THRESHOLDS IN THE PROSE FICTION  
OF WALTER DE LA MARE

by

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ABSTRACT

Walter de la Mare has always been known as a writer of fantasy and supernatural fiction. It is proposed here that he is, in fact, concerned with exploration of the conscious and unconscious selves. His exploration is more philosophical than psychological in that he makes no use of Freudian formulas. He follows rather the intuitive approach of Jung but uses the media of fiction and, thereby, imagery, to show the possibilities of man's infinite mind.

He uses images of doors, windows, water and mirrors to show how the conscious and unconscious selves, the real and astral selves, are divided by lack of understanding, by refusal to accept the other, and by total denial of one another. But he shows also how they may be united across these barriers once they are seen as thresholds between one and the other, that union of the two selves as one integral whole makes for happiness in understanding. He uses the present as an image of the threshold between past and future in which the individual stands in command of primeval memory and his future experience.

In all his prose fiction, de la Mare is concerned with man in his present, real, world crossing the boundary into the world of the spirit, the astral world. The real self, the physical human body, serves as container for the spiritual, though the make-up of that unconscious self should, ideally, be seen in the face. It is attainment of that ideal which is a major theme in de la Mare's prose fiction.
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CHAPTER I

INTRODUCTION: THE HOUSE

Have we, indeed, all of us, to the last dim corner and attic, cellar and corridor, explored ourselves? . . . Age, in time, scrawls our very selves upon our faces. Fast-locked the door of our souls may be, but, the key hangs in the porch.

It is in the porch, the threshold, of the soul that de la Mare's main interest lies. He is preoccupied with unlocking the door and exploring the house of the soul beyond. The fleshly house, the body, contains the soul and, as such, should show the character of the soul within through its windows. The soul has egress through the porch of the house in order to have commerce with other souls and individualities. It is the reality of that soul as dream or astral self, the portrayal of it as the true character of the individual, that makes a continued theme in de la Mare's prose fiction. Of this self he says that we cannot dismiss with a shrug of the shoulders the belief, long ago propounded by Paracelsus, that we are possessed of an astral or sidereal body, which is usually coincident with the corporate body, but is of a materiality so subtile as to be invisible to the human eye—a body which in sleep or trance or when freed by certain drugs, may depart into the viewless air on errands of its own. . . . Nor is it only in sleep apparently that this astral body can thus migrate.

He equates this astral self with the imaginative, creative self,
But the relation between the life of the imagination and that of the external world is obscure. . . . a second self less easy of access than when the earth's sun is in the sky: David and Jonathan. (p. 97)

The astral self then is close as friendship can be to the self we show to the world, but it is also as high above and unattainable as the sun and stars. It is the dream-ideal which we know and recognize but which must be struggled for.

It is the manifestations of the conscious mind, recognizing and living in reality in the known parts of the house of its being, and of the unconscious, astral, self moving across the porch of the self that form a pattern of exploration for de la Mare. He does not propose conclusions, he suggests speculations, possibilities of development, always toward union of the two selves that will make the integral individual true to his whole self.

Part of this pattern of exploration involves the manifestations of good and evil, the borderline between extremes, the twilight area between day and night, past and future, life and death, all with reference to the conscious and unconscious selves. This unconscious is clearly not the unconscious which Freud investigates. De la Mare has scant reverence for Freud's theories, though he was certainly cognisant of them. He said that

The psychologists . . . plunging us into the inscrutable pit of the unconscious, have even circumscribed what we had assumed to be man's infinite mind.

He clearly does not believe that science could be used in exploration of such a boundless thing as the mind or spirit. Freudian explanations
are too simple, scientific methods set limits to exploration. The self is never fully explored because what the conscious self knows is not indicative of what the unconscious self can do. De la Mare is thus closer to Jung's methods of thought since Jung inclined to an intuitive approach, maintaining only that there is a possibility of scientific investigation of spiritual experience.

Jung felt that "the spirit does everything to avoid looking himself in the face." This is the fast-locked door of the soul which de la Mare wishes to open: the decision, or choice, of the spirit to see itself, recognize itself, and remain in recognition. But, says Jung,

the bewildering interplay of good and evil, and the remorseless concatenation of guilt, suffering and redemption... make a razor-edged path, to be trodden for God's sake only. ... (p. 72)

The path is the thin line between extremes leading, in de la Mare's terms, to the ideal whole.

But, while Jung's investigation of the soul is known as psychological, de la Mare's explorations are literary and philosophical: "Surely there is no such thing as the truth: what matters is our reactions to all the little truths." Both questions and answers are infinite. There is no circumference to the mind but only boundaries between different worlds and selves. In all his prose, whether for children or adults, de la Mare deals with, explores, tells of, estrangement from, or return to one of these worlds or selves. The boundaries between the worlds appear in different forms: as doors, windows, water,
mirrors. Each acts as a porch for the passage of the self from one world to another, or as a threshold for exploration of the cellars and attics of the fleshly house.

The door is the threshold between the house of death and the landscape of life. Passage from one side to the other is possible. But Henry Lawford in *The Return*, stands almost entirely on that threshold. He stands, with death behind him, looking at both life and death.

'At death's door,' murmured Lawford under his breath; 'who was it was saying that? Have you ever, Sheila, in a dream, or just as one's thought go sometimes, seen that door? . . . its ruinous stone lintel, carved into lichenous stone heads . . . stonily silent in the last thin sunlight, hanging in peace unlatched. Heated, hunted, in agony--in that cold, green-clad, shadowed porch is haven and sanctuary . . . But beyond--O God, beyond!'

The door itself, the limit of his two worlds, is haven to this man. He is at the point of unity between two impossible extremes, but to look to his dead or his living self is to look to isolation and fear. Death is not then only that which awaits all men. Herbert says "Death is behind us, not in front--in our ancestors, back and back, until--". Death is also present and future: Miss M. once stumbled on the carcass of a young mole. Curiosity vanquished the first gulp of horror. Holding my breath, with a stick I slowly edged it up in the dust and surveyed the white heaving nest of maggots in its belly' with a peculiar and absorbed recognition. 'Ah Ha!' a voice cried within me, 'so this is what is in wait; so this is how things are'; and I stooped with lips drawn back over my teeth, to examine the stinking mystery more closely.
It is the use of the present tense "this is what is in wait", i.e., what lies in the future, "this is how things are", i.e., now, that further delineates de la Mare's concept of death. And again, in Henry Brocken, "The Past awaits us all."\(^{10}\)

Death appears to be another region to which the self may journey and return. In view of this it is almost natural to suspect de la Mare of inclining towards spiritualism. This is not, however, apparent in his writings. Since spiritualism sets up to bring consoling messages from the 'dear departed' to those still living, one can entirely absolve de la Mare of any inclination towards it. His ghosts are far from being consoling, on the contrary,

... in all the .. drenched, death-storied houses, down whose corridors and staircases the past hisses, and in whose great mirrors you see behind you a corridor of hinted faces, and in whose lofty beds you share your sheets and nightmare with an intangible, shifted fellow or the sibilant echo of a sound you wish had never been made, most things that happen are ordinary, or very nearly ordinary, and vile.\(^{11}\)

De la Mare's short stories and novels alike deal with souls and apparitions but not as emanations of a spirit world in the spiritualist sense, but as projections of the soul of the individual; They are not psychical phenomena but extensions of the unconscious self, representations of the "guilt, suffering and redemption" of the individual soul. This is particularly clear in de la Mare's short story "An Anniversary"\(^{12}\) in which Aubrey sees the face of John Fiske, a year after John's death. Aubrey has convinced himself that his wife loved John. As the story shows, it is Aubrey's own guilty lack of love for his
wife and his own suspicious mind that have created the apparition. He has isolated himself from his wife and from his true self by wrong use of the imagination.

Images of isolation recur throughout de la Mare's prose. As doors can be a haven, so they can shut people in, as Aubrey is finally shut in with his sick wife. This is to be, possibly, his "suffering and redemption".

Windows also isolate people in de la Mare's works. People are behind windows looking out or outside looking in. The windows are blank and staring, like dead stagnant eyes, in empty, desolate houses from which the spirit has fled. Or there are windows with strange faces, wicked, bodiless, odd, showing in them. But the glass itself serves as a barrier between self and self, the one threshold which is not broken in order to be crossed.

Water, as rivers and seas, is also an image of estrangement. It comes between child and adult, between a home-world and an exile-world. Even the rain that falls gives a sense of estrangement, of division. Rivers are, sometimes, a highway from one world to another, but the sea is the unknown in which we "mortal millions live alone".

It is in de la Mare's mirror-imagery that the estrangement of the conscious and unconscious selves is most clearly seen. His use of the mirror is the most convoluted of all. He held the primitive belief that the mirror holds the soul of the looker-in, as does a pool of water. Thus, in "The Looking-Glass":

The clearness of the air as it were of a glass, of a looking-glass, which conceals all behind and beyond it, returning only the looker's wonder, or
simply her vanity, or even her gaiety. Why, for the matter of that, thought Alice smiling, there are people who look into looking-glasses, actually see themselves there, and yet never turn a hair.\textsuperscript{13}

The mirror may only show the looker's current, and obvious, feeling, but beyond that it holds the unknown soul and those who see their souls, their true selves, can be frightened. To go into the looking-glass, or through it as Lewis Carroll's Alice does, is not just to play a fantastic game of chess. It is, for de la Mare, to be drawn in by the beast which, by destroying the soul, may cause death.

De la Mare's prose should not then be taken as simple fantasy demanding only "that willing suspension of disbelief" for entry to the lands of faery and magic. De la Mare, writing of Lewis Carroll, says that

\begin{quote}
... the sovereign element in the Alices ... consists of what is often perfectly rational, practical, logical, and, maybe, mathematical, what is terse, abrupt and pointed, in a state and under conditions of life to which we most of us win admittance only when we are blessedly asleep.\textsuperscript{14}
\end{quote}

The suggestion is that this "rational, practical, logical" world does not necessarily exist only in sleep and admittance to it during waking hours may not be a blessed occurrence. He shows this clearly in "Out of the Deep", and may have learned something of this concept from George Macdonald's treatment of the mirror as a threshold to strange lands in \textit{Lilith}.

De la Mare also uses the eye as a mirror. As such, again, it contains and sees the soul of the person reflected. Is it then possible, in the eye-mirror, to see ourselves, our souls, as others see us? Do
others see our souls? And do the reflecting pools of water in de la Mare's fiction, because of the animation in their inscrutable depths, show more of the soul? These questions of reflection and the soul will be examined more specifically later in this paper; they are posed here as suggestions of the ideas that de la Mare is concerned with.

One idea emerging clearly from de la Mare's writing is that the present, to him, is only the threshold between the past and the future. It is the limit of the past, that line at which the past exists no further; it is the outset of the future. Man, existing on that line, can step from it with ease. Not only does the individual memory hold the door open to the past but de la Mare consistently affirmed that

Memories [are] not only personal, but as we may well suspect, racial, and not only racial but primeval.¹⁵

In this statement he echoes Jung:

The psyche is not of today. It reaches right back to prehistoric ages. Has man really changed in a thousand years? Have stags changed their antlers in this short space of time?¹⁶

Late in his life de la Mare

read a book which suggested that the soul comes to this life with previous experience of it, so that there was no such thing as cognition; all cognition was recognition. Indeed it was difficult to see how you could know anything if you could not compare it with some previous experience.¹⁷

The last comment is his own and he would certainly say that such comparisons are made by the unconscious mind, as questions are answered and problems solved during sleep, by the primeval memory without
recourse to direct or conscious knowledge. The past thus awaits us inasmuch as we recognize and use the primeval experience and memory.

"What is space but the all I am? What is time but the all I was and shall be."

says the girl of "The Bird of Travel." The space that is the present, "I am", is the door to past and future. Man stands continually within that "I am", not God-like, but the integral self contained by the flesh. It is the "I am" of the house unexplored, of the regions with unknown entities moving within. And is the "I am" identified and contained by the name of the individual as the threshold between past and future? The "all the I was" is all the personal and unconscious memory and that "I" who, recognizing experience, becomes the "I . . . shall be". The latter is the anticipated but, because of the primeval memory, known, waiting, "I".

The capriciousness of man's sense of time as past, future, or present is further emphasized by experiences such as

the famous case of the dreamer who, after puffing out his bedside candle, slept, circumnavigated the globe, and awoke to find the wick still smouldering.

De la Mare knows also the oddness of the 'inner clock' which makes time appear to go quickly at moments of intensity and slowly in hours of boredom. He understands not only Alice's concept of time, but also the Mad Hatter's:

"I think you might do something better with the time," she said,"than wasting it in asking riddles that have no answers."

"If you knew Time as well as I do," said the Hatter, "you wouldn't talk about wasting it. It's him."

"I don't know what you mean," said Alice.
"Of course you don't!" the Hatter said, tossing his head contemptuously. "I dare say you never even spoke to Time."

"Perhaps not," Alice cautiously replied; "but I know I have to beat time when I learn music."

"Ah! That accounts for it," said the Hatter. "He won't stand beating. Now, if you only kept on good terms with him, he'd do almost anything you liked with clock. For instance, suppose it were nine o'clock in the morning, just time to begin lessons: you'd only have to whisper a hint to Time, and round goes the clock in a twinkling! Half-past one, time for dinner!"19

De la Mare was clearly influenced by Carroll, perhaps learning from him to ask questions and expound the riddles of time and space that have no answers. The question of who, beside Carroll, influenced de la Mare is answered variously by his critics and commentators. He belongs in the tradition of the supernatural that starts with Seneca, leading through Defoe, Walpole, the Romantics, and Poe. From the Romantics to Christina Rossetti and de la Mare another thread of influence is clear. And he cannot be discussed without reference to the Bible and to folk-and-fairy tales.

Within the period of his writing he is linked by interests, themes, images and concepts to Kipling: the entry to the past in Puck o' Pook's Hill is often by the river. In John Buchan's Gap in the Curtain the future is seen in the pages of a newspaper. G. K. Chesterton's The Man Who Was Thursday is a spy story set in the world of nightmare which deals with profound truths of life. George Macdonald's Phantastes and Lilith pass from real houses to landscapes of dream across the thresholds of doors and mirrors. And, in his foreword to James Stephens' The Crock of Gold, Walter de la Mare says that
it is not a book at all, but a crazy patchwork
stitched loosely together—a kind of motley
overall in which one may sit in one's bones
on the verge of time and space and contemplate
everything and nothing... 

He sits in the porch of the house of his body in contemplation of the
infinite size of the house and the landscape. He looks out and

By means of those frail tentacles, our senses,
we explore the outward semblance of our fellow-
creatures; but flesh is flesh and bone is bone,
and only by insight and by divination can we
pierce inward to the citadel of the mind and
soul. We can only translate their touch, their
gestures, the words they use, the changing looks
on their faces into terms of our own consciousness
and spirit.... Nevertheless, the inmost self
of each one of us is a livelong recluse. 

He would, by understanding and exploration, look into the house of
the individual, go from attic to cellar, to find some answer to the
infinites of man's soul, the astral self which is both close friend
and far astral body in each man. He would unlock the door of the
recluse-soul, and explore its dwelling-place of life.
FOOTNOTES: I


2 __________, *Behold this Dreamer!* (New York, 1939), p. 40, 41.

3 Ibid., p. 8.


7 Walter de la Mare, *The Return* (London, [1922]), p. 117.

8 Ibid., p. 132.


Russell Brain, *Tea with Walter de la Mare*, p. 124.

Walter de la Mare, "The Bird of Travel" in *The Riddle and Other Stories*, p. 155.

Walter de la Mare, *Behold this Dreamer!*, p. 68.


Walter de la Mare, *Desert Islands and Robinson Crusoe*, p. 11.
CHAPTER II

THE OPEN DOOR

Between the two worlds of life and death and between the conscious and unconscious selves there is only, for de la Mare, an open door which the individual self can pass through. As in an earthquake the safest place is in a doorway, so to stand in the open door between life and death is to be in a haven. The open door between the conscious and unconscious selves is a threat, however, to the conscious self; if the unconscious terrors are allowed to invade the room of the conscious, the self may lose its individuality and go mad.

De la Mare shows his conception of the life-to-death open door in The Return and several short stories. His concept of the conscious and unconscious and his spatial symbol of the house as mind is shown in "Out of the Deep". Both concepts deal with the life, the living, of the self, spirit, or the soul: the struggle of the self to retain his individuality.

Thus, in the haven, on the threshold, between life and death Arthur Lawford can be at peace, no longer fighting the perilous routine in life as Lawford on one side, and no longer struggling with the stormy existence in death of Sabathier on the other.

The door between the life of one and the death of the other is the tomb-stone of Sabathier, split from head to foot. Lawford rests
on the tomb and Sabathier passes through the open door into the body of Lawford. He takes possession more in a physical sense than a mental. It is here that de la Mare affirms his belief in the strength of the individual spirit: Sabathier's conquest of Lawford's body is immediate. Lawford presents an entirely different face and physique to himself and his family on his return home. The struggle is between the two individual souls, between two memories, two conscious and unconscious selves, to take possession of the already changed body. It is de la Mare's entirely consistent conception of mankind that the struggle should occur for the spirit, that the fleshly house should fall without the inhabitant noticing. The body, the face, is only the casing within which the recluse is hidden, which only occasionally is "the showing of a man's own mind."¹

The Return is, then, de la Mare's one full-length novel structured entirely around the problem of the border between life and death. The symbol of the tomb recurs throughout the novel in the form of a cupboard, a room, the Herbert cottage, Lawford's own house. The symbol is made clear in situations where Lawford is locked out, is standing in a doorway, or his mental struggles take place in closed rooms, alone in a darkened house. The first dialogue between Lawford and his wife, Sheila, on his return from Sabathier's grave takes place through the locked door of their bedroom, Lawford being on the inside.

'Are you ill? I will send for Dr. Simon.'
'Please, Sheila, do nothing of the kind, I am not ill. I merely want a little time to think in.' There was again a brief pause; and then a light rattling at the handle.
'Arthur, I insist on knowing at once what's wrong; this does not sound a bit like yourself. It is not even quite like your own voice.'

'it is myself,' he replied stubbornly, staring fixedly into the glass. 'You must give me a few moments Sheila. Something has happened. My face. Come back in an hour.'

'Don't be absurd; it's simply wicked to talk like that. How do I know what you are doing? As if I can leave you for an hour in uncertainty! Your face! If you don't open at once I shall believe there's something seriously wrong: I shall send Ada for assistance.'

'If you do that, Sheila, it will be disastrous. I cannot answer for the con--'

The conversation reveals not only the lack of communication between husband and wife but makes clear that the changes in Lawford's state are physical: in his voice, his face. The ironies and understatements in the conversation, Lawford's desire for "a little time to think in" because "something has happened" and Sheila's protest that she cannot leave him in "uncertainty" or she will "believe there's something seriously wrong", all underline the fact that something is seriously wrong but that a little time will not clear them of it.

And Lawford, the living symbol of Sabathier, is enclosed in a locked room, a tomb into which his wife cannot pass because, of his own volition, he has locked out life which does not comprehend death as he is beginning to.

Lawford's instinct, after revealing himself to Sheila, is to consult a medical dictionary. Sheila, however, brings the vicar, Mr. Bethany, to see Lawford. She has not credited Lawford's tale of being taken possession of while out for an afternoon walk, but brings Mr.
Bethany simply because she doesn't understand. There is a curious scene when Lawford, in his new guise, sees Mr. Bethany:

... the gold spectacled vicar and Lawford first confronted each other, the one brightly illuminated, the other framed in the gloom of the doorway. (p. 29)

Mr. Bethany stands in the light of life and the knowledge of a life after death, Lawford has the dark of death behind him; he is on the threshold between that darkness and Mr. Bethany's light. Mr. Bethany does not, to our knowledge, question his own belief in his religion, he partakes of the light of sincere knowledge, whereas Lawford is being forced to question his very self--his identity and foundations of belief in life and death. The solution is not a religious one, but the help comes in part from Mr. Bethany.

A second confrontation of importance is that which takes place between Mr. Danton and Lawford. Mr. Danton is "an old fat friend" who sits "congealed into a condition of passive and immovable hostility" (p. 107). Mr. Danton is not only hostile, he is also sceptical, and will not offer any kind of sympathy. Lawford is aware of the barrier of feeling confronting him, and the Sabathier in him reviles the sceptic:

'Firm, unctuous, subtle scepticism: and to that end your body flourishes. You were born fat; you became fat; and fat, my dear Danton, has been deliberately thrust on you--in layers! Lampreys! You'll perish of surfeit some day, of sheer Dantonism. And fat, post mortem, Danton. Oh, what a basting's there!' (p. 108)

In order to be helped Lawford must have sympathy and, facing Danton from the doorway, he, Lawford, knows he cannot find it in Danton.
The locked door appears again and again in *The Return*. Sheila, at night, locks the bedroom door, Lawford being on the inside. She wants to keep this embarrassing spectre from straying from his bed.

After lunch, Lawford lets himself out of his bedroom, locks the door, and runs from the house to an open common. He has crossed the threshold of death, escaped from an enforced grave, and running as the physical Lawford could not, his 'Sabathiered' body is free to live.

He returns at twilight to find the house locked against him. He enters by ringing the bell, Ada the maid answers, and he pretends to be the doctor sent for by Sheila. He retreats to lock himself into his bedroom again, to struggle with the spirit who would possess him.

This spirit of Sabathier becomes an actual, separate presence in the house. One early morning Lawford goes downstairs to fetch another volume of the medical dictionary, which is in the breakfast-room.

But as he stood there with his back to the room, just as the shadow of a bird's wing floats across the moonlight of a pool, he became suddenly conscious that something, somebody had passed across the doorway, and in passing had looked in on him.

He stood motionless, listening; but no sound broke the morning slumberousness, except the far-away warbling of a thrush in the first light. So sudden and transitory had been the experience that it seemed now to be illusory; yet it had so caught him up, it had with so furtive and sinister a quietness broken in on his solitude, that for a moment he dared not move. A cold, indefinite sensation stole over him that he was being watched; that some dim, evil presence was behind him, biding its time, patient and stealthy, with eyes fixed
unmovingly on him where he stood. But, watch
and wait as silently as he might, only the day
broadened at the window, . . . (p. 90)

It is neither ghost nor human reality of which he is conscious. Lawford
has come downstairs, with his own spirit dominant, to seek a rational,
prosaic answer to his problem. The spirit presence behind him at
the doorway stands in the gloom of the hall watching the man who can
live in the light of day and life; it is the projected soul of
Sabathier seeking for conquest of the body that has his form.

The desire of Sabathier to inhabit Lawford's being is sharply
realized and shown when Lawford is left alone at night in his house.

His bedroom is, again, the grave, but more explicitly so:

Inky blackness drifted up in wisps, in smoke
before his eyes; he was powerless to move, to
cry out. There was no room to turn, no air to
breathe. And yet there was a low, continuous,
ever-varying stir as of an enormous wheel
whirling in the gloom. Countless infinitesimal
faces arched like glimmering pebbles the huge
dim-coloured vault above his head. He heard a
voice above the monstrous rustling of the wheel,
clamouring, calling him back. He was hastening
headlong, muttering to himself his own flat
meaningless name, like a child repeating as he
runs his errand. And then as if in a charmed
cold pool he awoke and opened his eyes again
on the gathering darkness of the great bedroom,
and heard a quick, importunate, long-continued
knocking on the door below, as of some one who
had already knocked in vain.

Cramped and heavy-limbed, he felt his way across
the room and lit a candle. He stood listening
awhile: his eyes fixed on the door that hung a
little open. All in the room seemed acutely fantas-
tically still. The flame burned dim, enisled in
the sluggish air. (p. 172).

He is held on the bed of his coffin within the vault of the dead. The
faces from two memories shimmer on the arched roof of his grave. The
rushing wheel of time calls him back, to remain there. But the
ininitely small voice of his name is taking him headlong to life.

The knocking at the front door is Mr. Bethany, he who represents
one who called the dead to life. Mr. Bethany anxiously waits outside
the locked front door for Lawford during the ensuing struggle for
ownership as Lawford fights his way down the stairs. Lawford's
bedroom-grave has suddenly enlarged and the house is the grave,
while Lawford's body is the house for possession of which Sabathier
is fighting.

'Yes, I am coming,' said Lawford. He shut his
mouth and held his breath, and stair by stair he
descended, driving steadily before him the crouching,
gloating menacing shape, darkly lifted up before
him against the darkness, contending the way with
him.

'Are you ill? Are you hurt? Has anything
happened, Lawford?' came the anxious old voice
again, striving in vain to be restrained.

'No, no,' muttered Lawford. 'I am coming; coming
slowly.' He paused to breathe, his hands trembling,
his hair lank with sweat, and still with eyes wide
open he descended against the phantom lurking in
the darkness--an adversary that, if he should but for
one moment close his lids, he felt would master
sanity and imagination with its evil. 'So long
as you don't get in,' he heard himself muttering,
'so long as you don't get in my friend!'

'What's that you're saying?' came up the muffled,
querulous voice; 'I can't for the life of me hear,
my boy.'

'Nothing, nothing,' came softly the answer from the
foot of the stairs. 'I was only speaking to myself.'

Deliberately, with candle held rigidly on a level
with his eyes, Lawford pushed forward a pace or two
into the airless, empty drawing-room, and grasped
the handle of the door. He gazed in awhile, a
black oblique shadow flung across his face, his eyes fixed like an animal's, then drew the door steadily towards him. And suddenly some power that had held him tense seemed to fail. He thrust out his head, and, his face quivering with fear and loathing, spat defiance as if in a passion of triumph into the gloom.

Still muttering, he shut the door and turned the key. In another moment his light was gleaming out on the grey perturbed face and black narrow shoulders of his visitor. (p. 173-174)

Lawford's struggle is that Sabathier should not "get in", gain entry to the house of his being and live there. He must, symbolically, lock Sabathier out of himself into another "airless, empty" room or grave. Then, he can open the front-door of himself to the representative of life, love, and belief in man alive. Ironically, of course, Mr. Bethany also represents life-everlasting, beyond the door of the grave, though Mr. Bethany's life-beyond-the-grave is one of love and goodness, not the black evil that Sabathier represents.

Sabathier violates Christian teaching in that he died by his own hand and his grave cannot, therefore, be in consecrated soil: he is outside the light of the church's teaching. But he does in some sense enter the spiritual aura of the church in the troubled being of Lawford. Lawford himself says

... I believe in the resurrection of the body; that is what we say; and supposing, when a man dies--supposing it was most frightfully against one's will; that one hated the awful inaction that death brings, shutting a poor devil up like a child kicking against the door in a dark cupboard; one might--surely one might--just quietly, you know, try to get out?" (p. 101)

Lawford is affirming not only Christian belief but also his understanding of what has happened to him, and in using the Creed to state
his understanding he is acknowledging the religious implications of the experience. Sabathier, in trying to be reborn is, perhaps, also trying to die again, this time within the sphere of the church.

One of the most curious images of the grave is Herbert's cottage, which is reached by a wicket-gate in a tall hedge. Lawford has never noticed the cottage there before and no one seems to know of it; at the end the cottage and the Herbergs seem to disappear into a finality of which Herbert can only say "But some day you'll come again." The understanding is that when Lawford then comes, he will not return to the other side of the wicket-gate, that the wicket-gate to their garden is the one to which Miss Sinnet refers:

'Elderly people like me are used--well, perhaps I won't say used--we're not surprised or disturbed by visits from those who have gone before. We live, in a sense, among the tombs; ... as one gets nearer and nearer to the wicket-gate there's other company ... .' (p. 303)

To go through the wicket-gate into Herbert's garden and cottage is to go into the land beyond the door of the grave. The cottage and its garden are perpetually filled by the sound of falling water; the river Widder runs through the garden and right against the walls of the house. It seems to be the river of time which bears everything and everyone forward into their future death, making them part of the past, and into the grave of all rivers, the sea. The river of time appears as the river Wandle in "Miss Duveen" and the last river of The Three Royal Monkeys. Perhaps all three have something of the last river which Christian crosses in The Pilgrim's Progress: they are the rivers of death and on the other side is the life everlasting.
The door that opens to death appears in various forms in de la Mare's short stories. Usually it is fairly explicit that death is on the other side of the threshold. In "The Green Room," it is the dead who want something from the living. Alan publishes the ghost's poems, but it was not that that she wanted. Perhaps it was only acknowledgement of her still living spirit which haunts the room behind the bedrooms and enters through the narrow panelled door to haunt Alan. Nothing much is known of the girl, E.F., who haunts the room; she died of strychnine, a love-affair was involved and the hopelessness of the affair shows in her poems. But she passes through the door from death to watch life and demand,

... the very self within ... stayed there gazing out at him transfixed—the pleading tormented, dangerous spirit within that intangible husk. (p. 214)

The shell of the being no longer matters. The 'intangible husk' of E.F. does not matter, it is only the bearer of spirit, which is all, and it seems to want only attention.

E.F. is one of those who cross from death to life. But in both his short story "The Riddle" and his poem "The Feckless Dinner Party," de la Mare depicts people who pass from life to death. In "The Feckless Dinner Party" people in gay society move through darkness to death calling finally, ironically, for the butler "Toomes." The name signifies a desire for the supposed security of the tomb after the terrifying passage through darkness.

'The banister's gone!' 'It's deep; keep close!' 'We're going down and down!' 'What fun.' 'Damp! Why, my shoes . . . .' 'It's slimy . . . Not moss!' 'I'm freezing cold!' 'Let's run.'
'... Behind us. I'm giddy....' 'The catacombs....'
'That shout!' 'Who's here?' 'I'm alone!' 'Stand back!'
'She said, Lead...!' 'Oh!' 'Where's Toomes?' 'Toomes!'
'TOOMES!'
'Stifling! 'My skull will crack!'

'Sir Nathan! Ai!' 'I say! Toomes! Prout!'
'Where? Where?' "'Our silks and fine array" ...'
'She's mad.' 'I'm dying.' 'Oh, Let me out!'
'My God! We've lost our way!' ...

In "The Riddle" five seven children pass from life to death through the open lid of the carved chest. In the story itself de la Mare gives no destination for the seven children, they simply all climb into the chest and are never seen again. But Edward Wagenknecht once asked de la Mare the meaning of the story and was told that it represented death. The indications in the story itself are those of continuity.

So these seven children, Ann, and Matilda, James, William and Henry, Harriet and Dorothea, came to live with their grandmother. The house in which their grandmother had lived since her childhood was built in the time of the Georges.

The "So" places it with the folk-tales; the grandmother and the house older than her give it an added sense of overlapping sequences within the single continuum of time.

Edward Wagenknecht, in his explication of "The Riddle" in College English, connects the empty chest with Bluebeard's room, with Pandora's box and with Mr. Fox's room of dead brides. He points to the variety of technique that de la Mare uses in each entry into the chest: Henry's careful fingering of the carvings and the memories evoked by the inside of the chest; the friendship that draws Harriet and William
together into the chest; the irrelevant detail of the scratch on James' cheek; and the cosmic stage across which Ann moves to enter the chest.

Aside from the connections with the folk tale, there is that between de la Mare's "The Riddle" and Kipling's "'They'". Surely "The Riddle", first published in *The Monthly Review* in 1900, is the life-to-death side of the story of which "'They'" is the death-to-life. The children of Kipling's story are 'stolen' from real life by the blind woman who has none of her own and wants them. The spirits of children who have entered de la Mare's carved chest come alive for this blind woman in her great empty house, filling it with the sounds of children that she wants to hear. The door which de la Mare thought closed behind the children is, for Kipling, one that opens before them.

In "Odd Shop" the door that opens before the Customer leads him into a shop of memories and sounds of life. The wares sold in the shop will be discussed in detail later. The one door through which the Customer enters, and the other from which the Shopkeeper comes seem to be thresholds to real worlds. The Customer comes from the foggy street to ask his way to the railway station. It is almost one o'clock and a thick mist is rising from the nearby river. The atmosphere in the shop is one of unreality, having a quality of 'otherworldliness' or fantasy. The realities are the two characters in the situation and dialogue, and by writing the dialogue as a play the reality is sharpened to that of nightmare. The story does, in
fact, have some of the quality of Alice's discussion with the Sheep in a dark little shop in Through the Looking Glass. In both there is a sense of there being something more than the words convey, a sense of importance underlying the conversation.

"Things flow about so here!" [Alice] said at last in a plaintive tone, after she had spent a minute or so in vainly pursuing a large bright thing, that looked sometimes like a doll and sometimes like a work-box, and was always in the shelf next above the one she was looking at. "And this one is the most provoking of all— but I'll tell you what—" she added, as a sudden thought struck her. "I'll follow it up to the very top shelf of all. It'll puzzle it to go through the ceiling, I expect!"

But even this plan failed: the 'thing' went through the ceiling as quietly as possible, as if it were quite used to it.

"Are you a child or a teetotum?" the Sheep said, as she took up another pair of needles. "You'll make me giddy soon, if you go on turning round like that." (p. 232-233)

The underlying subjects are matter and space in this brief scene from Carroll's book. From this scene in the shop Alice and the Sheep are transported to a river.

De la Mare is concerned with memory, sound, and time in the "Odd Shop"

... it is not so much what a sound is in itself, or even what causes it, that matters. But its effects. What it does to the listener. The tapping of the beetle first reminded you of a solitary child in a nursery, knocking and knocking to be let in to its own imagination, to its own profound fancy of its own small world of the doll's house. When you knew it for what it actually was, I warrant you saw quite a different picture, sir. Some definite tragic memory, perhaps.
Whereas Carroll is content to portray quickly and metaphorically his concern with space and matter, de la Mare deals with time-fleeting and time-everlasting, as his underlying subjects, throughout his short story. Dream-time in the *Looking Glass* goes quickly, the incident in the Sheep's dark shop takes two pages to relate, the conversation in de la Mare's dark shop takes eight.

The Shopkeeper at the end of de la Mare's story watches the Customer pass from the shop into the thickening fog. The fog appears to symbolize the chaos of actual life, the Odd Shop and its contents to stand for the pure natural sounds and objects that man is losing sight of, or cannot recognize, because of the rising fog. The Customer has been in brief contact with this natural world and has bought a small sound that of advancing age, from it, caged and wrapped to bear away with him to the railway station. Thus, as Alice finds that the egg she buys is really more than just an egg; it is Humpty Dumpty, so the Customer takes the memories of age with him as a present, contained in time and space by sound.

As the world outside the Odd Shop is that of a symbolically fog-shrouded real world, so in "Out of the Deep" the world outside Jimmie's house is real. But Jimmie's world is entirely within the house, and the house, like Jimmie's mind, of which it is the enlarged symbol, is full of terrors. Jimmie searches the house daily, goes tapping on the basement walls looking for the sepulchral butler, he peers at

That high cupboard in the corner from which certain bodiless shapes had been wont to issue and stoop at him cowering out of his dreams;
the crab-patterned paper that came alive as you stared; the window cold with menacing stars; the mouse-holes, the rusty grate--trumpet of every wind that blows--these objects at once lustily shouted at him in their own original tongues. (p. 237)

He does his 'round' of the house daily, in the same way he goes round the house of his mind: "His, too, was a wretchedly active mind". (p. 243) He goes from room to room exploring, finding the things he will sell from the house which his uncle has left him. Like his mind, the house is also full of things left by his Aunt Charlotte, and by the butler Soames.

The struggle in "Out of the Deep" is really between Jimmie the child and Jimmie the man he wants to become. Strangers formed and destroyed his personality. He must destroy or get rid of the objects in the house that represent their tyranny. But, as Peter Penzoldt says,

Like leeches they cling to his unconscious mind, feeding on his substance, and when he pulls the bell-rope they materialize as part of himself. 

The butler who insinuates himself into the bedroom on Jimmie's pulling of the bell-rope looks like Jimmie, as does the girl, a "small odd-looking child". The door that lets these people in opens and closes noiselessly upon them as Jimmie lies in bed watching them. But he feels a kindness for the girl and leaps out of bed, through the open door to challenge the "cries and shouts and screamings" (p. 25) that herald her exit. In answer to his challenge

... he heard as if from beneath and behind him a kind of lolloping disquietude and the sound as of a clumsy-clawed, but persistent animal pushing its uncustomary awkward way up the soap-polished marble staircase.
It was to be tit for tat, then. The miserable menage had let loose its menagerie. That. They were going to experiment with the mouse-cupboard-and-keyhole trickery of his childhood. Jimmie was violently shivering; his very toes were clinging to the mat on which he stood.

Swaying a little, and casting at the same time a strained whitened glance round the room in which every object rested in the light as if so it had rested from all eternity, he stood mutely and ghastly listening.

Even a large bedroom, five times the size of a small boy's attic, affords little scope for a fugitive, and shutting your eyes, darkening your outward face, is no escape. It had been a silly boast, he agreed—that challenge, that "dare" on the staircase; the boast of an idiot. For the "congenial company" that had now managed to hoof and scrabble its way up the slippery marble staircase was already on the threshold.

All was utterly silent now. There was no obvious manifestation of danger. What was peering steadily in upon him out of the obscurity beyond the door, was merely a blurred whitish beast-like shape with still, passive, almost stagnant eyes in its immense fixed face. A perfectly ludicrous object—on paper. Yet a creature so nauseous to soul and body, and with so obscene a greed in its motionless piglike grin that with one vertiginous swirl Jimmie's candles had swept up in his hand like a lateral race of streaming planets into outer darkness. (p. 257-8)

This horrific member of the "Night staff" does not, interestingly enough, come through the doorway. It waits on the threshold and

If his wet groping fingers had not then encountered one of the carved pedestals of his uncle's bedstead, Jimmie would have fallen; Jimmie would have found in fact, the thing's physical level. (p. 258)

The fact that the white creature does not enter the room which Jimmie occupies places it very definitely as part of the subconscious which Jimmie has already, because he wanted to defend the girl, defeated.
It cannot cross the threshold from unconscious to conscious mind. The creature exists in the house of his mind, but relegated to the formless shadows which Jimmie has subdued and against which he is now armoured.

The girl is Jimmie's lost soul, the 'anima' stunted in growth by the destroyers of Jimmie's personality. Only when Jimmie can tell her to go, as the white creature has gone, is she able to become part of him, without need of existence separate from him. Then the house becomes empty.

... Jimmie had felt infinitely colder and immeasurably lonelier ... and he was so empty and completely exhausted that his one apprehension had been lest he should be unable to ascend the staircase to get to bed. There was no doubt of it: his ultimatum had been instantly effective. The whole house was now preternaturally empty. It was needless even to listen to prove that.

(p. 270)

Jimmie, finally can go to bed, not to his uncle's big Arabian bed, but to the truckle-bed of his childhood. On his way up he pauses.

At the wide-open door of his uncle's bedroom and he brandished his guttering candle in a last smiling gesture of farewell: and held on.

(p. 271)

It is Jimmie's first and last contented gesture, but the wide-open door of the room symbolizes the open doors of his mind through which all memories can pass unhindered; all the

... uncountable faces of the past--in paint, stone, actuality, dream--that he had glanced at or brooded on in the enormous history of his life. (p. 269)

can move through the emptiness without Jimmie's fears answering the bell-rope.
The image of an open door is used by de la Mare to symbolize not only the door between physical life and death as in *The Return* but also the threshold between the life of the conscious and the life of the subconscious self. Lawford has to struggle with life which has come from the grave, through which he discovers what is the

... vague thought that behind all these years, hidden as it were from his daily life, had lain something not yet quite reckoned with.

He had not reckoned with the dull unloving routine of his existence, of the dreams overlaid by the leaves of years. The life from the grave, Sabathier, makes him grapple with himself and with Sabathier, and to find the value in being himself. He is locked out of the world of life that he knows. He is locked into the grave with another and has, himself, to find the key.

Jimmie's struggle within the house of his being is to clear his unconscious being of the leeches that destroy him, to tell them to go, and to gain the emptiness of a house inhabited only by himself. If the subconscious self is permitted to cross the threshold into the conscious, is allowed to dominate, then Jimmie's struggle is lost. The fearful creatures of the subconscious would overpower him, gain control of the house of his mind. Thus de la Mare balances the emptiness of Jimmie's self against the emptiness of the house, using the latter as the larger symbol of the former. The emptiness and freedom of the whole is the desirable haven for Jimmie, as the threshold between life and death is the haven for Lawford. In both cases it is in the crossing of the threshold that danger lies.
FOOTNOTES: II


7 Walter de la Mare, "The Riddle" in The Riddle and Other Stories, p. 289.

8 Rudyard Kipling, Traffics and Discoveries (London, 1904), p. 303-335.


13 Walter de la Mare, "Out of the Deep" in The Riddle and Other Stories, p. 253.

14 The Return, p. 2.
De la Mare's use of window and water imagery shows him again dealing with the individual separated from understanding of himself, and his conception of the denial of a spirit, or imaginative part, of an individual. He shows these divisions in images of windows as the clear material through which the individual sees that which he has chosen not to have, or that which he cannot understand. Windows serve as barrier and threshold.

Water-imagery is both threshold and mirror. The individual can pass through the surface of water, and so into knowledge of the unconscious. He can cross water to a greater understanding, and he can be borne by water from life to life-beyond-death.

But water can also reflect back to the looker the understanding that he lacks. It is a personal, individual, and primitive reflection of the soul that he sees. The real and imaginative selves again are separate, and de la Mare is exploring their possible unions and the evident boundaries between them. Thus the window is a visible-invisible boundary between the two selves or between any two people. It is an image of non-communication: faces peer and mouth at each other through the glass, but no understanding is possible. Fanny and Miss M. confront each other on one terrifying occasion:
Curtain withdrawn, we looked each at each through the cold, dividing glass in the gloom—her eyes, in the night-spread pallor of her skin, as if congealed. The dark lips, with an exaggerated attempt at articulation, murmured words, but I could catch no meaning. The face looked almost idiotic in these contortions. I shuddered, shook my head violently. She drew back.¹

Fanny and Miss M. never seem to have an understanding of each other. The lack seems to be based on Fanny's refusal to accept Miss M. as having a human capability as great as her own. The above instance has for Miss M. a nightmare quality in that she cannot understand the person she adores, that she is thwarted by the barrier between them, and, as in a dream, is "Terrified that [Fanny] would be gone." (p. 206).

Much earlier in Miss M.'s existence an open window has served as a threshold which she would not cross in order to communicate with her godmother, Miss Fenne. Miss M. sits out on her tiny balcony, in darkness, the light falling full on Miss Fenne, and refuses to accept the kindness offered. (p. 29)

Just after this, on Miss M.'s last night at Lyndsey, she sits watching a storm:

One glance into the obscure vacancy of the room behind me persuaded me to remain where I was, though the rain drove me further and further into the corner of my balcony. (p. 33-34)

The empty room seems to hold the shadow of Miss Fenne, and her own feelings of having treated the lady unkindly help to keep Miss M. outside. The storm in the skies reflects her own storm of feeling at leaving Lyndsey.
Later that same night she makes what amounts to a descent into hell as, alone in the house, she hears knocking at the front-door. Thinking it to be Pollie returning without a key, Miss M. descends the stairs;

. . . stairs which I had very rarely ascended or descended except in her arms. . . . To leap from stair to stair was far too formidable a means of progression. I should certainly have dashed out my brains. So I must sit and jump sitting, manipulating my candle as best I could. (p. 36)

The person knocking goes to the back door and Miss M. has to descend a final flight of stairs, to find the kitchen swarming with cockroaches. For a being as tiny as Miss M. is shown to be, the cockroaches are creatures of horror and revulsion. And from this revulsion she is aroused by a noise at the window.

There she sees Adam, a farm boy, peering in through the glass, laughing. The darkness, loneliness, horror, and the mocking laugh turn the situation into one of macabre nightmare.

Miss M. thus early learns that windows are barriers, that behind drawn curtains she can hide to watch others, as she does at Beechwood. The windows of her eyes through which she gazes go unshuttered but "Why couldn't one put boards up in the Wandleslore of one's mind?" (p. 154) and become a total recluse? But Miss M. seems aware that she can only seclude herself after she has found herself: the being who lives within the cage of herself. She cannot put up the shutters and retire, for that is to live unknowing, unloving and darkened to communication with others. Mr. Anon, steals into her mind because it
is unshuttered, unlike Wanderslore. She resents him until too late because she fails to comprehend his understanding of her.

Wanderslore is not the only deserted house in the de la Mare canon. There is the house in "The Bird of Travel":

The whole place looked as if it had settled its eyelids and composed its mouth for a protracted and stagnant sleep.

This house does not dream; it has already become a recluse. But the house of "The Princess" is different again:

Was it occupied? Most of the windows were shuttered; a few of the upper ones were only curtained. Who and what, I wondered, might not have taken up a lodging here? There was a look of neglect, of the distraught, but it was not extreme. Moss, damp, discolouration, weather and season would account for much of that. And you could tell at a glance that the place had never been a happily peopled house; not at any rate in recent years. In a word, it looked abandoned. And the very effect of the air surrounding it changes when a house had been abandoned. Humans are like that too.

The windows always give the first hint of the character of the house, and so it is with the eyes of a human. The Princess herself says

"Well, there are two kinds of ghosts. We may compare them to a nut. The one kind is the kernel. The other is the husk. At this moment you are contemplating the husk. Do I look it? Do I look that kind of ghost? Do I look--well, dead?"

God only knows I had never encountered a human being before that in some respects looked less dead, and yet so perilously near it. (p. 73)

The Princess' ghost, her soul, has abandoned the husk of herself, as the spirit has deserted the house.

Miss M. says that
There was, however, another kind of beauty which I loved with all my heart. It is difficult to express what I mean, but to see... a man whose face was absolutely the showing of his own mind--I never wearied of that.⁴

And for a man to show his mind is for him to have "unshuttered windows", that one may see and enter into the house of his being, know him from cellar to attic.

De la Mare is, then, drawing a parallel between the shuttered and unshuttered house and those people who know themselves and those who refuse to. He implies that self-knowledge is one of choice: one chooses to put up the shutters of one's house, therefore, one chooses to know or not to know the rooms of the "fleshly house". Certainly there are those in de la Mare's prose fiction who do not want to know their true selves. Their lives seem to have been built on denial of that self, leading ultimately to destruction of another, or calcification into their outer selves. Fanny Bowater will marry Percy Maudlen not for love, but so that she can climb higher on the social ladder, be secure, be comfortable, be able to "sneer down on them". (p. 324) Fanny may attain the place she wants in society but it will be at the expense of that "phantom within her [which] seemed content merely to be her beauty". (p. 100) That phantom self will calcify into the husk of Fanny, as Fanny refuses to acknowledge its existence.

In the same way the true self of Dickens' Louisa Gradgrind in Hard Times⁵ calcifies. Louisa's imagination is starved but in choosing to marry Mr. Bounderby she submits to calcification, only dimly
recognizing what she has chosen when she meets Harthouse. Finally Louisa is left staring into the fire, like an unreleased Cinderella, now aware of where her choice had brought her: to a point where the spirit had fled, leaving only the husk to exist.

Fanny recognizes her choice far more definitely than Louisa, but the hardness of her character, her determination, do not imply that she will regret the emptiness of her house.

The Fruit Merchant in "The Tree" has also denied the imaginative, creative, aspect of his personality. He has made his living from the fruit of trees, but he is of the city, has denied his artistic self in order to become as Belial, serving Mammon. Thus, he comes to collect £100.0.0. from his brother, P.P., after twelve years and stands outside his brother's run-to-seed-garden "like an obese minute Belial on the ramparts of Eden." (p. 220) He is the Devil of the New Testament, not just one of the sons of the Old Testament, and he stands looking into Eden, an Eden he has chosen to ignore.

He peers through the window of the hovel to see P.P. endlessly drawing the Tree in all the varied guises of the seasons. The window is a symbol of both the threshold and barrier between the half brothers, for P.P. is the artist of the Tree, the reproducer of life, the imagination that must endlessly create. Through the window P.P. and the Fruit Merchant may see each other, and might communicate, but the glass of the window prevents communication.

The threshold between the half brothers is therefore also a sharply drawn demarcation line. P.P.'s house is only a hovel, with room for one man, one idea, one conception of beauty. He has starved
his body of food for twelve years and has lived in, and on, his
spirit for so long that the fleshly house is lost in the burgeoning of
the spiritual. So his half brother, the Fruit Merchant, sees him
aging and unkempt, through the window, and looks into P.P.'s eyes,
but

These were not eyes—in that abominable counten­
enance. Speck-pupilled, greenish-grey, unfocused,
under their protuberant mat of eyebrow, they re­
mained still as a salt and stagnant sea. And in
their uplifted depths, stretching out into endless
distances, the Fruit Merchant had seen regions
of a country whence neither for love nor money he
could ever harvest one fruit, one pip, one can­
ered bud. And blossoming there beside a
glassy stream in the mid-distance of far­
mountained sward—a tree . . . (p. 230)

It is the Tree of Life in the spirit's Garden of Eden and, because
he has chosen Mammon, the Fruit Merchant can only peer through the
window into the dream in which P.P. lives shuttered and secluded
as the "kernel" ghost, but he is

. . . frightened and elated; mute and bursting
with words. The act of God! Rather than even
remotely resemble that old scarecrow in his
second childhood pushing that tiny-bladed knife
across the surface of a flat of wood, he would—.
An empty and desolate look stole into the
gazing eye.
Not that he professed to understand. He knew
nothing. His head was completely empty. The last
shred of rage and vindictiveness had vanished
away. He was glad he had come, for now he was
going back. (p. 228)

His glimpse of the life of the imagination through the chink in the
shutter will fade with time, it has rid him of any desire to reclaim
his £100.0.0. If life in a hovel is all his money has gained for P.P.
then it is profitless to want either the money or the life.
Windows do not always figure in de la Mare's prose as images of separation. To Selina in "Selina's Parable":

... every window in her small private world had a charm, an incantation all its own. Was it not an egress for her eye to a scene of some beauty, or life, or of forbiddingness; was it not the way of light; either her own outward, or the world's inward? (p. 90)

"Selina's Parable" shows a more positive aspect of de la Mare's thinking. Selina is definitely one of those whose mind shows in her face. Perhaps it is because she is a child and as yet unimprisoned and that she has a freedom not usually possessed by adults. She is aware of her house, of the various views from its windows and looks out in order to let in the experiences of the world.

The positive experiences of Selina are not present in de la Mare's evil short story "Seaton's Aunt". Window and water balance each other as thresholds of an evil that reaches out to draw in the good or weak. Withers, Seaton's friend, does not want to understand Seaton, but his narration of his dealing with Seaton and his aunt give an excellent understanding of Seaton's relationship with this vampire-aunt.

When Withers goes to spend the half-term holiday with Seaton, they arrive at noon, having stopped to buy some rat-poison in the village,

... and entered the gates out of the hot dust beneath the glitter of the dark-curtained windows. Seaton led me at once through the little garden-gate to show me his tadpole pond, swarming with what (being myself not in the least interested in low life) I considered the most horrible creatures --of all shapes, consistencies, and sizes, but with whom Seaton seemed to be on the most intimate
of terms. I can see his absorbed face now as he sat on his heels and fished the slimy things out in his sallow palms. (p. 99-100)

Seaton is thus seen leaning over the water, fishing and peering at the contents of the pond through the window of its surface.

As the boys meander towards the house Seaton's aunt is seen at an open upper window.

She must have stood, I think, unusually still, with eyes fixed on us, though this impression may be due to Seaton's sudden warning and to my consciousness of the cautious and subdued air that had fallen on him at sight of her. I know that without the least reason in the world I felt a kind of guiltiness, as if I had been "caught." (p. 100-101)

The "caught" is not only school-boy slang, it picks up the implication of a "catch" made while fishing. Seaton's aunt appears already as a huge malevolent face peering down from a height at the "tadpoles" she has caught.

Forrest Reid points out that the pond with its tadpoles symbolizes the house which is swarming with "spiritual larvae". He describes Seaton as a little rat swimming round and round in a water-trap, and we watch him growing feeble and feeble but still swimming, swimming, while his Aunt's big face leans in gloating interest over the abominable spectacle. (p. 221)

Looking at each image one can only be aware that water and face are both abominable spectacles. The face takes on the all-encompassing property of a glowering sky, Seaton takes on that of the small, struggling soul. Seaton will be sucked into that sky to become part of the parasitic evil.
In "The Face" de la Mare sets out most clearly the primitive belief that a reflection seen in water is the soul of the looker. The actual primitive belief is more simple than de la Mare's use of it:

In Saddle Island, Melanesia, there is a pool 'into which if any one looks, he dies; the malignant spirit takes hold of his life by means of his reflection on the water.'

We can now understand why it was a maxim both in ancient India and ancient Greece not to look at one's reflection in water, and why the Greeks regarded it as an omen of death if a man dreamed of seeing himself so reflected. They feared that the water-spirits would drag the person's reflection or soul under water, leaving him soulless to perish.\(^{10}\)

In "The Face"\(^{11}\) Nora goes to "The Ponds" one evening and, leaning over the dark water in order to see her face, falls in.

"I seemed to be falling into an enormous black pit, and it seemed it would never end. But it wasn't, as they say, just memories that came back to me. There were horrible eyes staring at me, and voices shouting. No, not at me; but together, across. And when at last I came up again, and managed to breathe and to see a little, I was just clutching at anything and . . . ." (p. 116)

. . . that strange phantom face had appeared. She had found herself gazing straight up into it; though whether, with the water streaming from her hair, her eyes were open or shut, she could not remember. It was through those few everlasting moments the face had stayed there, lit faintly as if by some light of its own, smiling, seraphic, unchanging, the eyes faintly luminous. . . . (p. 104).

Nora has gone down into a pit of the unconscious, down with her soul through the surface of the water. On coming back

"And that face there--smiling at me. It seemed, as you might say, I had gone in under a dark dreadful tunnel, and come out the other side." (p. 117)
She has come back with knowledge of her soul. The "black pit", the "dark dreadful tunnel" are the Valley of Death which she has passed through and gained knowledge from. Nora's difficulty now is to explain the face she saw to her fiance, the stolid George. She explains it, but it is doubtful whether George understands the explanation or her any the better for it:

"Haven't you--don't you carry about any picture of yourself better than the reflections of what you see in a glass? And even that's often better than real. You don't think, George, surely, it's just your face I love--and looking like that either! Why, it's you; you; what perhaps nobody else sees at all." (p. 122)

This is de la Mare's clearest statement of his belief regarding the individual: each person must surely be aware of the better, truer self within himself and others, as the above quotation suggests. The face is not often a true mirror of that better self, and it is love which can cross the threshold between the husk and kernel selves.

Miss M. sees her soul only briefly in the looking-glasses of water around her. Exiled by Mrs. Monnerie to Monk's House, she would lean over the cold mouth of the well, just able to discern in the cold mirror of water, far beneath, the face I was almost astonished to find reflected there. 'Shall I come too?' I would morbidly whisper, and dart away.12

Her fortunes are at a low level and she is depressed. She, too, looks into the "inscrutable pit of the unconscious", but the water is too far down for her to see a clear reflection of her soul. She becomes caught up again, for a short while, in worldly considerations.
Then she, symbolically, looks up into "a down-tilted looking-glass." (p. 305) She is looking up to a worldly challenge, up into a mirror made by that world. The self she sees is the one that will go on display at the fair.

After that disastrous display Miss M. returns to Wanderslore. There, desolate, shamed and fevered, she stays near a pool of water. She drinks from it, washes her face in it, sits beside it. The actions seem to stand for absorbing, bodily, her soul; washing away the outer, untrue, self; and communing with her true self. She cannot go far from that pool.

The rivers that run through many of de la Mare's narratives are not minor streams, they are wide or deep, swift-running, rarely calm. Miss Simcox in "At First Sight" watches her reflection and

> Already in the waning light her face appeared a little duskier, its grave scrutiny fixed on that profoundly lustrous and fluid looking-glass. She speculated how deep it actually was; smiled inwardly at the thought of how shallow it need be. (p. 187)

She intends to, and will, commit suicide. She cannot accept her love for Cecil. She decides that his world is not for her: he is perhaps too innocent, and the burden of responsibility will fall too much on her. Cecil, through her renunciation of him, will find a measure of freedom in his mind, but the freedom would have been that much greater if she had chosen to love him. As it is, at their parting

> ... the water gurgled as if in echo of a never-ending lullaby. At least to some ears it might sound so, though for Cecil it resembled the monologue of a hopeless voice babbling of everlasting darkness. (p. 193)
The lullaby is for Miss Simcox. Cecil does not yet realize that the
darkness of saying good-bye presages the light of his mental freedom.
The river will divide them, but Cecil gains, not all he might have
gained, but something.

The young river in "Miss Duveen" separates Arthur from Miss
Duveen. Miss Duveen is slightly mad. Arthur, however, watches her
eccentric but resolute gardening from across the river Wandle, and
grows accustomed to her. It is Miss Duveen who crosses the boundary
between the two lands to converse with Arthur in the rain.

Over a period of time she talks to Arthur of her childhood,
of her sister Caroline who was drowned in a lake. She almost des­
cribes the drowned body to Arthur, but manages not to, though the
picture has stayed in her own mind very vividly. Because the drowned
body is not described, while the living Caroline is, the bedraggled
body is clearly imaginable to the reader. Arthur seems to lack
imagination and also to lack understanding of Miss Duveen, so that
finally the river separates them again, though

... we sometimes waved to one another across
the water, but never if by hiding myself I
could evade her in time. The distance seemed
to confuse her, and quite silenced me. I
began to see we were ridiculous friends,
especially as she came now in ever dingier
and absurder clothes. She even looked
hungry, and not quite clean, as well as ill;
and she talked more to her phantoms than to
me when once we met. (p. 88)

When he hears that she has been put away

... the news, in spite of a vague sorrow,
greatly relieved me. I should be at ease
in the garden again, came the thought--no
longer fear to look ridiculous, and grow hot
when our neighbour was mentioned, or be saddled
with her company beside the stream. (p. 89)

The Wandle becomes an image of separation, a threshold that cannot
be crossed. The elderly, over-imaginative Miss Duveen cannot communicate
with the young Arthur who is obviously just entering the confines of
consciousness of social mores.

Rivers are not, however, only barriers between one person or
another, they are thresholds between two people, two lands, thresholds
that may be crossed as Miss Duveen crossed the Wandle. They also serve
as bridges between two lands: the river's current bears people from
one land to another. In the *Three Royal Monkeys*[^15] de la Mare uses
the river in both forms, as boundary and as bearer. Thumb, Thimble
and Nod cross rivers in their journey to the Valleys of Tishnar
and, last of all, are carried by a river underground, and out into the
Valleys themselves.

The last, black, part of their journey is one that makes a
great symbolic picture of the whole. Nod loses his Wonderstone, his
talisman, for a night, to the Water Midden who lives in the river.
She is the lovely representative of Tishnar who, like the Mermaid of
the Folk-tale, wants to be loved, to have a soul. Nod, the loving,
understanding Prince of Tishnar, promises to remember the Water Midden
when he comes to the Valleys of Tishnar.

The three Royal Monkeys go into darkness on the underground
river protected by friends of the Water Midden. How long they are
under the ground, floating on the river they do not know. They lose
consciousness there through lack of good air. Even the water becomes tainted and, as they all drink it, they fall into a heavy sleep.

The underground river is the river of time and death on which the monkeys float. They come to the Valleys of Tishnar on the other side of the "dark, dreadful tunnel" and their quest appears to be met. But in folklore and fairy-tale the quest is never quite over; in *The Three Royal Monkeys* Thumb, Thimble and Nod took up the quest from Seelem; in Tolkien's stories of Middle Earth Frodo takes up the quest from Bilbo, and as there are lands beyond the sea which Frodo sails out across, so there will be other hobbits of the same mental make-up as these two. The stories of King Arthur show the same pattern of continuity: to return, to complete the circle, is for another to set out on the journey. For de la Mare's three royal monkeys the river has not reached the sea, which is the end of all rivers, therefore, one cannot presume that their journey is finished.

The sea in de la Mare's work certainly appears to represent both finality and eternity. Miss Curtis, in "The Picnic", faces the sea when she finally learns the truth of her blind love. The narrator, in "Mr. Kempe", clings, fly-like, to the cliff above the sea and says that "It was like edging between this world and the next." The narrow path along the cliff edge is like the river of the *Three Royal Monkeys* in that it carries the traveller from one place to another. It is also a threshold between two worlds in that the sea, or the next world, is on one side and the land, this world, is on the other. The line itself hovers dangerously, it bounds both worlds, falls into neither, but leads ultimately to a different landscape.
Henry Brocken's experience on Criseyde's island is the end of his imaginative journey. He repudiates her, and refuses to stay alone on her island. Rather he takes on the loneliness of rowing on the sea forever in his little boat, and his sea seems a vastly empty one, a huge reflection of his sky.

His desire for loneliness is different from Miss M.'s. She, on first seeing the sea, says

Flat, bow-shaped, hazed, remote, and of a blue stilling my eyes as with a dream—I verily believe the saltest tears I ever shed in my life smarted on my lids as the spirit in me fled away, to be alone with that far loveliness. A desire almost beyond endurance devoured me. "Yes," cried hidden self to self, "I can never, never love him; but he shall take me away--away--away. Oh, how I have wasted my days, sick for home."

Her words sound like a cry for the best dream of man, for the Hills of Beulah, the Valleys of Tishnar. It is the divine discontent and longing of the self to be itself in its own "home", Eldorado or Paradise. And yet Miss M.'s very human self says "I can never love him". She would like to have her cake and eat it, too, to give nothing and to take it all.

In Miss M.'s and other of de la Mare's characters we see expressed his questioning thought regarding the fleshly house and the spirit that would flee from it or hide in it. He explores the relationship between these two selves, showing them separated by window and by water. He shows evil and good grimacing at each other through these barriers. He demonstrates that there is a narrow line, a breakable "something", which can be both crossed and walked along. He demonstrates that it
is love between two people, and the understanding of one individual of himself, which can pass the thresholds of window and water.
FOOTNOTES: III

1 Walter de la Mare, Memoirs of a Midget (London, 1921), p. 206.


6 Walter de la Mare, "The Tree" in The Riddle and Other Stories p. 212-231.

7 "Selina's Parable" in The Riddle and Other Stories, p. 90-96.

8 "Seaton's Aunt" in The Riddle and Other Stories, p. 97-141.


11 Walter de la Mare, "The Face" in A Beginning and Other Stories, p. 96-124.

12 Memoirs of a Midget, p. 299.


14 "Miss Duveen" in The Riddle and Other Stories, p. 69-89.


17 Walter de la Mare, *Memoirs of a Midget*, p. 196.
"Did'st thou ever see a lark in a cage? Such is the soul in the body: this world is like her little turf of grass; and the heaven o'er our heads, like her looking-glass, only gives us a miserable knowledge of the small compass of our prison . . ." 

John Webster

De la Mare uses this quotation as an epigraph at the beginning of Memoirs of a Midget. It gives an indication of the themes of the novel: an individual imprisoned within the small compass of her body, seeing the sky in her mirror as the vision of the free-soaring soul.

The sky also acts as a mirror showing the person one ought to, and can, be. It shows the true self and is at the same time the cosmic consciousness of the good. Between self and sky lies the barrier of misunderstanding: once this threshold has been crossed, total, and possibly frightening, perception of the self is possible.

As the sky is the cosmic mirror so the eye is the microcosmic mirror: it reflects the individual from within and returns a reflection of a looker-in: it contains and is containing very much as de la Mare has used water through the surface of which the self can pass into the unconscious. In the same way the on-looker may pass through the surface vision into the consciousness of the other
individual and gain understanding of him.

De la Mare uses man-made mirrors as barrier images which also raise questions that he does not answer. The mirror is principally fact, a man-created barrier between an individual and himself, between one individual and another. The individual sees his clothes and the outline of his physical features, occasionally he may catch a glimpse of the self hidden by these features, but the glimpse allows no time for full appreciation of that self and precludes its full realisation. And realisation can come only when the individual can answer the question 'who is the self in me?'.

The sky as mirror in the *Memoirs of a Midget* is the most pervasive image, subtle and changing. By day Miss M.'s view of the sky is often obscured by people and houses. Until she is eighteen, at Lyndsey, she has an uninterrupted view of sky and landscape from her high window with its balcony, built to her size. From there she watches storm and sunshine. Perhaps because she is still too conscious at this stage of her tiny size Miss M.'s feeling, for the vast mirror above her is one of awe. Her concern is for the dimensions of her body: not yet have the "shades of the prison-house" touched her enough to waken more than a slight awareness of her soul.

The daytime mirror shows Miss M. more often than not, throughout the book as busy, flitting from one revelation of man to another. At night her sky-mirror becomes an object of love and attention for her. At Beechwood she takes up the study of the stars, learning their names and positions. The clear nights are, of course, her favourites, then
she slips from the house to walk towards Wanderslore and watch the sky. She loses her sense of diminutiveness in this occupation: her soul's search, reaching for stars, is equal in stature to that of all men. The lights of the sky represent those souls of aspiration.

By day the sky reflects the practical nature of man, the storm clouds are his challenges, the falling rain his miseries.

It can become, for Miss M., as constricting as a glass jar: the mirror is hard, unfeeling, reflecting a distorted image. Thus she dreams once that she is shut in a glass-jar with a hairy combination of Mrs. Bowater and Miss Fenne outside tapping on the glass. (p. 68) This is unmistakably an image of the prisoned soul and of the desire to communicate with those outside.

Later on, at the disastrous birthday dinner given by Mrs. Monnerie, Miss M. drinks the green syrup and

A horrifying transparency began to spread over my mind. It seemed it had become in that instant empty and radiant as a dome of glass. All sounds hushed away. Things near faded into an infinite distance. Every face, glossed with light as if varnished, became lifeless, brutal, and inhuman, the grotesque caricature of a shadowy countenance that hung somewhere remote in memory, yet was invisible and irrevocable. (p. 293)

The great dome of the glass sky distorts humanity into a "grotesque caricature" of all Miss M. has come to believe. It distorts it to show Miss M. also the "lifeless...inhuman" part that she has been playing. She is banished from Mrs. Monnerie's society after her drunken collapse and retires to Monk's House. There, after wandering one afternoon under a blue sky and herself feeling happier with life,
Fanny comes to her, reviles her bitterly; the sky loses its colour and reality for Miss M., withered beneath such hatred, until she says: "The empty air had swallowed up the sound of our voices. Its enormous looking-glass remained placid and indifferent. It was if all that we had said or, for that matter, suffered, was of no account . . ."

(p. 326)

At this time Miss M. is coming to the end of her story, to the point of learning her last tragic lesson of loneliness, and the night sky changes its aspect for her: "The moon shone glassily in the cold skies, but daybreak was in the east; I must wait until morning."

(p. 357) Day will break the dark mirror of the sky and in the clear light she will be able to see at last the truth of her lack of love for Mr. Anon. The appalling light on the knowledge of her own failure turns Miss M. from the skies to begin

systematically, laboriously, a frenzied search.
Leaf, pebble, crawling nightcreature--with slow, animal-like care, I turned them over one by one, seeking and seeking. (p. 361)

She has to turn her back on her mirror to hunt in her "little turf of grass", for her view of her naked soul has shocked, frightened, mortified her beyond the capacity to face it.

The sky as cosmic mirror appears, briefly, in many of de la Mare's short stories. Thus, as Ann, the last of the children to enter the oak chest, in "The Riddle," sleep-walked, "... Vega, the farshining stood over against the window above the slate roof," (p. 293) for a moment the reader is aware of the wider implications of the story. Vega is the brightest star of the constellation Lyra which is one of the
oldest northern constellations and is named for the lyre of Orpheus or Mercury. Thus de la Mare brings, briefly, the far bright hope of a star, with connotations of music and sorrow, with, perhaps, a further swiftly brought message of hope.

In the same way, at the end of "The Looking Glass",

Not until the evening of that day did the sun in his diurnal course for a while illumine the garden, and then very briefly: to gild, to lull, and to be gone. The stars wheeled on in the thick-sown waste of space, and even when Miss Lennox's small share of the earth's wild living creatures had stirred and sunk again to rest in the ebb of night, there came no watcher--not even the very ghost of a watcher--to the garden, in a watch-gown. So that what peculiar secrets found reflex in its dark mirror no human witness was there to tell. (p. 68)

It is the cosmic mirror which reflects human behaviour, which the human, in this case Alice, may view and interpret according to the true or distorted vision she has. In this mirror, Alice, Miss M. and many of de la Mare's characters, looking at their true selves, are aware of the boundary that exists between their outward and inner real selves, that boundary symbolized by the mirror of sky or glass.

The time of soul-nakedness and shame that Miss M. experiences at the end of her story is shown earlier in its physical aspects when she had slipped across from out of my bath for a pinch of the 'crystals' which Mrs. Monnerie had presented me with that afternoon; for my nose, also, was accustoming itself to an artificial life. An immense cheval looking-glass stood there, and at one and the same instant I saw not only my own slim, naked, hastening figure reflected in its placid deeps, but, behind me, that of Fleming, shadowily engrossed. With a shock I came to a standstill, helplessly meeting her peculiar stare. Only seven yards or so of dusky air divided us.
Caught back by this unexpected encounter, for one immeasurable moment I stood thus, as if she and I were mere shapes in a picture, and reality but a thought. . . . suddenly I flung myself on my knees, and prayed—though what about and to whom I cannot say.  

The image of an actual looking-glass plays a more obvious role in Miss M.'s narration than does the sky. But the part played is less open to analysis. It poses questions rather than acting a cosmic role. The questions raised all concern the self: who is Miss M.? who is Fanny? who is the real self? and what is the real self? The actual and the reflected selves seem sometimes to switch their identities, as in the passage quoted above.

In the last letter received by Sir Walter Pollacke, included in his Introduction, Miss M. says, regarding her story,

"I have tried to tell nothing but the truth about myself. But I realize that it cannot be the whole truth. For while so engaged (just as when one peers into a looking-glass in the moonlight) a something has at times looked out of some secret den or niche in me, and then has vanished."  

Regardless of the ghost-story implications of the peering figure, Miss M. is showing rather her awareness that the self is 'selves', that few people present to the real world their true self.

We may now and again, too, encounter in our walks abroad a fellow-creature touched with a certain cast of strangeness and aloofness. We scan the fleshly house, but the windows are darkened. . . . by slow and infinite degrees . . . that human being has . . . become . . . withdrawn and insulated, and lives on, enringed ever more and more inaccessibly with barriers . . .

It is this 'withdrawn and insulated' recluse that de la Mare seeks out in Miss M.'s mirror. Thus, the first real intimation we have of
her diminuitive size is her early memory of watching her father shave while she is seated on a pomatum pot on his dressing-table. A jackdaw appears at the nearby window and frightens Miss M. "I leapt up, ran across the table, tripped over a hairbrush, and fell sprawling beside my father's watch." Thus, mirror, window, nature and time are combined by de la Mare into a picture to reflect Miss M.'s "fleshly house".

This outward Miss M. is clearly described a few pages later, again from a mirror image:

I can perfectly recall my childish figure as I stood with endless satisfaction surveying my reflection in a looking-glass on the Christmas morning after my ninth birthday. My frock was of a fine puffed scarlet, my slippers loose at heel, to match. My hair, demurely parted in the middle, hung straight on my narrow shoulders (though I had already learned to plait it) and so framed my face; the eyebrows faintly arched (eyebrows darker and crookeder now); the nose in proportion; the lips rather narrow, and of a lively red.

My features wore a penetrating expression in that reflection because my keen look was searching them pretty close. But if it was a sharp look, it was not, I think, a bold or defiant; and then I smiled, as if to say, 'So this is to be my companion, then.' (p. 9)

For a moment the hidden self has peered out from the shadows in the mirror and we are aware that already, at nine, Miss M. is something of a recluse, her true self hidden and undisplayed.

Later Miss M. developed the habit of talking to her mirrored self "for company's sake, and make believe I was a dozen different characters. . . . I made as much, and as many, of myself as possible." (p. 53)

But she protests against this everchanging self to Mrs. Bowater,
and Mrs. Bowater gives the answer that Miss M. herself will fulfill in the last visit to Wanderslore:

"What is the use of being one's self, if one is always changing?"

"There comes a time, miss, when we don't change; only the outer walls crumble away morsel by morsel, so to speak. But that's not for you yet. Still, that's the reason." (p. 238)

These barriers will eventually crumble from Miss M. under the harsh light of the sky's mirror. Miss M. will change no more.

Before that, however, comes Fanny Bowater, Mrs. Bowater's stepdaughter. Fanny, to Miss M., is an enigma, a reality and a dream. Miss M. loves her with an idolatory given usually only to the mysterious. But Fanny is curiously hard. She sees life with uncompromising clarity, refusing to have aspirations beyond her own comfort and security. She writes of Wuthering Heights:

"It is a mad, untrue book. The world is not like Emily Bronte's conception of it. It is neither dream nor nightmare, Midgetina, but wide, wide awake." (p. 44)

And she says of herself "I can't and won't see things but with my reason. My reason, I tell you." (p. 208)

Her insistence on fact and reality begins to sound as if she is protesting too much, is, in truth, refusing to admit her dreaming self to its proper place in her being. In fact, "the secret of herself remained her own." (p. 87) There would be a tearing down of barriers for Fanny too, but Fanny doesn't want to see herself, she wants to retain her secret, and hates Miss M. for showing her herself.

Miss M. sees Fanny over and over again in a man-made looking-glass.
Fanny comes to visit Miss M. in her room in Mrs. Bowater's house and always she looks at herself in the mirror over the mantel-piece. Fanny is beautiful, but Miss M. says that "however much she loved to watch herself in the looking-glass or in her mind, and to observe her effects on others, she was not vain." (p. 96)

De la Mare refers to the mirror in various contexts as a way of viewing the self. Daydreams are called "A passive looking-glass of active reflections." Reality is said to preen "itself in dream's looking-glass": (p. 104) this is surely the aspiring Miss M., and perhaps Fanny who will not admit her dreams. De la Mare says also, of reading a poem, that "Consciousness . . . becomes a passive mirror of how wide a field of echo and solitude and beauty." (p. 108)

In The Return the human consciousness of Arthur Lawford becomes a struggling mirror of "echo and solitude" when he sees in his looking-glass, not his own familiar face, but the features of Sabathier which have supplanted his own.

He sat there and it seemed to him his body was transparent as glass. It seemed he had no body at all--only the memory of an hallucinatory reflection in the glass, and this inward voice crying, arguing, questioning, threatening out of the silence--'What is it really--really--really?' And at last, cold, wearied out, he rose once more and leaned between the two long candle-flames, and stared on--on--on, into the glass. (p. 13)

He is alone with a body he owns but does not know, whose consciousness he has yet which resounds with echoes of another. In some respects, it is a simpler problem than Miss M.'s: Lawford must expel the consciousness of another man, Miss M. seeks for herself. Struggling against a recognizable adversary is easier than looking for an unknown.
Therefore, when Lawford looks in the mirror he sees that which is possessed by the soul of another man. What Miss M. sees in her mirrors is unclear, the threshold between real and unreal is transparent and reality is just a thought.

In *The Three Royal Monkeys* Andy Battle gives Nod, servant of Tishnar, "the endless unknown", a piece of looking glass. Thus the mirror passes from man the real to the agent of the unreal and we do not know what Nod sees in it.

It is clear in *The Return* that de la Mare is already concerned with mirror images, but the dominant image is that of the door as has been discussed. It is notable that the objective change in Lawford takes place before the subjective; the animosity of the other characters is built on this objective change; if it were not so visible they might have been able to accept it.

In *Memoirs of a Midget* Fanny Bowater has been explained as being the objective reality of Miss M.'s practicality, her mind; Mr. Anon being Miss M.'s heart. It is a very tenable explanation of Fanny in that Miss M., seamstress of great skill, great reader, minor philosopher, is unable to understand her own business affairs. Certainly Fanny's cruelty and practical sense are beyond Miss M. Mr. Anon can represent the un-understanding heart of Miss M. that dwells at Wanderslore, that is unable to grasp the spiritual communion of love between two people. Thus Mr. Anon is warped, mis-shapen, dour, scorned by Miss M. Yet of him she says "--I am, as you might say, in my own mind with him." With Mr. Anon Miss M. is most at ease, she talks "without fear"
of what she should not say, certainly she hurts him by things she does say and do, but she is most truly herself in his company. And in his company her experiences, both good and bad as Forrest Reid points out, come closest to poetry.¹²

Miss M.'s experiences are, because of her size, more closely related to her sight, her vision or view of things than might be that of an ordinary-sized mortal. Thus, she sees in detail the mole's carcass, she goes to private views in London, she scrutinizes people. Through her eyes we see these things, her view of them becomes the reflection that we see in those smallest of all mirrors: the eyes, those "strange devices that alone divide / The seer from the seen--."¹³

The eye is not only that which looks: it is also that which contains and that which informs both the person looked at and the looker. It is the eyes that look into the mirror, or at a human being, that see the image there. These same eyes are the threshold of the soul of the looker, in them the landscape of the soul within may be seen by that other person, or may be reflected in the mirror. Sometimes, in Memoirs of a Midget, there is a faint whimsicality to the image, as when the large, bovine Pollie uses Miss M. as a looking-glass to help her don her new hat before they both leave Lyndsey. As they explore the house for the last time

Even Pollie's imperturbable face wore the appearance of make-belief; for an instant I surprised the whole image of me reflected in her round blue eye.¹⁴

Whimsicality and unkindness prompt Fanny's suggestion that Miss M. dance at the New Year's Eve Parish concert. The recluse in Miss M.
has no financial need as yet to make herself an exhibition for the public, and the suggestion is greeted by silence:

The two gentlemen's faces smoothed themselves out, and both, I knew, though I gave them no heed, sat gazing, not at their hostess. But Fanny herself was looking at me now, her light eyes quite still in the flame of the candles, which, with their reflections in Mrs. Bowater's pier glass, were not two, but four. It was into those eyes I gazed, yet not into, only at. (p. 78)

Miss M. cannot see into those light-coloured eyes: they are hard, bright, and only reflect, in the mirror, Miss M. The glass of the mirror is a barrier between these two; communication, true vision, is impossible.

Fanny and Miss M. are separated always by invisible barriers of the mirror and the self. Mr. Anon and Miss M. are not. The differences between them are those of one person in love and one not, of one person's undivided intention of loving and the other's attention fascinated with the world and philosophic problems. But with these two "there is a commerce between minds as well as between eyes." (p. 64)

The commerce of these two small people is written in language whose images are so closely woven that to quote in part is not to show the full complexity of their exchanges. But to quote in full draws red herrings across any explanation of the pattern of mirror and eye imagery. Miss M. records their first meeting with Mr. Anon:

Standing there, with fixed, white face and black hair, under a flowering blackthorn, he remained as motionless and as intent as I. He was not more than a few inches, apparently, superior in height to myself . . . (p. 148)
To this day I sometimes strive in vain to see, quite clearly in my mind, that face, as it appeared, at that first meeting. A different memory of it obtrudes itself; yet how many, many times have I searched his features for news of himself, and looked passingly—and once with final intensity—into those living eyes. But I recollect that his clothes looked slightly out of keeping and grotesque amid the green things of early spring. It seemed he had wasted in them. So, too, the cheek had wasted over its bone, and seemed parched; the thin lips, the ears slightly pointed. And then broke out his low, hollow voice. Scarcely rising or falling, the mere sound of it seemed to be as full of meaning as the words.

He looked at me, and at all I possessed, as if piece by piece—as if he had been a long time searching for them all. Yet he now seemed to avoid my eyes, though they were serenely awaiting his. Indeed from this moment almost to the last, I was never at a loss or distressed in his company. He never called me out of myself beyond an easy and happy return, though he was to creep into my imagination as easily as a single bee creeps into the thousand-celled darkness of its hive.

Whenever I parted from him his remembrance was like that of one of those strange figures which thrust themselves as if out of the sleep-world into the mind's wakefulness; vividly, darkly, impress themselves upon consciousness, and then are gone . . . (p. 148-149)

This young man's [face] kept me engrossed because of the self that brooded in it—its dark melancholy, too . . . (p. 150)

Mr. Anon is always dark and light beside the bright colours of Miss M. He is like the house of Wanderslore itself, with the "fright, louring stare" (p. 172) of its shuttered windows. Miss M. will always see his face when she thinks of those windows. She makes the latter statement prophetically, for, as he lives and spiritually belongs to the wild, neglected demesne, so Mr. Anon returns to die there.
It is a place of deep shadow, of deadly nightshade and the nightjar; also one of sunshine for Miss M. She says once "Why couldn't one put boards up in the Wanderslore of one's mind?" (p. 154) Mr. Anon has done this, and the light that permeates Miss M.'s life cannot reach him through the shutters. He is, perhaps, Miss M.'s heart. Certainly he is the one person Miss M. is able to reach across the threshold of his, and her own, personalities, whereas between her and Fanny there is a barrier always. Fanny sees Miss M. as living in a "pretty little doll's house", (p. 96) as being a "pin in a pin-cushion" (p. 122) in a large workbox. It is Fanny who cruelly knocks on the glass jar of Miss M.'s imprisonment, while Mr. Anon creeps in to share "her little turf of grass."

Arthur Lawford's imprisonment is, finally, solitary also. Grisel almost shares it with him, but there is an element of doubt as to the sincerity of her intentions, she belongs too truly on the other side of the wicket-gate. She appears to encourage Lawford in his struggle but, somehow, the reader cannot trust her. It is not, however, with Grisel but with Sheila and her sceptical friends that Lawford's eyes are described as "glassy". Lawford's mind is then a mirror "reflecting the outside world", receiving its impressions and giving them back, not accepting them, as they are false to his vision and his struggle.

The eye which reflects and records a wrong impression is very simply recorded in de la Mare's short story "The Picnic." It is a story of blindness of sight and comprehension. The theme is
explicit in the first three lines of the story:

There was an empty, pensive look on
Miss Curtis's face as she stood there, solitary,
by the (as yet unblinded) shop-door . . . (p. 285)

The emptiness of her vision is that of the man she fell in love
with on her holiday at Newhampton five years before, only he was
blind. His solitariness was that of the blind for he had a companion,
Miss Curtis has none.

She sees the man sitting at the window of a house, and she sees
him smiling at her with a look

as natural as a child who likes the look of a
 stranger--of any sex--and of course doesn't
mind showing it. There wasn't in fact the least
symptom of the cheeky, of the fast, in that
smile. It was quiet, and far-away; lonely--
that was the word. (p. 296)

She looked at him and, on the third day, she smiled back, and we
are told that if she had not been a little short-sighted she might
have wondered about the vagueness of his expression, the fact that
he "had simply smiled on." (p. 297)

Finally Miss Curtis sits outside his house on the last day of
her holiday waiting, sure that he will come out to her. He does.

Then, with that vast western light for help, she
had looked up--straight into the unknown one's
face, straight into his eyes. And though they
were fixed in her direction they had made no sign.
None--just none. How could they? For though they
were wide open they were veiled by a peculiar film,
and even if the unknown one's hand had not been
resting on his companion's arm, she would have
realized at once that he was blind--just blind.
(p. 305)

The indifferent mirror of the sky shows her the truth, she sees her
own blindness, the distortion which she made in her own mind's mirror, and in the mirror of the blind man's companion who calls her "poor thing" on her breaking her tea-flask in shock at the revelation,

... she felt the full destructiveness of that 'poor thing.' To see ourselves as others see us and not through the distortion of self-deception, rapture, and romance--'Poor thing!' (p. 306)

It is the vision of the self as others see us, reflected in eyes, in mirrors, in the sky's looking-glass that is the raison d'être of many of de la Mare's stories. He explores the possibilities of escape from the soul's cage and he seems to find escape only possible through facing and accepting the true reflection of that other self in the mirror. There may be shame for the self, as Miss M. found; there may be disillusionment such as Miss Curtis'; there is always struggle.


CHAPTER V

THE PRESENT, BETWEEN PAST AND FUTURE

The mirror image of the individual merges into that of the integral individual which is de la Mare's conception of space and time as the "all I am" shown in the Introduction. The threshold to be crossed is that of, again, understanding into integrity and wholeness. The "all I am" encompasses the space of name and person and comprehends the space in time past, present and future of memory, being and experience which any one individual fills. The "all I was" (p. 155) of primeval and individual memory becomes the "I... shall be" (p. 155) that recognizes and uses experience and memory as part of the self. The "all I am" (p. 155) of the integral self is Miss M. who realizes herself at the end of the Memoirs, is Lawford in The Return, is Henry Brocken and Nod, all on their various journeys of self exploration and discovery. De la Mare's novels are concerned with the struggle of crossing the threshold from self-misunderstanding to full-comprehension and thus integrity.

In The Return, Lawford finds when all other methods of self-identification are lost to him, that his name is all that, finally, he can hold on to as himself, his identity being lost between the combined memories of Sabathier and Lawford. His name is his only point of contact with the "I am" which is the space his body occupies
but which is presently occupied by Sabathier. In many of de la Mare's works the importance of the name or lack of it is implicit.

De la Mare asks, over and over again, "Who is the individual. How can he reach himself?" By what can we, the onlookers, know of a person if he is hidden behind a mask? We take the mask for the individual, and are led astray in our judgment. Thus in Mr. Bloom in "A Recluse" a sense of the mask that Mr. Bloom has created for himself is built up:

If his house had suggested vacancy, so did he; and yet--I wonder. (p. 8)

What was wrong with the man? What made him so extortionately substantial, and yet in effect, so elusive and unreal? What indeed constitutes the reality of any fellow creature? The something, the someone within, surely; not the mere physical frame. (p. 14)

And then, as I sat looking at him--it is difficult to put it into words--his face 'went out' so to speak; it became a face (not only abandoned but) forsaken, vacant and as if uncurtained too, bleak and mute as a window. The unspeculating eyes remained open, one inert hand lay on the table beside his plate, but he, Mr. Bloom, was gone. (p. 22)

The mask is finally revealed on what had been an empty bed

... on the pillow--the grey-flecked brown beard protruding over the turned-down sheet--now showed what appeared to be the head and face of Mr. Bloom. With chin jerked up, I watched that face steadily, transfixedly. It was a flawless facsimile, waxy, motionless; but it was not a real face and head. It was an hallucination. How induced is quite another matter. No spirit of life, no livingness had ever stirred those soaplike, stagnant features. It was a travesty utterly devoid--whatever its intention--of the faintest hint of humour. It was merely a mask, a life-like mask (past even the dexterity of a Chinese artist to rival), and--though I hardly know why--it was unconceivably shocking. (p. 39-40)
Mr. Bloom has dabbled in spiritualism to such an extent that the spirits have taken over from him and now create his image outside his own volition. His name is an ironic one: the mask of his face blooms unwanted and apart from himself, while his true inner self does not show on his own physical face.

"A Recluse" points most clearly to de la Mare's conception of the space the individual occupies. The conception is less clear in the novels because de la Mare is dealing with the problem of attaining self-understanding. McCrosson, however, hints at the importance of the name Henry Brocken:

... a brocken is "an optical phenomenon" and a "specter". If one stands at the rim of a cloud-filled crater with the sun at one's back, one's shadow is projected upon the clouds below, and around the shadow radiates a glowing nimbus. Henry, then, is a projection of the author's mind: a mere shadow, and the vehicle by which de la Mare could absorb, more intently, the reality of the characters who are his primary concern.

Indeed, the characters, Lucy Gray, Jane Eyre, have far more substantiality than Henry Brocken in many respects. But Brocken is more than just a "projection of the author's mind." He is on a journey of the imagination, in which he discovers the limitations of his point of view: that he cannot exist only as a phenomenon in a world of people projected from literature, but must guide his own boat on the waters of the unknown world. He is a character, an individual who is able to communicate with some of the characters that he meets, but not with others. He communicates with the Yahoo and with the Doctor of Physic among others, but his conversation with
Annabel Lee shows how far the shades of the prisonhouse of adulthood have closed around him:

'You are a very lonely little girl," I said.
'I am building in the sand,' she answered.
'A castle?'
She shook her head.
'It was in dreams,' she said, flushing darkly.
(p. 128)

The conversation continues in short questions and answers; it is only an adult who calls a little girl "little girl" aloud, and the conversation has taken its cue from that.

Brocken puts to sea and meets Criseyde. With her he finds himself incapable of giving up his freedom for love that she may search for Troilus. "You have voyaged far?" Criseyde asks him; "From childhood to this side regret," (p. 190) is Brocken's sad answer. He can no longer give carelessly but must weigh the pros and cons that the mores of his society have built around him as his cage.

Inasmuch as Brocken is an optical phenomenon, we cannot add more to our knowledge of him as a personality. The novel is one of a journey made in the imagination; if anything it is a novel belonging to the stream of consciousness genre. We find that it is not, finally, Henry Brocken that is the optical phenomenon, but the characters he has met that have passed before our and Henry Brocken's eyes that are projections of his mind, caught in the shadows that he casts on the cloud-filled crater of his unconscious self. His acceptance of self lies in his final rejection of the shadows and acceptance of the unknown world.

Henry Brocken has much in common with de la Mare's Traveller
of his long poem *The Traveller* published in 1946. Both are journeys on horseback through lands of the imagination. But the Traveller's journey is through a wasteland of unfriendly landscape. The early scenes have something of the wonder that imbues much of *Henry Brocken*, but the Traveller moves swiftly into an arid and fearful wasteland with no real epiphany before his death. The Traveller is, in fact, a poem of disillusionment. The Traveller himself is man on his journey of life, a journey taken through the wilderness of World Wars and fear for any bright future. The continual quest must go on, but it lacks the hope of self-knowledge found in de la Mare's novels.

*The Three Royal Monkeys*, written for children, is another story of quest, one in which the names of the Three Mulla-Mulgars are tied to the function of each monkey. Ummanodda, Nod as he is called throughout the book, is a Nizzaneela, and is under the protection of Tishnar which means that which cannot be thought about in words, or told, or expressed. So all the wonderful, secret, and quiet world beyond the Mulgars' lives is Tishnar—wind and stars, too, the sea and the endless unknown. But here it is only the Beautiful One of the Mountains that is meant. So beautiful is she that a Mulgar who dreams even of one of her Maidens, and wakes still in the presence of his dream, can no longer be happy in the company of his kind. He hides himself away in some old hole or rocky fastness, lightless, matted, and uncombed, and so thins and pines, or becomes a Wanderer or Moh-Mulgar. But it is rare for this to be for very few Mulgars dream beyond the mere forest, as it were; and fewer still keep the memories of their dream when the live-long vision of Munza returns to their waking eyes. (p. 273)
Nod is he who is on the border of Tishnar. He sees into the unknown, is able to carry the Wonderstone from which by rubbing "Samaweza-wise," (p. 15) that is counter-clock-wise, he can obtain the direct help of Tishnar. Nod represents the imagination of the Three Mullamulgars, the one who is closest to the subconscious, to the dream world of sleep. He is Nod the Shepherd, guiding his brothers down the road of evening.

Nod's brothers, Thumma and Thimbulla, or Thumb and Thimble, have names indicative of their position in relation to Nod. Thumb has physical strength greater than the other two. He is practical, and is frightened by the powers of Tishnar as is shown by his reaction to Nod's transfiguration before the phantoms of Mulgarmeerez. He is earlier momentarily afraid on coming to the end of the trail over the mountains of Arakkaboa, but his practical sense calms Nod's purely imaginary fears.

Thimble plays a less important part in the story, he is the second brother, often the one of whom least is told in folk and fairy tales; he simply follows the adventures of the elder brother. But Thimble does serve in a slightly more important capacity than that: he serves as a bridge between the practicality of Thumb and the imagination of Nod. He is the stitching between two pieces of cloth. His illness in the mountains of Arakkaboa serves to bind the brothers even closer on their journey.

Some names in de la Mare's other two full-length novels take on great significance. In *The Return*, Lawford, Bethany, Danton, Simon
all have relevance to the theme of the struggle of life and death in the novel. In Arthur Lawford himself a natural law is forded, crossed: in him the dead cross the threshold of death and re-enter life. Whether or not "Arthur" indicates the Arthurian cycle is more open to doubt, though certainly a parallel can be drawn between the invading evils that King Arthur combated and those against which Lawford struggles. King Arthur was certainly finally defeated but the perpetuity of the struggle is inherent in the legend of his death. So, with Lawford, the essential battle is won, but there is a feeling that it may have to be re-fought, maybe at other times and by other people. The struggle of life and death is continual.

In the name of the vicar, Mr. Bethany, de la Mare shows how continual is that struggle. The raising of Lazarus took place at Bethany. The place-name is also made important by one of de la Mare's comments in Behold This Dreamer! § "All minds, probably, are shared by a Martha and a Mary." (p. 16) Here again, he is dealing with the duality of the individual, "the listener may at any moment be compelled to supersede the servant." (p. 19) Mr. Bethany both listens and serves Lawford. He represents not only Lazarus returning to life through love, but also loving service that includes listening to the one who needs help. It is interesting to note that, like Mr. Crimble the curate in Memoirs of a Midget, he wears glasses. But, unlike Mr. Crimble, Mr. Bethany uses the added power given to his eyes to both see, understand and cope with the lives of his parishioners.

In Mr. Danton de la Mare recalls Georges Jacques Danton, lawyer,
orator and leader of the French Revolution. He began as an anarchist favouring the over-thrown of the established regime, but later became a partisan of peace, in direct conflict with Robespierre who finally had him guillotined. De la Mare's Mr. Danton represents the anarchy of the dead Sabathier's return to life in Lawford. Later in the novel he represents the sceptic who wants peace in society, refusing to believe what has happened to Lawford. He prefers that Lawford should be put into a lunatic asylum in order to retain at least the form of peace. Georges Jacques Danton had, similarly, refused to recognize all the facts of the case, among them the extreme measures wanted by Robespierre. De la Mare's Mr. Danton thus represents not only the crossing from monarchy to democracy of the French Revolution but also the lack of understanding of the processes involved in crossing that threshold between the two types of government.

In Dr. Simon, who is only on the outskirts of the novel, de la Mare hints again at Christian ideas. He quite possibly represents Simon Peter and the change from the house built upon sand to the rock of belief that Peter came to be. Lawford was a being without firm foundation until shaken into belief by near-denial of himself, and thus into a re-birth. One of the few facts given of Dr. Simon is that he had helped at one very difficult confinement, and Lawford's return to himself is a difficult rebirth from the grave to his own life.

The names given by de la Mare to two of the characters in Memoirs of a Midget are important simply because they are not names. Miss M. is never either more or less than "Miss M." McCrosson seems to believe that Miss M.'s real name is "Miss Thomasina of Bedlam."
relying solely on the incident when Miss M. introduces herself under this name. But the tone of her introduction, just after she has been quarrelling with Mr. Anon, is one of bitterness and sarcasm. McCrosson also fails to take into account Miss M.'s recitation of the anonymous poem "Tom o'Bedlam" at Lady Pollacke's tea, and her stated fondness for the poem. Also, later on, Miss M. goes through the M's in Debrett's Peerage. The latter incident shows Miss M.'s intense humanity in that she is probably hunting for royalty among her ancestors as people in idle moments do sometimes and thus that "M." stands for more than "Midget" or "Midgetina", as Fanny Bowater calls her.

Miss M. is, thus, not identified by name. The reader is forced to concentrate more on her as narrator and on her character as revealed by her narration. She has no real label by which we can easily identify her. "Miss M." only tells us that the bearer of the title is feminine, which we know. The "M." can stand equally for "Midget", "Me" or "Myself". Miss M. is, then, almost as anonymous as Mr. Anon. By making her so, literally, de la Mare further enforces his argument that the person who cannot truly name himself, cannot truly be himself. And, in the Memoirs of a Midget, he is dealing with a self-discovery which is not complete enough to give a name to the space "I am" which Miss M. occupies.

Mr. Anon is given no other name at any time, only one indication is given that he has any other. Miss M., having introduced him to Mrs. Bowater, later asks him his name: "He gave me his name--and 'Mr. Anon' describes him no worse." (p. 175) she says. Mr. Anon has then, no use for a name. As Forrest Reid points out, the incidents
in which he appears are written in language closest to poetry, and
"Tom o'Bedlam" is an anonymous poem. The real name is not important
to poetry, but is Mr. Anon poetry himself? Perhaps he is the heart,
imagination, of Miss M., personified. He has this aspect yet seems
to stand, like Tishnar, for an unnameable challenge, the dream
ideal symbol of Miss M.'s life. He is perhaps closely akin to Tom
o'Bedlam himself

'With a heart of furious fancies,
   Whereof I am commander!
   With a burning spear,
   And a horse of air,
   To the wilderness I wander.

'With a knight of ghosts and shadows,
   I summoned am to tourney:
   Ten leagues beyond
   The wide world's end;
   Methinks it is no journey.' (p. 46)

The connection with de la Mare's "Song of Finis" is clear as

At the edge of All the Ages
   A Knight sate on his steed,
His armour red and thin with rust,
   His soul from sorrow freed;
And he lifted up his visor
   From a face of skin and bone,
And his horse turned head and whinnied
   As the twain stood there alone.

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

The final picture of Mr. Anon is undoubtedly that of The Traveller
in de la Mare's long poem of that name, for Mr. Anon certainly finds
no joy in his love for Miss M. He rides behind his horse on a donkey-cart to her rescue and to his death. But he goes to his death in the quiet of the wilderness of Wanderslore after accepting a challenge of humiliation and fear. He is Miss M.'s "knight of ghosts and shadows" for it is their world he inhabits, therefore he is anonymous, unnameable.

De la Mare thus uses names deliberately to endorse the thematic structure of his works. The same is true in some of his short stories, such as "A Recluse", "Odd Shop", "The Looking-Glass" and "The Tree".

In both "Odd Shop" and "The Tree" de la Mare deals with unnamed people, they represent precisely what they are: the buyer and the seller. The emphasis in "Odd Shop" is on the wares, not on the kind of people who buy these wares. The Shopkeeper has collected and caged memories and sounds which anyone may hear if he wishes to. The Customer is interested, he has a little time to spare, and he browses amongst the goods. He does not recognize the sounds in the cages until he is told what they are but his reactions to them describe the sound, by metaphor and allusion, more clearly than actually knowing what the sound is as told by the Shopkeeper. The two characters are vehicles for description though, inevitably, some kind of personality is built up from the words they speak and their reactions to each other. The story has a Dickensian quality to it; it is an incident lifted from life and put into the realm of the curious and revealing.
If the story of "Odd Shop" is Dickensian, then surely the Fruit Merchant of "The Tree" stands characterized by one strong aspect of himself, as do many of Dickens' characters, his worldliness. He belongs to the City, to the commercial world that buys, sells, and sends ships to gather goods from far lands. He is the Merchant of the fruits of the earth, exploiting them for his own ends.

On the other hand P.P., his half-brother is, to the Fruit Merchant, "perfect pest; paltry poser; plaguey parasite." (p. 207) The Fruit Merchant might have added 'Pied Piper' or 'perfect painter' to the list. P.P. is at the other mental extreme from the Fruit Merchant: he is solely creator, giving no thought for the morrow, living only to put on paper the various aspects of The Tree. He is the Pied Piper led astray, as unable to see a world other than the Tree and the fruits of it as the Fruit Merchant is incapable of seeing a world other than that based on commercial values. But P.P. as Pied Piper will draw the commercial world to his artistry, his works will sell and the Fruit Merchant will buy them. But the Fruit Merchant will be outside the charmed sphere of appreciation; he will, lamely, burn them.

The Alice of "The Looking-Glass" in both name and title clearly recalls Alice of Through the Looking-Glass. But there the similarity ends. Carroll's Alice went through a real looking-glass into the game of chess beyond. For de la Mare's Alice

... the low and foundering wall between the empty meadows and her own recess of greenery had always seemed to her like the boundary between two worlds. On the one side freedom, the
wild; on this, Miss Lennox, and a sort of captivity. There Reality; here (her "duties" almost forgotten) the confines of a kind of waking dream. (p. 56)

But she finds the air in the garden like a looking-glass, it is so clear, and her desire is to pass through that glass into the free world beyond, outside the garden. She can be at peace in the garden; she looks down at night from her window wishing to be in it. The mirror is, for her, the half-way line, the threshold between confinement and freedom; it is also, finally, the threshold of life that leads, for her, to the freedom of death.

Alice's own recognition is that it is herself that is the mirror in the garden, "the spirit is me: I haunt this place!" (p. 65) The spirit is the mirror; the border between prison and freedom is the spirit, and is herself: "It can be only my thankful, thankful self that is here. And that can never be lost." (p. 65) She can exist, she realises, beyond death in the peaceful solitude of the garden, outside the frightening "vacancy of the house." (p. 55)

The "all I am" that is the space contained by Alice will pass into and become the clear air of the looking-glass in the garden, to reflect its solitude as she has reflected on it previously.

De la Mare has clearly, then, used names as referents to increase the strength of his stories, in this way Mr. Bethany is himself, and in himself recalls the incidents at the Biblical Bethany. So Alice recalls Lewis Carroll's Alice and her character is built on to the adventures of the earlier Alice.

The "all I was" of the personal and unconscious memory is the "I . . .
shall be" of experience, recognized and used, in de la Mare's world. The long past is linked to the future by the primeval memory. De la Mare felt that

Dreams, wholly rational and coherent, are it is true, rare. And these, apart from their peculiar aura, so closely resemble actuality that they suggest relics of a previous life, . . ." 13

Megroz re-inforces this statement in saying that dream, for de la Mare, "springs also from an unusually active, unconscious memory of a distant ancestry." 14

The story most clearly involving the primeval memory of man is "The Vats". 15 The opening words "Many years ago now--in that once upon a time which is the memory of the imagination rather than of the work-a-day mind, I went walking with a friend" set the tone and theme immediately: time-primeval, time-individual, time-present.

The narrator and his friend are not named, they are "we", "I", "my friend and I". They are, finally, the "Children of Lazarus, ageing, footsore, dusty and athirst." (p. 303) They are part of the experience of all men in seeing and comprehending experience. They are the "we" of mankind primeval, present and future; and the individual "I" within that mankind, one of the partnership between man alone and man "by nature political." 16

The two friends go for a walk in spring and come upon a view of the Vats. The story, if 'story' it is, describes the Vats and their effect upon the two humans.

Obviously their mucous incrustations and the families of weeds flourishing in their interstices were of an age to daunt the imagination. Their
ancestry must have rooted itself here when the
dinosaur and the tribes of the megatherium
roamed earth's crust and the pterodactyl clashed
through its twilight--thousands of centuries
before the green acorn sprouted that was to
afford little Cain in a fallen world his first
leafy petticoats. I realised as if at a sigh
why smiles the Sphinx; why the primary stars
have blazed on in undiminish­ing midnight lustre
during Man's brief history, and his childish
constellations have scarcely by a single inch
of heaven changed in their apparent stations.

They wore that air of lovely timelessness which
decks the thorn, and haunts for the half-woken
sense the odour of sweet-brier; yet they were
grey with the everlasting, as are the beards of
the patriarchs and the cindery craters of the
Moon. (p. 300)

The timelessness of the thorn and the sweet-brier recall, from de la
Mare's poem "All That's Past," that

... no man knows
Through what wild centuries
Roves back the rose.17

In images such as these de la Mare creates the sense of continual
memory, of perpetuating seasons; no one may know the continuity, one
can only experience it and record it for part of the future, the "I
shall be", experience.

The effect of the Vats upon the two minute human spectators is
at first that "they called to some hidden being within us that, if
not their coeval, was at least aware of their exquisite antiquity."18

They then realise that the Vats contain

... floods, beyond measure, of the waters for
which our souls had pined. Waters, imaginably
so clear as to be dense, as if of melted metal
more translucent even than crystal; of such a
tenuous purity that not even the moonlit branches
of a dream would spell their reflex in them, so
costly... (p. 301)
The Vats contain the Elixir Vitae, and the two watchers

... knew now and for ever that Time-pure is;
that here—somewhere awaiting us and all forlorn
mankind—lay hid the solace of our mortal longing;
that doubtless the Seraph whose charge is the
living waters will in the divine hour fetch down
his iron key in his arms, and—well, Dives, rich
man and crumb-waster that he was, pleaded out of
the flames for but one drop of them. Neither my
friend nor I was a Dives then, nor was ever
likely to be. And now only I remain.

We were Children of Lazarus, ageing, footsore,
dusty and athirst. (p. 303)

The "Children of Lazarus" have received a drop of comfort from the
rich table of time and can live in the knowledge of that comfort.
The monuments created by nature and by man survive and life itself
continues behind and before the short span of man's tenure on earth.
Man can be aware of that eternity reaching back and forth of him
and be both comforted and awed by it; the boundary between eternity,
past and future, being the small space of man's present tense, "I am".

The goods sold by the Shopkeeper in "Odd Shop" also testify to
the continuity of life. The first cage at which the Customer listens
contains, he says,

A sound like someone rasping on a rough surface,
with a fingernail. But shriller; more musical.19

The Shopkeeper corrects him: "... what you hear is only the call
and possibly the colloquy of a house-cricket. ... in the silence
of midnight." (p. 13) The Customer listens to "the knocking of the
death-watch beetle. Another love call, ..." (p. 14); a storm on
the coast of Wales; milk dripping from a teaspoon into a cup; "the
whisper an evening primrose makes when its petals ... unfurl," (p. 16)
and the voices of conscience and advancing age. The syllables spoken by the latter are indistinguishable to the Customer, but the Shopkeeper elucidates them:

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Snow, dust, motes of light, falling time, time ever falling. Remember, yes, remember. Oh, yes, remember. Yes, remember. (p. 18)
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The Customer replies that he would have supposed age to look ahead rather than back. He does not realize that the experience of the aged human is behind, and, because the experience is now become part of the primeval memory, is also ahead of the human because dying is part of the primeval memory. Each one of the sounds sold by the Shopkeeper is part of an eternal past; they are the minute aspects of which the Vats symbolize the huge whole. The fact that the last paragraph of "Odd Shop", four short sentences long, begins in the present tense and ends in the past, emphasizes the continuity of time and life within time:

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He watches his visitor mount the narrow street and vanish into the thickening fog. No one, not even a cat, is otherwise in sight. The no one, indeed, might almost have been nothing. Merely an old man's memory--after the muffled jangling of the shop-bell had ceased.
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Frank Swinnerton points out that de la Mare felt that there is no such thing as death qua finality, and that intelligence is in truth a stream of consciousness. Death is then a passing into the racial memory, as living is a participating in that memory and an adding to it.

The space occupied by the individual, identified by his name or personality, therefore moves into the eternity of the past which is,
if recognized as universal experience, also part of the future of all men. For death is before each individual as it is also behind him. The fact must be recognized and the experience used by the individual who stands on the threshold between time-past, primeval, and time-future, the "I . . . shall be" of used experience, within his own "I am".


7. Doris McCrosson, Walter de la Mare, p. 122.


13. Behold, This Dreamer!, p. 79.


15. Walter de la Mare, "The Vats" in The Riddle and Other Stories, p. 295-303.


18 ___________, "The Vate" in *The Riddle and Other Stories*, p. 300-301.

19 ___________, "Odd Shop" in *A Beginning and Other Stories*, p. 13.

CHAPTER VI

THE OTHER AND THE REAL WORLDS

The individual who stands securely in the present, cognisant of his astral self and of his primeval past is he who, in de la Mare's terms, is happiest in the real world about him. The space he occupies is not a cage but an area from which he can move serenely back and forward in time, up to the arch of ideal good, the sky, and down into death. From all these worlds come the experiences that make up the true self. But these worlds are not "other" than the true self, they are part of it, extensions of its knowledge and experience in the real world. De la Mare has, however, consistently been accused of failing to face facts, of living in, and writing of, a fantasy world.\(^1\)

In his adult fiction it is clear that he is exploring the fleshly house of man in time and space. His stories for children, as for adults, are concerned with the same themes of estrangement from the true self, from the home, and for communication and respect between individuals. In "Mr. Bumps and His Monkey"\(^2\) he deals with spiritual separation and isolation. His hero is the monkey, Jasper, taken from his home by Mr. Bumps across the sea to England. There he is stolen and is made into a circus show-piece. He is found by Mr. Bumps and is returned to his homeland but, having been physically removed from his kind they find him no longer acceptable because of his experiences.
There is suspicion finally that Jasper is killed as an alien by his own people.

Jasper's 'real' world is the forest - but man, lacking understanding, transports him across the symbolically dividing sea into his 'real' world. Jasper is an alien in this world and becomes one in his own. Yet de la Mare is clearly sympathetic to Mr. Bumps, who is kind to Jasper, showing rather that it is Mr. Bumps' society which is at fault in making an exhibit out of an alien being.

"Sambo and the Snow Mountains" is a penetrating story of a black boy's desire for integration in a white society. The story, though veiled in fantasy, is surely one of social concern. De la Mare is noting the facts of life faced by colored people living in western society. The tragi-comedy of Sambo's solution, that he paints himself with white-wash and remains white from a misguided sense of loyalty, shows that de la Mare felt that there is no honest solution to a colored boy's problem. The story echoes Blake's "The Little Black Boy" in that Sambo leaves the town to go to the Snow Mountains to take care of an old lady. The Snow Mountains are the heaven of Blake's poem, the old lady is "the English child" with silver hair whom he will shade from the heat of heaven.

Blake's poetry, as McCrosson points out, is also echoed in "Maria-Fly". The primary theme of the story is in the second stanza of Blake's poem:

Am not I
A fly like thee?
Or art not thou
A man like me?
De la Mare is again dealing with the individual, his identity and relationship to creatures around him. But, primarily, the story is one of communication, of Maria trying to explain her vision of the fly as herself to various people and failing, not as much through her own lack of ability to express herself, but rather through the adults' failure to understand the importance and truth of what she wants to say. De la Mare has captured the child's rapture and the poignancy of the after-experience. Both are real, endlessly repeated experiences of mankind, de la Mare shows, as Maria finally turns away

her small head filled as with a tune ages old
and as sorrowful as the sounds of the tide on
the unvisited shores of the ocean. (p. 359)

Even in fantasies such as "The Lovely Myfanwy," which is a fairy-tale, de la Mare is expressing an opinion of a social being: a possessive and jealous father. Owen ap Gwythock imprisons his daughter within his castle walls that she may not be seen by those not worthy of her. But the fame of her beauty spreads and a Prince comes as a juggler to woo and win her, which he does, and Owen ap Gwythock learns his error by being turned into an Ass, the literal symbol of what, as a man, he is metaphorically. Myfanwy escapes across the threshold of the castle into the world of love and freedom from which she has been exiled. Her father emerges into the world of self-realization and integrity.

Thus, in his stories for children, de la Mare weaves into the fabric of fantasy his criticism and concern for the real world in which
he lives. His stories of children show no less an appreciation of reality. He presents them, not gilded with romance, but in very real guises of brutality and naivety. In "The Trumpet" Philip and Dick meet at night in a church to wait for ghosts. Dick climbs the statue of an angel blowing a trumpet and falls from his high perch. Philip calls him, but

... since no answer was volunteered, and all courage and enterprise had ebbed into nausea and vertigo, the speaker found himself incapable of venturing nearer the fallen body, and presently, as thievishly as he had entered it, crept away out into the openness of the church-yard, and so home. (p. 360)

Children in de la Mare's fiction react with fear like Philip's, with wonder like Maria's, and with a curiosity epitomized by the boy in "An Ideal Craftsman". The boy helps to make murder look like suicide by repositioning the dead body. He has read of how a strangled man was made to appear to have hanged himself and, his imagination and intellectual curiosity aroused, the boy deals in the same manner with the dead butler, Jacobs. Only finally, when the foot of the dangling body touches his cheek,

... even for him, as if even for his clear bold young spirit, ... that last minute assault of a helpless enemy, overwhelming some secret stronghold in his mind, had suddenly proved intolerable, his energy, enterprise, courage wilted within him ... now every object had become suddenly real, stark, menacing, and hostile. Panic seized him. (p. 73)

The experiment of recreating a situation from literature is complete. Now the real world returns to the boy's consciousness and he runs through the house "as if he had been awakened out of a dream" (p. 73)
calling for his absent mother.

This story is akin to Josephine Tay's *The Franchise Affair* which is a detective story whose unravelling only occurs when it is realized that the child, accusing adults of abduction, is telling lies. Tay's story is based on the facts of an abduction case of the 1860's. De la Mare's tale is no distortion of reality when compared with the facts of the child-murders committed by Norma and Mary Bell, age thirteen and eleven, in Newcastle, England in May and July, 1968.

Children and adults are concerned, directly, with death in many of de la Mare's stories, such as "In the Forest", "'What Dreams May Come'", "Crewe", and "Missing". In all of them, as in these, or in "Seaton's Aunt", he shows an awareness of man's capacity for evil. He writes of it directly, factually, without disguise. If he acts as first-person narrator, as in "Crewe", the atmosphere of evil comes dark and menacing, mingled with fear. If he writes as omniscient narrator, he leads the reader into the scene so that with Jimmie in "Out of the Deep" we challenge the white beast across the threshold of our consciousness.

He draws us into and across the borders of fiction into a reality that we know is "ordinary, or very nearly ordinary, and vile." And his subject, always, is the imminence of spiritual danger. Only rarely does Mr. de la Mare himself obtrude, avuncularly, into those stories that tremble on the razor's edge, at the door of the wrong room on the rim of the chockablock grave. (p. 126)

Because his subject is the spiritual self the supernatural quality of his fiction is different from that of Henry James, M. R. James, or Arthur Machen. The real but undefined danger is more
terrifying than the describable. Thus in *The Turn of the Screw* Quint and Jessel are weakened as ghosts, first because they have no raison d'être; secondly James has described them in finest detail, thus leaving the reader's imagination with no need to visualize its own terrors. De la Mare suggests a supernatural danger lurking just out of sight. Jimmie's white beast in "Out of the Deep" is only 'pig-like'; it is a vague, formless being lurking across the threshold of Jimmie's consciousness, a being from the cellars of his spiritual house. It is a real but undefinable danger that is more terrifying than the detailed ghosts of Henry James.

In his short stories de la Mare is dealing with specific variations of good and evil, conscious and unconscious, and the thresholds between the variations are subtle, frightening, and the crossing of the border between often barely noticeable.

In his novels, de la Mare is concerned with fuller exploration of the house of man's consciousness. He explores from cellar to attic the house of the central figure. His conclusion seems to be that, hopefully, ultimately an individual may reach total acceptance of self and thereby gain happiness. He is concerned with man's real, whole self, in a real world. The "other" world is that seen through windows, in mirrors, across water, across the threshold. Once astral and real self join as an integral being then the individual may look out from his windows, recognize the mirrored self and pass the thresholds of his doors in full awareness of his habitation.

2 Walter de la Mare, Mr. Bumps and His Monkey (Philadelphia, 1942).


5 Walter de la Mare, "Maria-Fly" in Broomsticks and Other Tales (London, 1925), p. 343-360.

6 Ibid. p. 216-304.

7 Walter de la Mare, Best Stories (London, 1942), p. 325-360.

8 Ibid. p. 53-73.


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