brocken’ was a great joy to me. I only know these two & I should be grateful if you would let me know of any others out or to come” (letter to de la Mare, 18 August 1906, MS. Engl. lett. c.376, Bodleian Library, Oxford). Indeed, as Whistler’s quote reveals, de la Mare subsequently sent work from Poems for Thomas to consider, though Thomas complained about some of the mannerisms in the new work: “I only grumble at the ‘ev’n instead of ‘even’ and so on, especially as it did not seem to be needed by the rhythm” (qtd. in Whistler 126).


76 Edward Thomas, letter to Walter de la Mare, 8 June 1909, MS. Engl. lett. c.376, Bodleian Library, Oxford.

The connotation of intimacy in de la Mare’s use of the word “tryst” to describe their meeting is important, and he says that they talked with “the dams down.” In fact, as their friendship developed over the next year or more, Thomas made various revelations to de la Mare of his personal problems, including his infatuation with a very young woman, the
daughter of one of his neighbours. De la Mare, on the other hand, was nowhere near as forthcoming about his personal life, apparently maintaining one degree of distance even from Thomas: “some essential solitude, not willed, was one of the terms of his friendship” (Whistler 126).

77 Whistler 126.

78 Walter de la Mare, foreword, Collected Poems, by Edward Thomas (London: Faber & Faber, 1979) x.

79 Edward Thomas, letter to Walter de la Mare, 19 February 1908, Edward Thomas: Selected Letters 49-50.

80 Edward Thomas, letter to Helen Thomas, 20 August 1912, Edward Thomas: Selected Letters 76.

81 Edward Thomas, letter to Walter de la Mare, 8 June 1909, MS. Engl. lett. c.376, Bodleian Library, Oxford.


83 See Jan Marsh 96.

84 Edward Thomas, letter to Walter de la Mare, 4 April 1907, MS. Engl. lett. c.376, Bodleian Library, Oxford.

85 See Edward Thomas, letters to Walter de la Mare, 19 Sept. 1909 and 24 April 1910, MS. Engl. lett. c.376, Bodleian Library, Oxford.

86 Edward Thomas, letter to Walter de la Mare, 16 December 1907, MS. Engl. lett. c.376, Bodleian Library, Oxford.

87 Edward Thomas, letter to Walter de la Mare, 4 November 1908, MS. Engl. lett. c.376, Bodleian Library, Oxford.

88 Edward Thomas, letter to Walter de la Mare, 8 June 1909, MS. Engl. lett. c.376, Bodleian Library, Oxford.

89 Edward Thomas, letter to Walter de la Mare, 8 June 1909, MS. Engl. lett. c.376, Bodleian Library, Oxford.

90 Edward Thomas, letter to Walter de la Mare, 18 October 1910, MS. Engl. lett. c.376, Bodleian Library, Oxford.

91 Edward Thomas, letter to Walter de la Mare, 18 October 1910, MS. Engl. lett. c.376, Bodleian Library, Oxford.

92 Edward Thomas, letter to Walter de la Mare, 28 October 1910, MS. Engl. lett. c.376, Bodleian Library, Oxford.

93 Edward Thomas, letter to Walter de la Mare, 24 November 1911, MS. Engl. lett. c.376, Bodleian Library, Oxford.

94 T. Seccombe, letter to Walter de la Mare, 24 November 1911, de la Mare papers, Bodleian Library, Oxford. What neither Thomas nor de la Mare knew was that Henry Newbolt, who was responsible for establishing the award, had pushed the selection committee to choose The Return: “It took all his tact and persuasion for the committee were divided, and even though in the end they agreed to vote unanimously for the de la Mare novel, Newbolt felt that none of the others were really enthusiastic” (Whistler 190). Thus, Newbolt and Thomas seem to have encouraged de la Mare in opposite directions. It was Newbolt, of course, who had first
insisted that de la Mare divide his work into groups aimed at child and adult readers, and who now favoured the adult novel over the children's romance. And yet Thomas, who seems to have been at least as sober a character as Newbolt in both life and letters, could see the children's work as the very core of de la Mare's genius.

95 Edward Thomas, letter to Walter de la Mare, 15 May 1912, MS. Engl. lett. c.376, Bodleian Library, Oxford.

96 Complete Poems 243.

97 Whistler 154.


102 Edward Thomas, letter to Walter de la Mare, [29 June 1913], MS. Engl. lett. c.376, Bodleian Library, Oxford.

103 Edward Thomas, letter to Walter de la Mare, [February or March 1908], Edward Thomas: Selected Letters 51.

104 Edward Thomas, letters to Walter de la Mare, 16 September 1909 and 19 September 1909, MS. Engl. lett. c.376, Bodleian Library, Oxford.

105 Edward Thomas, letter to Walter de la Mare, 3 January 1913, MS. Engl. lett. c.376, Bodleian Library, Oxford.

106 Edward Thomas, letter to Walter de la Mare, [n.d. but probably late December 1913], MS. Engl. lett. c.376, Bodleian Library, Oxford.


110 Qtd. in Farjeon 119.

111 Edward Thomas, letter to Walter de la Mare, 21 March 1915, MS. Engl. lett. c.376, Bodleian Library, Oxford. Jan Marsh states that Thomas sent out copies to several of his friends, including de la Mare, in April 1915 (126). Of course, Frost and Monro saw some of the poems in December 1914. The more recently published Selected Letters (ed. R. George Thomas) reveal that John Freeman and Edward Garnett had them earlier in March than de la Mare. The responses of John Freeman, Edward Garnett, Hudson, and Harry Hooton to Thomas' poems are acknowledged in Thomas' letters to them. But it is uncertain how de la Mare reacted to these first pieces. (Thomas' correspondence with de la Mare certainly abated considerably at this time.) We have only de la Mare's later testimonies of the importance of the man and his work.
Edward Thomas, letter to John Freeman, 8 March 1915, Edward Thomas: Selected Letters 106.


See Edward Thomas, letter to Walter de la Mare, 11 January 1912, MS. Engl. lett. c.376, Bodleian Library, Oxford.


Qtd. in Whistler 258.


Edward Thomas, letter to Elfrida de la Mare, 12 January 1917, MS. Engl. lett. c.376, Bodleian Library, Oxford.

Edward Thomas, letter to Walter de la Mare, 30 October 1914, MS. Engl. lett. c.376, Bodleian Library, Oxford.

Edward Thomas, letter to Walter de la Mare, 9 March 1917, Edward Thomas: Selected Letters 147.

Complete Poems 295-6.


Collected Poems 73.

Walter de la Mare, foreword, Collected Poems, by Edward Thomas, viii.


Geoffrey Faber, “Are Publishers Any Use?” Oxford University English Club, 15 February 1934, rpt. in A Publisher Speaking (London: Faber & Faber, 1934) 124.

The book may have been inspired by Kate Greenaway’s A Day in a Child’s Life.

W. M. Meredith, letter to Walter de la Mare, 3 February 1913, de la Mare papers, Bodleian Library, Oxford.

The three salvaged verses were “Lob Lie by the Fire,” “The World of Dream,” and “Sadly, O Sadly.”

See Otto Kyllmann, letter to Walter de la Mare, 12 August 1913, de la Mare papers, Bodleian Library, Oxford.
Notes to Chapter 3: Dreams into Gold

136 Otto Kyllmann, letter to Walter de la Mare, 28 August 1913, de la Mare papers, Bodleian Library, Oxford.

137 The fairy stories finally appeared in volume as Told Again (Oxford: Blackwell, 1927).

138 Otto Kyllmann, letter to Walter de la Mare, 15 June 1915, de la Mare papers, Bodleian Library, Oxford.

139 See Otto Kyllmann, letter to Walter de la Mare, 10 August 1915, de la Mare papers, Bodleian Library, Oxford.

140 See Walter de la Mare, letter to J. R. Pinker, 27 May 1940, de la Mare papers, Bodleian Library, Oxford.

141 Otto Kyllmann, letter to Walter de la Mare, 25 September 1915, de la Mare papers, Bodleian Library, Oxford.

142 Otto Kyllmann, letter to Walter de la Mare, 6 March 1915, de la Mare papers, Bodleian Library, Oxford.

143 Otto Kyllmann, letter to Walter de la Mare, 24 September 1917, de la Mare papers, Bodleian Library, Oxford.

144 W. Heinemann, letter to Walter de la Mare, 7 April 1919, de la Mare papers, Bodleian Library, Oxford.

145 Pawling [of W. Heinemann], letter to Walter de la Mare, 25 April 1919, de la Mare papers, Bodleian Library, Oxford.

146 Pawling [of W. Heinemann], letter to Walter de la Mare, 2 May 1919, de la Mare papers, Bodleian Library, Oxford.

147 W. Heinemann, letter to Walter de la Mare, 6 May 1919, de la Mare papers, Bodleian Library, Oxford.

148 Pinker’s royalty statement of 1924 to de la Mare lists £663.2s.4d for regular sales of Corne Hither, £305.1s. for special sales. De la Mare papers, Bodleian Library, Oxford.

149 Riding and Graves, A Pamphlet against Anthologies (Garden City: Doubleday, Doran & Co., 1928) 35.

150 Rev. of The Riddle and Other Tales, The Canadian Forum 4 (1924): 150. The separate Canadian edition was issued by Macmillan Co. of Canada, with the title, The Riddle and Other Tales. This is one of the sole instances of the issuing of a separate Canadian edition of a de la Mare title. Perhaps neither the British nor American publishers had distribution into Canada at the time. In any case, his popularity in 1923 must have been adequate to make the issuing of a Canadian edition worthwhile.


152 Harold Orel points out that The Bookman typically revealed the rather inbred character of the publishing industry (Popular Fiction in England, 1914-1918 [Lexington: University of Kentucky Press, 1992] 18). We should note, too, that this particular reviewer, R. Ellis Roberts, was relatively conservative. In 1934, he became Constable’s editor for the quarterly Life and Letters, and, though he “said he would maintain the journal’s innovative character, the two volumes for which he was responsible broke no new ground: he published works by W. B. Yeats, G. K. Chesterton, Clive Bell, and St. John Ervine” (Sondra Miley Cooney,

Notes to Chapter 4: A Reputation that Sells

1 Geoffrey Faber, letter to Richard de la Mare, 29 August 1928, de la Mare papers, Bodleian Library, Oxford.

2 Qtd. in Neil Corcoran, Seamus Heaney (London: Faber & Faber, 1986) 23.


4 In her biography, Theresa Whistler states that Richard de la Mare started at Faber & Gwyer in 1927. But Giles de la Mare, Richard's son, says that his father was appointed just a few weeks after T. S. Eliot (personal interview, 22 May 1997).

5 Giles de la Mare, who sits on the board of directors at Faber & Faber, asserts that the firm follows this collaborative practice to this day (personal interview, 22 May 1997).


8 Geoffrey Faber, “Are Publishers Any Use?” Oxford University English Club, 15 February 1934, rpt. in A Publisher Speaking 126.

9 Geoffrey Faber, “Book Trade Problems and Policy,” Barrett Street Trade School, 25 October 1933, rpt. in A Publisher Speaking 75.

10 Geoffrey Faber, “A Publisher Looks at Booksellers,” Society of Bookmen, 10 March 1931, rpt. in A Publisher Speaking (London: Faber & Faber, 1934) 38.

11 Faber, “A Publisher Looks at Booksellers” 35.

12 Faber, “A Publisher Looks at Booksellers” 22.

13 Faber, “A Publisher Looks at Booksellers” 28.

14 Faber, “Are Publishers Any Use?” 125.

15 Faber, “Are Publishers Any Use?” 129.

16 See Faber, “Book Trade Problems and Policy” 84-86.

17 “Frank Morley had suggested that since Eliot’s literary reputation was not at this period such that it commanded universal respect or admiration, Faber really wished to acquire his skills as a businessman and financier [Eliot having left Lloyd’s bank to join Faber & Gwyer]. But that can only be partly true: Faber really wanted to hire someone who had a certain reputation among the young and would as a result be able to attract promising new writers who would enhance the standing of the firm. Eliot also had experience as an editor and it was a combination of these qualities - businessman, editor and ‘talent scout’ - that made him perfectly qualified for such a job” (Ackroyd 151).

18 Ackroyd has noted how cagey Eliot was at recruiting talent and finding material to publish. Because of the nature of the material in which he was interested, he was in direct competition with other publishers, particularly the Hogarth Press. Eliot himself had an agreement with the Woolfs to publish The Waste Land, though he gave the book to Faber & Gwyer once he had joined the firm (Ackroyd 154). He also “poached” Herbert Read from the Woolfs (Ackroyd 153). He was slower to take on Auden, refusing his poems in 1927, but then
monitoring his development, publishing *Paid on Both Sides* in the *Criterion* in 1929 and *Poems* from Faber & Gwyer the next year (Ackroyd 183).

19 Ackroyd 183. Why were the reading public willing to accept Eliot as a guide into the difficult passages of modernist poetry? Simply put, Eliot himself was moving more and more towards the institutional centres of culture — publishing, the academy, and the Anglican church. At the same time as Eliot joined Faber & Faber, he was coming to prominence as a critic. In May 1925, the *Criterion*, of which he had been editor since its inception in 1922 (the first issue in October of that year included *The Waste Land*), became a monthly and Eliot’s place as editor was announced on the cover. And in 1926, Eliot delivered his lectures at Cambridge, “The Metaphysical Poets of the Seventeenth Century,” which were to confirm his role as an academic critic.

20 I derive this information from the list “Best Selling Books during December,” published in *The Publisher and Bookseller* in January each year. The poets named are those listed as having best-selling books of poetry in various parts of Britain in December of 1928, 1929, and 1930.

21 Books of poetry published by the firm in the years between 1925 and 1930 include the following:

Herbert Read, *Collected Poems, 1913-1925*. 1926

22 De la Mare’s *Ariel* poems were “Alone” (1927), “Self to Self” (1928), “A Snowdrop” (1929), “News” (1930), and “Lucy” (1931). De la Mare’s short story *Seaton’s Aunt* was also published in 1927 in a one-shilling edition with a wood-engraving by Blair Hughes-Stanton.

23 Richard de la Mare, letter to Walter de la Mare, 20 February 1931, de la Mare papers, Bodleian Library, Oxford.

24 Richard de la Mare, letter to Olive Jones, 15 October 1936, de la Mare papers, Bodleian Library, Oxford.

25 Walter de la Mare, letter to Richard de la Mare, 16 October 1936, de la Mare papers, Bodleian Library, Oxford.

26 Walter de la Mare, letter to Richard de la Mare, 8 December 1936, de la Mare papers, Bodleian Library, Oxford.

27 Richard de la Mare, letter to Walter de la Mare, 19 February 1937, de la Mare papers, Bodleian Library, Oxford.

28 Eliot had enjoyed similar benefits in the publishing of his own work by virtue of being an editor at Faber, as Ackroyd notes: “the new post meant that he had secured a home for his work where he could be free from the exigencies of editors and from that difficult combination of luck and perseverance which marks the ordinary course of a writer’s publishing career” (152).
29 Faber & Gwyer seem to have arranged to take over all of de la Mare's titles published by Selwyn and Blount. An advertisement on the back of the jacket for *Seven Short Stories* (Faber, 1931) lists *The Three Royal Monkeys, Ding Dong Bell*, and *The Riddle* as titles in print from Faber & Faber. In fact, only *The Riddle* was in print, *The Three Royal Monkeys* appearing in 1935 and *Ding Dong Bell* in 1936.

30 *Crossings* was performed as a charity concert for two nights in November 1925, at the Lyric Theatre, Hammersmith.

31 Whistler 349.

32 Whistler 349.

33 Joseph Anthony, letter to Walter de la Mare, 23 March 1928, de la Mare papers, Bodleian Library, Oxford.

34 Walter de la Mare, letter to Joseph Anthony, 9 July 1928, de la Mare papers, Bodleian Library, Oxford.

35 Joseph Anthony, letter to Walter de la Mare, 27 June 1928, de la Mare papers, Bodleian Library, Oxford.


37 Joseph Anthony, letter to Walter de la Mare, 19 March 1929, de la Mare papers, Bodleian Library, Oxford.

38 Geoffrey Faber, letter to Richard de la Mare, 29 August 1928, de la Mare papers, Bodleian Library, Oxford.

39 Geoffrey Faber, letter to Richard de la Mare, 29 August 1928, de la Mare papers, Bodleian Library, Oxford.

40 Geoffrey Faber, letter to Richard de la Mare, 29 August 1928, de la Mare papers, Bodleian Library, Oxford.

41 Walter de la Mare, letter to Richard de la Mare, 5 November 1928, de la Mare papers, Bodleian Library, Oxford.

42 Joseph Anthony, letter to Walter de la Mare, 23 February 1929, de la Mare papers, Bodleian Library, Oxford.

43 Walter de la Mare, letter to Joseph Anthony, 30 April 1929, de la Mare papers, Bodleian Library, Oxford.

44 Walter de la Mare, letter to Joseph Anthony, 30 April 1929, de la Mare papers, Bodleian Library, Oxford.

45 The most recent edition of *Stories from the Bible* has illustrations by Edward Ardizzone and was first published by Faber & Faber in 1961, with a reprint of this same edition in 1977.
Sections of the book had also been published as *The Story of Joseph* (1958), *The Story of Moses* (1959), and *The Story of Samuel and Saul* (1961), all with illustrations by Ardizzone.

46 Richard de la Mare, letter to Walter de la Mare, 17 May 1933, de la Mare papers, Bodleian Library, Oxford.

47 Walter de la Mare, letter to Richard de la Mare, 19 May 1933, de la Mare papers, Bodleian Library, Oxford.

48 Walter de la Mare, letter to Richard de la Mare, 19 May 1933, de la Mare papers, Bodleian Library, Oxford.

49 Walter de la Mare, letter to Richard de la Mare, 9 June 1933, de la Mare papers, Bodleian Library, Oxford.

50 Walter de la Mare, letter to Richard de la Mare, 9 June 1933, de la Mare papers, Bodleian Library, Oxford.

51 Geoffrey Faber’s “blurb” was qtd. in Richard de la Mare, letter to Walter de la Mare, 12 June 1939, de la Mare papers, Bodleian Library, Oxford.


54 The only way to resolve this contradiction is to understand the distinction between classical and conservative. Dr. Karl Moritz has suggested that, viewing classical architecture through the lens of the neoclassical, we inevitably impose ideas of stability and order upon it. But at the time of its production, this so-called classical architecture vibrated with the voices of gods and the beliefs of a people, and resonated against the rocks and trees and sky of its location. The neo-classical quotation of such architecture, which began with the Romans, carries with it only the connotation of good government, power, and order. Without the original context either of sites or of beliefs, the complex poetry of architectural form is lost. But, taken in its original context, the classical can be viewed as modern: it belongs to a time and a place and a people (lectures on art history, Ryerson Polytechnic University, 1986-1990).

55 Whistler 322.

56 Faber, “Are Publishers Any Use?” 129.

57 James Wells, letter to Eric Pinker, 11 July 1930, de la Mare papers, Bodleian Library, Oxford.

58 Geoffrey Faber, letter to Walter de la Mare, 7 July 1930, de la Mare papers, Bodleian Library, Oxford.

59 Walter de la Mare, letter to Richard de la Mare, 4 April 1934, de la Mare papers, Bodleian Library, Oxford.

60 Richard de la Mare, letter to Walter de la Mare, 5 April 1934, de la Mare papers, Bodleian Library, Oxford.

61 Whistler 348. De la Mare had first met Gosse in February 1912. De la Mare had a deep admiration for Hardy and went to visit him on several occasions, in 1921 and 1923. Ellen Terry came out of retirement to act in de la Mare’s fairy play, *Crossings*, when it was performed for the first time in London, at the Lyric Theatre, Hammersmith, in November 1925.
62 Faber, "A Publisher Looks at Booksellers" 22.

63 Walter de la Mare, letter to Richard de la Mare, 26 May 1930, de la Mare papers, Bodleian Library, Oxford.

64 Leonard Clark lists the prices for these limited editions as follows: Desert Islands, 84/- for an edition of 650 signed copies; Christina Rossetti: Poems, 52/6 for an edition of 300 numbered copies (Newtown: Gregynog Press); On the Edge, 52/6 for an edition of 300 signed copies; and Poems for Children, with 125 numbered and signed copies at an unspecified price ("A Handlist of the Writings in Book Form [1902-1953] of Walter de la Mare," Studies in Bibliography, 6[1954]: 206).

65 Walter de la Mare, letter to Katherine Facey, 11 June 1930, de la Mare papers, Bodleian Library, Oxford.

66 Geoffrey Faber, letter to Walter de la Mare, undated but earlier than 4 July 1930, de la Mare papers, Bodleian Library, Oxford.

67 Walter de la Mare, letter to Geoffrey Faber, 4 July 1930, de la Mare papers, Bodleian Library, Oxford.

68 Geoffrey Faber, letter to Walter de la Mare, 7 July 1930, de la Mare papers, Bodleian Library, Oxford.

69 Walter de la Mare, letter to Geoffrey Faber, 8 July 1930, de la Mare papers, Bodleian Library, Oxford.

Interestingly, the title of the published volume, On the Edge, was linked to the story "The Orgy" by means of Elizabeth Rivers’ decoration on the book’s cover and headpiece to the story, which picks up on a comparison in the story between the character Philip Pim and the god Mercury. The decoration is of a winged coin on its edge; the headpiece is of a number of such winged coins, flying through the clouds. These illustrations have two effects. They rationalize the title of the volume by connecting it with one of the stories included. But they also connect the rather materialistic matter of "The Orgy" to de la Mare’s more typically ethereal concerns: the money is literally flying away, but on angel’s wings! To be sure, we are told about Philip Pim that, "As with Adam and the happy birds in the Garden of Eden — linnet and kestrel and wren — he enjoyed seeing [money] fly" (On the Edge 252).

70 Walter de la Mare, letter to Richard de la Mare, 7 January 1931, de la Mare papers, Bodleian Library, Oxford.

71 Walter de la Mare, letter to Richard de la Mare, 30 July 1930, de la Mare papers, Bodleian Library, Oxford.

72 Walter de la Mare, letter to Richard de la Mare, 1 August 1930, de la Mare papers, Bodleian Library, Oxford.

73 Walter de la Mare, letter to Richard de la Mare, 1 August 1930, de la Mare papers, Bodleian Library, Oxford.

74 Walter de la Mare, letter to Richard de la Mare, 2 January 1931, de la Mare papers, Bodleian Library, Oxford.

75 “Literature and Art,” The Times Review of the Year, supplement to The Times, 1 January 1931, xi.
These were *Early One Morning* (1934), *Behold, This Dreamer* (1939), and *Love* (1943). All of these were expensive books in their ordinary trade editions, priced at a guinea each (21/-).


J. R. Pinker, letter to Walter de la Mare, 13 November 1934, de la Mare papers, Bodleian Library, Oxford.

Walter de la Mare, letter to J. R. Pinker, 14 November 1934, de la Mare papers, Bodleian Library, Oxford. *Mr Brush* was a novel that de la Mare had been working on for some time, but which he never published. In fact, de la Mare published no novels after *Memoirs of a Midget* (1921).

Walter de la Mare, letter to Otto Kyllmann, 23 April 1937, de la Mare papers, Bodleian Library, Oxford.

Otto Kyllmann, letter to Walter de la Mare, 18 November 1937, de la Mare papers, Bodleian Library, Oxford.

Walter de la Mare, letter to Otto Kyllmann, 23 November 1937, de la Mare papers, Bodleian Library, Oxford.

Walter de la Mare, letter to J. R. Pinker, 29 June 1938, de la Mare papers, Bodleian Library, Oxford.

Otto Kyllmann, letter to Walter de la Mare, 10 May 1940, de la Mare papers, Bodleian Library, Oxford.

See Otto Kyllmann, letter to Walter de la Mare, 14 May 1940, de la Mare papers, Bodleian Library, Oxford.

Otto Kyllmann, letter to Walter de la Mare, 13 Jan. 1941, de la Mare papers, Bodleian Library, Oxford.

Otto Kyllmann, letter to Walter de la Mare, 17 Jan. 1941, de la Mare papers, Bodleian Library, Oxford.

Otto Kyllmann, letter to Walter de la Mare, 29 Jan. 1941, de la Mare papers, Bodleian Library, Oxford.

J. R. Pinker, letter to Walter de la Mare, 24 June 1938, de la Mare papers, Bodleian Library, Oxford. One royalty statement shows that in 1924, the year after its publication, *Come Hither* produced royalties of £663.2s.4d. from regular sales, £305.1s from special sales, for British sales only. The new edition of *Songs of Childhood* (1923) produced £157.9s.10d. in the same year (de la Mare papers, Bodleian Library, Oxford).

Otto Kyllmann, letter to Walter de la Mare, 21 April 1941, de la Mare papers, Bodleian Library, Oxford.

Walter de la Mare, letter to J. R. Pinker, 27 May 1940, de la Mare papers, Bodleian Library, Oxford.

Walter de la Mare, letter to J. R. Pinker, 28 September 1939, de la Mare papers, Bodleian Library, Oxford.
93 J. B. Pinker, letter to Walter de la Mare, 29 September 1939, de la Mare papers, Bodleian Library, Oxford.

94 Walter de la Mare, letter to Otto Kyllmann, 30 March 1942, de la Mare papers, Bodleian Library, Oxford.

95 Otto Kyllmann, letter to Walter de la Mare, 31 March 1942, de la Mare papers, Bodleian Library, Oxford.

96 Otto Kyllmann, letter to Walter de la Mare, 21 April 1941, de la Mare papers, Bodleian Library, Oxford.

97 These sales figures for *Come Hither* represent regular sales in Britain only. De la Mare papers, Bodleian Library, Oxford.

98 Otto Kyllmann, letter to Florence Thompson, 24 November 1947, de la Mare papers, Bodleian Library, Oxford.

99 Constable & Co., letter to Walter de la Mare, 17 November 1949, de la Mare papers, Bodleian Library, Oxford.

100 Otto Kyllmann, letter to Walter de la Mare, 9 December 1948, de la Mare papers, Bodleian Library, Oxford.

101 Constable & Co., letter to Walter de la Mare, 22 November 1949, de la Mare papers, Bodleian Library, Oxford.


103 Whistler 400.

104 Whistler 401.

105 Geoffrey Faber, letter to Walter de la Mare, 29 November 1939, de la Mare papers, Bodleian Library, Oxford.


107 In Britain, in fact, Walter de la Mare remains a household name because his poetry is still used in schools. Poetry remains an important part of the curriculum in elementary and secondary schools. In North America, however, the reception of poetry seems to be much more conditioned by the concerns of post-secondary education. Because de la Mare’s work does not fit with the agendas of most postsecondary classes in literature, his work is more often than not excluded from courses in early twentieth-century poetry.
Notes to Chapter 5: The Vast Wreckage of Faiths

1 Michael Roberts, introduction, Faber Book of Modern Verse (London: Faber & Faber, 1936) 34.
3 Raymond Williams has explained how Leavis and Richards were originally intent on the democratisation of education, offering the non-academic public means of analyzing and understanding their own world in terms of their own concerns. This project, Williams asserts, was inevitably reconfigured by its institutionalisation. See The Politics of Modernism (London: Verso, 1996) 153ff.
5 Leavis, New Bearings in English Poetry 170.
7 By the "academy," I refer primarily to the discipline of English Studies. While it is true that the field of Cultural Studies is geared towards recognizing and analyzing popular cultural movements and enthusiasms, de la Mare does not seem to have qualified as a subject. He has fallen between the highbrow preference of English Studies and the populist subjects of Cultural Studies.
8 Leavis, New Bearings in English Poetry 164.
10 Grigson 122. Grigson’s quotations are phrases drawn from T. S. Eliot’s poem on de la Mare’s achievement, which appeared in Tribute to Walter de la Mare (1948).
11 Many of de la Mare’s lyrics, the majority drawn from the children’s work, have been set to music. These include the following: "The Little Bird," by Bainbridge Crist, in 1915; "The Huntsmen," by Jessie Furze in 1933; "The Song of Soldiers," by Victor Hely-Hutchinson in 1933; "Down-Adown-Derry," "Reverie," "Captain Lean," and "The Sleeping Beauty," by Dr. Armstrong Gibbs in 1933; "Autumn," by Mrs. Cotman in 1933; "Trees," by Dr. J. Fredric Staton in 1933; "The Scarecrow," by Corbett Sumsion in 1934; eight epitaphs from Ding Dong Bell, by Theodore Chandler (USA) in 1939. Both Robin Stephenson and Anna Larson have set "The Listeners." Benjamin Britten composed "Tit for Tat" using a number of de la Mare’s poems.
12 Indeed, what was stressed in both “modernist” poetics and the criticism that it spawned was an engagement with reality, a reality defined primarily by visual accuracy or scientific exactitude. The world was to be reexamined with the photographer’s rather than the painter’s eye for detail. The emphasis on this version of objective reality reached its apotheosis with William Carlos Williams, who had strong connections with Alfred Stieglitz and other members of the Photo-Secession. De la Mare was bound to suffer in this climate, since music and sound had always generated much of the meaning in his poetry (a meaning
necessarily more vague, more emotive, than that supplied by visual images). In “Music Unheard” from *The Listeners*, he defined the allure of the auditory world:

Sweet sounds, begone —
Whose music on my ear
Stirs foolish discontent
Of lingering here;
When, if I crossed
The crystal verge of death,
Him I should see
Who these sounds murmureth.


14 The claim that such judgment could avoid “prejudice and preconception” is itself part of the modernist rejection of history and location. Reading, of course, can never be accomplished without preconception.


16 This phrase was used by David Perkins to designate not his own view of de la Mare, but the general opinion in which he was held by a contemporary audience (see *A History of Modern Poetry: From the 1890s to the High Modernist Mode* [Cambridge, Mass.: Belknap Press, 1976] 179-191).

17 I derive this information from figures supplied by Giles de la Mare. His figures show that “The Listeners” was anthologised 47 times in the period of 1992-1997. The most popular poems from *Peacock Pie* were “Silver” (appearing 21 times), “Someone” (appearing 15 times), and “Mistletoe” (appearing 9 times).

18 For instance, in David Perkins’ history of modern poetry, he begins his section on de la Mare by noting that de la Mare’s “full stature has not been generally recognized” (179), but ends: “Even de la Mare’s best poems are in a sense slight, but they are far from being merely conventional or traditional” (191).


20 Scupham 44.


27 [Percy Lubbock], “Peacock Pie,” rev. of *Peacock Pie*, *TLS*, 3 July 1913.
Notes to Chapter 5: The Vast Wreckage of Faiths

28 It should, perhaps, be noted that Lubbock's praise of Poems (1906) was more muted. In a review comparing recent books by Arthur Symons, Laurence Housman, and de la Mare, it is de la Mare's work that seems the most flawed and yet the most sincere and original. As Lubbock writes of the poem "The Market-place," "There are obvious weaknesses in this poem, but there is one, at any rate, from which it is free: if it pleases, it does not please by appealing to any mode or style of the moment. Mr. De la Mare's work has occasionally undoubted beauty, but it is always free from prettiness" ("Some Recent Poetry," rev. of The Fool of the World, by Arthur Symons, Mendicant Rhymes, by Laurence Housman, and Poems, by Walter de la Mare, TLS, 23 Nov. 1906, 392).


33 J. B. Priestley, Figures in Modern Literature (London: John Lane the Bodley Head, 1924) 54.

34 Priestley 40. In looking at de la Mare's fiction, Priestley finds that the less it is inflected with the normal - the adult approaching the world of social relations and its corresponding reality - the more successful it is. Hence, The Return fails because de la Mare tries to bring the horrific fantasy of Lawford's metamorphosis into the midst of the mundane world, a world which he is incapable of portraying, as is evident from the failure of his attempt to delineate Mrs. Lawford. Memoirs of a Midget, on the other hand, transports us completely into the fantasy realm, led by the first-person narrative of a sensibility permanently trapped in childhood, Miss. M..

35 [Virginia Woolf], "Dreams and Realities," rev. of Motley and Other Poems, by Walter de la Mare, TLS, 30 May 1918, 253. Nor was Woolf's opinion of de la Mare's significance confined to his poetry. She found that, after reading Rupert Brooke and the Intellectual Imagination, "the problem of Rupert Brooke's poetry has, for us, come nearer solution." One of the signs of Brooke's intellectual imagination, Woolf concurs with de la Mare, is his copious use of adjectives, and Woolf feels that de la Mare "helps us to define what was, and still is, our case against the adjectives." For the intellectual imagination rests on the range of experience in developing its insights, figured adjectively, and Brooke himself was still a young man at his death: "is it not true that the intellectual poet, unlike the visionary poet, improves and develops with age?" Thus, Woolf feels, despite the vigour of his poetry, Brooke's real riches would have lain in his future, and perhaps in prose, or in a life of action: "he has left us only sketches and premonitions of what was to come" ([Virginia Woolf], "The Intellectual Imagination," rev. of Rupert Brooke and the Intellectual Imagination, by Walter de la Mare, TLS, 11 Dec. 1919, 739).

Interestingly, if de la Mare himself may be counted amongst the visionary poets (rather than as a poet balancing the visionary and the intellectual), then Woolf's comments reflect heavily on de la Mare and anticipate later criticisms that his poetry failed to develop in the course of his lifetime, or that its original vibrancy became muted and sullied as de la Mare aged (see, for example, Michael Kirkham or I. A. Richards' "Reconsideration").

37. The psychoanalytic nature of Mégriz’s work is evident in some of his titles: Francis Thompson: The Poet of Earth in Heaven: A Study in Poetic Mysticism and the Evolution of Love-Poetry (1927); Dante Gabriel Rossetti, Painter Poet of Heaven in Earth (1928); Letters of Women in Love: Disclosing the Female Heart from Girlhood to Old Age (1929); Joseph Conrad’s Mind and Method: A Study of Personality in Art (1931); The Three Sitwells: a Biographical and Critical Study (n.d.); The Real Robinson Crusoe; Being the Life and Strange Surprising Adventures of Alexander Selkirk of Largo, Fife, Mariner (1939).

38. Mégriz 118-119. Mégriz’s Jungian reading is supported by de la Mare’s own statements made in an interview with his critic, in which de la Mare reveals that “truth to life” is an impossible measure for literature, even fiction, since every individual perceives life in a unique way. What makes literature compelling, in de la Mare’s view, is a quality of “universality” combined with unique but sincere insight: “it is neither a copy of life in general nor of the author’s particular life. It is a compound; its materials are selected and re-shaped, and so we get a new unity which comes from the imagination” (Walter de la Mare, qtd. in Mégriz 5).

39. Qtd. in Walter de la Mare, Behold, This Dreamer! (1939; London: Faber & Faber, 1984) 97.

40. Behold, This Dreamer! fn 80-81.


44. Science and Poetry, 2nd ed., 78. That de la Mare should have begun his poetic career in imitation of the lullaby is evidently a crucial factor: for the lullaby frequently has horrific or terrifying images woven into its lulling (see Marina Warner, No Go the Bogeyman).

45. Complete Poems 172.

46. Complete Poems 7.

47. Richards’ critique of de la Mare takes shape against his critique of other poets. De la Mare, we discover, is not the only one of his poetic generation to evade the difficulty of the loss of belief, of the dissolution of the Magical View: “Mr. De la Mare takes shelter in the dream-world of the child, Mr. Yeats retired, for a season, into black velvet curtains and the visions of the Hermetic, and Lawrence made a magnificent attempt to reconstruct in himself the mentality of the Bushman” (79) Hardy is one of the few of de la Mare’s generation who “held aloof from the general conspiracy to forget . . . The comfort of forgetfulness, the comfort of beliefs, he has put both of these away” (77).

48. I. A. Richards, Science and Poetry, 2nd ed., 79. But if this seems entirely critical, it is clear that Richards values de la Mare as an exceptional poet for the uncomplicated interests of childhood: “there is a time in most lives when, rightly enough, Mr. Masefield, Mr. Kipling, Mr. Drinkwater, or even Mr. Noyes or Mr. Studdert Kennedy may profoundly affect the awakening mind; it is being introduced to poetry, or rather to the possibility of emotional experiences instigated, if not wholly controlled, through ordered words. Later on, looking back, we can see that any one of a hundred other poets would have served as well” (48-9).
The suggestion, of course, is that these poets are interchangeable and mediocre. De la Mare is at least spared from this judgement. He is an exceptional poet, though one who must be left behind with childhood.

50 Richards, “Reconsideration” 32.
51 Kirkham 117.
53 Rickword himself offers a critique of J. M. Barrie as a sentimentalist whose appeal to emotion is never properly grounded in the palpable, who has avoided frankness not because of certain unpalatable truths in life, but because of his inability to escape his own subjectivism (even in his dramas). Edwin Muir attacks Arnold Bennett on the grounds that his work is based on pragmatic rather than aesthetic grounds, and that Bennett’s motives are so transparently mercenary. Dorothy Edwards denounces G. K. Chesterton for the way he gloats over the facile truths which seem to have been arbitrarily revealed to him. “He has no respect for facts . . .” (40). D. H. Lawrence declares that John Galsworthy’s Forsytes are social beings but not human beings: “While a man remains a man, a true human individual, there is at the core of him a certain innocence or naïveté which defies all analysis, and which you cannot bargain with, you can only deal with in good faith from your own corresponding innocence or naïveté” (55). Robert Graves examines the way that Rudyard Kipling was able to transform the British Empire into a “mystico-literary” phenomenon (85). Bertram Higgins claims that John Masefield never integrated or overcame his influences: “The drama of his adolescence was the clash between his ‘heroic’ and ‘aesthetic’ tendencies, represented by Kipling and Yeats respectively – a conflict which he could have solved by defining it. That problem was never solved; and for all his output Masefield to-day remains an adolescent writer” (97). Thomas McGreevy tries to discover what in George Moore’s work would compensate for the fact that he is “vulgarly frivolous in his attitude and method of expression” (110). G. Bernard Shaw is a pure rationalist who has tried to give body to his metaphysics by becoming a dramatist, according to W. J. Turner. John Holmes considers H. G. Wells’ fiction and his attraction to science and finds that “it was not the pursuit of knowledge that primarily attracted him, but the dramatic possibilities offered by science and the scientist to a romantic journalist” (147).
54 Douglas Garman, “Walter de la Mare,” Scrutinies by Various Writers, ed Rickword 44.
55 Garman 43. Garman may have been particularly incensed not just by the preciosity of the eccentric firm of Lispet, Lispett, and Vaine, but also by the parchment-bound, signed, limited edition of this story that had appeared in 1923 (London: Vine Books). De la Mare himself, it may have seemed, was becoming a purveyor of fine wares.

Garman asserts that de la Mare tries to conjure himself and his reader out of this reality with Fancy rather than Imagination, while offering a defence of Fancy in his essay on Rupert Brooke where he aligns it with visionary rather than intellectual imagination. This itself is a misrepresentation of de la Mare’s essay Rupert Brooke and the Intellectual Imagination.
56 Forrest Reid, Walter de la Mare: A Critical Study (London: Faber & Faber, 1929) 209.
58 Leavis, New Bearings in English Poetry 24.
59 Leavis uses these particular terms to characterize the poem “All That’s Past,” but the charge of enchantment underlies all that he says about de la Mare’s work.
When he wrote his “Retrospect” to *New Bearings* in 1950, Leavis made it clear that he has nothing against the idea of faith, nor is he disturbed by Eliot’s acceptance of the Anglican religion. But it must be a faith consciously chosen and hewn, a faith which takes into account all the brutal and sordid facts, rather than ignoring or forgetting them. And it is clear to Leavis that Eliot has had to struggle to believe. He quotes from one of Eliot’s essays: “‘The majority of people live below the level of belief or doubt. It takes application and a kind of genius to believe anything . . .’” (165). Eliot, in his own estimation and that of Leavis, possesses that genius. De la Mare does not.

On the other hand, Leavis seems to have maintained a hostility even to those poets of the younger generation who inherited some of de la Mare’s lyric gifts, expressed in his “Retrospect 1950.” Auden, who Leavis admits was perhaps the most promising of that generation in 1932, is still displaying signs of “a surprisingly radical adolescence” (167), his reputation amongst the wider public supported entirely by the public acceptance of undergraduates’ enthusiasm for his work: “The Oxford valuation became immediately metropolitan. The undergraduate notability became a world-figure almost overnight” (168). Numerous other poets — Spender, Day Lewis, MacNeice, George Barker, and Dylan Thomas — are dispatched with a single footnote referring to the revelation of their inadequacies in the pages of *Scrutiny*.

These figures are drawn from de la Mare’s tax returns, de la Mare papers, Bodleian Library, Oxford. While it is true that sales of Brooke’s work, which supplied de la Mare with extra royalty income, had also dropped, they had only fallen by less than one third. In 1930/31, de la Mare earned £314.8s.5d. from the Brooke estate. In 1932/33, he earned £222.16s.6d. from the estate. In 1934/35, the estate paid him £243.10s.

Whether Geoffrey Faber played any direct part in the publication of the book, either by explicitly commissioning it — as he had done with Wilenski’s book on *The Modern Movement in Art* — or simply by urging Reid on with a study on which he was already engaged, is unknown.

Reid 23. Sometimes, though, the reader is shocked, when reading either prose or poetry, to come across some inflection of the modern: a car or a level crossing, for instance. It is true that train stations and carriages figure in a number of stories, but these are depicted as magical, liminal spaces where strange confrontations and confessions may occur. As Graham Greene observed, the obsession of an author is revealed in his symbols, and “the dominant symbol in Mr. de la Mare’s short stories is the railway station or the railway journey: sometimes the small country station, all but deserted except by a couple of travellers chance met and an aged porter, at dusk or bathed in the quiet meditative light of a harvest afternoon; sometimes the waiting room of a great junction with its dying dusty fire and its garrulous occupant” (“Walter de la Mare’s Short Stories,” *The Lost Childhood and Other Essays* [London: Eyre & Spottiswoode, 1951] 79).

Reid sees these figures as archetypal: Tishnar “is the divine protectress, the spiritual guardian, the mother goddess” (119), while Immanâla “is the very incarnation of fear, cruelty, and treachery” (118).

Reid 245. Reid does not repress his criticism of de la Mare’s technique either. He notes the increasing tendency towards inversions in the poetry — beginning lines with verbs or
adjectives – which becomes an unignorable intrusion in some of the poems of The Veil. He sees an inconsistency in the use of the child perspective in “The Almond Tree.” And despite public acclaim for the last of de la Mare’s romances, Reid notes the extreme difficulty of making the fabulous Miss. M. into the admirable hero of a realistic novel.


71 Perkins 544.

72 Collected Poems (London: Faber & Faber, 1942) v.

73 Whistler 377.

74 Walter de la Mare, foreword, Art and Scientific Thought: Historical Studies towards a Modern Revision of Their Antagonism, by Martin Johnson (London: Faber & Faber, 1944) v.

75 Martin Johnson, Art and Scientific Thought: Historical Studies towards a Modern Revision of Their Antagonism (London: Faber & Faber, 1944) 68.

76 Leavis, New Bearings in English Poetry 43. Indeed, the same criticism that Richards and Leavis applied to de la Mare has and is applied to all enchanter, all creators of fantasy in the modern world. J. R. R. Tolkien was forced to defend not just his own fantasy creations, but the whole realm of fairy, from the assumption that such genres were suited only for the amusement of children. He argued that fantasy actually restores us to reality (see Tree and Leaf[Boston: Houghton Mifflin, 1965]).


78 John Bayley was to make a similar point twenty years later about the difference in the symbols the two poets had forged: “Crudely speaking, the criterion of romantic success is to imagine a world different from anyone else’s. This may be done self-consciously by a perpetual, strong-willed juggling with abstracts and events, as in the case of Yeats; or instinctively, by the natural cast of mind and imagination, as in the case of Walter de la Mare . . .”(83). Yeats’ active “juggling” was bound to catch the critic’s eye and to respond well to the critic’s intellectual exegesis; but to perceive and explain the quieter accomplishments of de la Mare’s poetry the critic would have to work harder and travel over less certain terrain. It is not easily illuminated by the light of reason.


80 Yeats xxxiv. Furthermore, despite Yeats’ claim to a more inclusive criterion, he included only fifteen of those poets from Roberts’ anthology. And he reflected on the monotony of rhythm of Eliot’s early poetry: “I think of him as a satirist rather than poet” (xxii). Evidently, this anthology was to reflect Yeats’ eccentric narrative of the modern, as he almost admits: “That I might follow a theme I have given but a bare mention or none at all to writers I greatly admire”(xl).

81 Grigson 124.

82 Scrutiny, VII.1(June 1938): 95.

Notes to Chapter 5: The Vast Wreckage of Faiths

84 Complete Poems 516.


Notes to Conclusion

3 The Society was founded in 1996 by de la Mare’s literary executors. John Bayley is Honorary President. The society publishes (at irregular and long intervals) a magazine and hosts a small annual conference. By July 2000, the Society had 70 members.
4 “Lispet, Lispett and Vaine,” Short Stories 1895-1926 111.
5 The open-endedness and freefloating quality of such symbols makes them prone to abuse. The witch, in particular, has become a stereotypical figure of female malignity in its media representation while socially-minded groups have attempted to recover the “real” meaning of the witch, using a framework of sociohistorical analysis and (feminist) theory.
8 Graham Greene, “Walter de la Mare’s Short Stories,” The Lost Childhood and Other Essays (London: Eyre & Spottiswoode, 1951) 81-2.
10 Lewis Carroll, Alice’s Adventures in Wonderland (1865; Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1982) 111.
12 Walter de la Mare, qtd. in Whistler 401.
13 Lord David Cecil, introduction, Private View, by Walter de la Mare (London: Faber & Faber, 1953) viii.