

Classic Poetry Series

Walter de la Mare
- poems -

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Walter de la Mare(1873 - 1958)

Sir Walter de la Mare was born in Charlton, Kent, in the south of England, of well-to-do parents. His father, James Edward Delamaere, was an official of the Bank of England. His mother, Lucy Sophia (Browning) Delamare, was related to the poet Robert Browning. He was educated in London at St. Paul's Cathedral Choir School, which he left at age 16. From 1890 to 1908 he worked in London in the accounting department of the Anglo-American Oil Company. His career as a writer started from about 1895 and he continued to publish to the end of his life. His first published story, 'Kismet' (1895), appeared in the Sketch under the pseudonym Walter Ramal.

In 1908 de la Mare was awarded a yearly government pension of £100, and he devoted himself entirely to writing. He retired to Taplow in Buckinghamshire, where he lived with his wife, Constance Elfrida Ingpen, and four children. His son Richard became chairman of Faber & Faber, and published several of his father's books. In 1915 he became one of the legatees of his fellow poet Rupert Brooke. De la Mare received the CH in 1948, and the OM in 1953. He died at Twickenham, near London, on June 22, 1958. De la Mare is buried in St Paul's Cathedral.

His first stories and poems De la Mare wrote for periodicals, among others for The Sketch, and published in 1902 a collection of poetry, SONGS OF CHILDHOOD, under the name Walter Ramal. It attracted little notice. Subsequently De la Mare published many volumes of poetry for both adults and children. In 1904 appeared under his own name the prose romance HENRY BROCKEN, in which the young hero encounters writers from the past.

THE RETURN (1910) was an eerie story of spirit possession. Arthur Lawford suspects that an eighteenth-century pirate, Nicholas Sabathier, is seizing control of his personality. "'Here lie ye bones of one, Nicholas Sabathier,' he began murmuring again - 'merely bones, mind you; brains and heart are quite another story. And it's pretty certain the fellow had some kind of brains. Besides, poor devil, he killed himself. That seems to hint at brains...'"

De la Mare's first successful book was The Listeners; the title poem is one of his most anthologized pieces. In the work supernatural presence haunts the solitary Traveller, the typical speaker of his poems: "Is there anybody there? said the Traveller, / Knocking on the moonlit door; / And his horse in the silence champed the grasses / Of the forest's ferny floor.... / But no one descended to the Traveller; / No head from the leaf-fringed sill / Leaned over and looked into his grey eyes, / Where he stood perplexed and still." In 1923 he produced a

collection of other people's poetry, COME HITHER. In his poems de la Mare has described the English sea and coast, the secret and hidden world of nature.

His favorite themes, childhood, death, dreams, commonplace objects and events, de la Mare examined with a touch of mystery and often with an undercurrent of melancholy. His novels have been reprinted many times in horror collections because of their sense of wonder, and also hidden malevolence. However, De la Mare did not have the morbid atmosphere of Poe, but his dreamlike visions had much similarities with Blake.

A Song Of Enchantment

A song of Enchantment I sang me there,
In a green-green wood, by waters fair,
Just as the words came up to me
I sang it under the wild wood tree.

Widdershins turned I, singing it low,
Watching the wild birds come and go;
No cloud in the deep dark blue to be seen
Under the thick-thatched branches green.

Twilight came: silence came:
The planet of Evening's silver flame;
By darkening paths I wandered through
Thickets trembling with drops of dew.

But the music is lost and the words are gone
Of the song I sang as I sat alone,
Ages and ages have fallen on me -
On the wood and the pool and the elder tree.

Walter de la Mare

Alexander

It was the Great Alexander,
Capped with a golden helm,
Sate in the ages, in his floating ship,
In a dead calm.

Voices of sea-maids singing
Wandered across the deep:
The sailors labouring on their oars
Rowed as in sleep.

All the high pomp of Asia,
Charmed by that siren lay,
Out of their weary and dreaming minds
Faded away.

Like a bold boy sate their Captain,
His glamour withered and gone,
In the souls of his brooding mariners,
While the song pined on.

Time like a falling dew,
Life like the scene of a dream
Laid between slumber and slumber
Only did seem. . . .

O Alexander, then,
In all us mortals too,
Wax not so overbold
On the wave dark-blue!

Come the calm starry night,
Who then will hear
Aught save the singing
Of the sea-maids clear?

Walter de la Mare

All But Blind

All but blind
In his chambered hole,
Gropes for worms
The four-clawed mole.

All but blind
In the evening sky,
The hooded Bat
Twirls softly by.

All but blind
In the burning day,
The barn owl
Blunders on her way.

And blind as are
These three to me,
So blind to someone
I must be.

Walter de la Mare

All That's Past

Very old are the woods;
And the buds that break
Out of the brier's boughs,
When March winds wake,
So old with their beauty are--
Oh, no man knows
Through what wild centuries
Roves back the rose.
Very old are the brooks;
And the rills that rise
Where snow sleeps cold beneath
The azure skies
Sing such a history
Of come and gone,
Their every drop is as wise
As Solomon.

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

Walter de la Mare

Alone

The abode of the nightingale is bare,
Flowered frost congeals in the gelid air,
The fox howls from his frozen lair:
Alas, my loved one is gone,
I am alone:
It is winter.

Once the pink cast a winy smell,
The wild bee hung in the hyacinth bell,
Light in effulgence of beauty fell:
I am alone:
It is winter.

My candle a silent fire doth shed,
Starry Orion hunts o'erhead;
Come moth, come shadow, the world is dead:
Alas, my loved one is gone,
I am alone;
It is winter.

Walter de la Mare

An Epitaph

Here lies a most beautiful lady,
Light of step and heart was she;
I think she was the most beautiful lady
That ever was in the West Country.

But beauty vanishes, beauty passes;
However rare -- rare it be;
And when I crumble, who will remember
This lady of the West Country.

Walter de la Mare

Arabia

Far are the shades of Arabia,
Where the Princes ride at noon,
'Mid the verdurous vales and thickets,
Under the ghost of the moon;
And so dark is that vaulted purple
Flowers in the forest rise
And toss into blossom 'gainst the phantom stars
Pale in the noonday skies.

Sweet is the music of Arabia
In my heart, when out of dreams
I still in the thin clear mirk of dawn
Descry her gliding streams;
Hear her strange lutes on the green banks
Ring loud with the grief and delight
Of the dim-silked, dark-haired Musicians
In the brooding silence of night.

They haunt me -- her lutes and her forests;
No beauty on earth I see
But shadowed with that dream recalls
Her loveliness to me:
Still eyes look coldly upon me,
Cold voices whisper and say --
'He is crazed with the spell of far Arabia,
They have stolen his wits away.'

Walter de la Mare

As I Was Walking

As I was walking,
Thyme sweet to my nose,
Green grasshoppers talking,
Rose rivalling rose:
And wing, like amber,
Dispread in light,
As from bush to bush
Linnet took flight:
Master Rabbit I saw
In the shadow-rimmed mouth
Of his sandy cavern,
Looking out to the South.
'Twas dew-tide coming;
The turf was sweet
To nostril, curved tooth,
And wool-soft feet.
Sun was in West;
Crystal in beam
Of its golden shower
Did his round eye gleam.
Lank human was I,
And a foe, poor soul—
Snowy flit of a scut,
He was into his hole,
And—stamp, stamp, stamp!
Through dim labyrinths clear,
The whole world darkened,
A murderer near.

Walter de la Mare

At Ease

Most wounds can Time repair;
But some are mortal -- these:
For a broken heart there is no balm,
No cure for a heart at ease --

At ease, but cold as stone,
Though the intellect spin on,
And the feat and practiced face may show
Nought of the life that is gone;

But smiles, as by habit taught;
And sighs, as by custom led;
And the soul within is safe from damnation,
Since it is dead.

Walter de la Mare

AUTUMN (November)

There is a wind where the rose was,
Cold rain where sweet grass was,
And clouds like sheep
Stream o'er the steep
Grey skies where the lark was.

Nought warm where your hand was,
Nought gold where your hair was,
But phantom, forlorn,
Beneath the thorn,
Your ghost where your face was.

Cold wind where your voice was,
Tears, tears where my heart was,
And ever with me,
Child, ever with me,
Silence where hope was.

Walter de la Mare

Bones

Said Mr. Smith, "I really cannot
Tell you, Dr. Jones—
The most peculiar pain I'm in—
I think it's in my bones."

Said Dr. Jones, "Oh, Mr. Smith,
That's nothing. Without doubt
We have a simple cure for that;
It is to take them out."

He laid forthwith poor Mr. Smith
Close-clamped upon the table,
And, cold as stone, took out his bones
As fast as he was able.

Smith said, "Thank you, thank you, thank you,"
And wished him a good-day;
And with his parcel 'neath his arm
He slowly moved away.

Walter de la Mare

Brueghel's Winter

Jagg'd mountain peaks and skies ice-green
Wall in the wild, cold scene below.
Churches, farms, bare copse, the sea
In freezing quiet of winter show;
Where ink-black shapes on fields in flood
Curling, skating, and sliding go.
To left, a gabled tavern; a blaze;
Peasants; a watching child; and lo,
Muffled, mute--beneath naked trees
In sharp perspective set a-row--
Trudge huntsmen, sinister spears aslant,
Dogs snuffling behind them in the snow;
And arrowlike, lean, athwart the air
Swoops into space a crow.

But flame, nor ice, nor piercing rock,
Nor silence, as of a frozen sea,
Nor that slant inward infinite line
Of signboard, bird, and hill, and tree,
Give more than subtle hint of him
Who squandered here life's mystery.

Walter de la Mare

Comfort

As I mused by the hearthside,
Puss said to me;
'there burns the fire , man,
and here sit we.

Four walls around us
against the cold air;
and the latch drawn close
to the draughty stair.

A roof o'er our heads
star-proof, moon immune,
and a wind in the chimney
to wail us a tune.'

'What felicity!' miaowed he,
'where none may intrude;
just man and beast- met
in this solitude!'

'Dear God, what security,
comfort and bliss!
and to think, too what ages
have brought us to this!'

'You in your sheep's' wool coat,
buttons of bone,
and me in my fur-about
on the warm hearthstone'

Walter de la Mare

Dry August Burned

Dry August burned. A harvest hare
Limp on the kitchen table lay,
Its fur blood-blubbered, eye astare,
While a small child that stood near by
Wept out her heart to see it there.

Sharp came the clop of hoofs, the clang
Of dangling chain, voices that rang
Out like a leveret she ran,
To feast her glistening bird-clear eyes
On a team of field artillery
Gay, to manœuvres, thudding by.
Spur and gun and limber plate
Flashed in the sun. Alert, elate,
Noble horses, foam at lip,
Harness, stirrup, holster, whip,
She watched the sun-tanned soldiery,
Till dust-white hedge had hidden away —
Its din into a rumour thinned —
The laughing, jolting, wild array:
And then — the wonder and tumult gone —
Stood nibbling a green leaf, alone,
Her dark eyes, dreaming. . . . She turned, and ran,
Elf-like, into the house again.
The hare had vanished. . . . ' Mother, ' she said,
Her tear-stained cheek now flushed with red,
' Please, may I go and see it skinned? '

Walter de la Mare

Fare Well

When I lie where shades of darkness
Shall no more assail mine eyes,
Nor the rain make lamentation
When the wind sighs;
How will fare the world whose wonder
Was the very proof of me?
Memory fades, must the remembered
Perishing be?

Oh, when this my dust surrenders
Hand, foot, lip, to dust again,
May these loved and loving faces
Please other men!
May the rusting harvest hedgerow
Still the Traveller's Joy entwine,
And as happy children gather
Posies once mine.

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

Walter de la Mare

Ghost

'Who knocks? ' 'I, who was beautiful
Beyond all dreams to restore,
I from the roots of the dark thorn am hither,
And knock on the door.'

'Who speaks? ' 'I -- once was my speech
Sweet as the bird's on the air,
When echo lurks by the waters to heed;
'Tis I speak thee fair.'

'Dark is the hour!' 'Aye, and cold.'
'Lone is my house.' 'Ah, but mine? '
'Sight, touch, lips, eyes gleamed in vain.'
'Long dead these to thine.'

Silence. Still faint on the porch
Brake the flames of the stars.
In gloom groped a hope-wearied hand
Over keys, bolts, and bars.

A face peered. All the grey night
In chaos of vacancy shone;
Nought but vast sorrow was there --
The sweet cheat gone.

Walter de la Mare

Gloria Mundi

Upon a bank, easeless with knobs of gold,
Beneath a canopy of noonday smoke,
I saw a measureless Beast, morose and bold,
With eyes like one from filthy dreams awoke,
Who stares upon the daylight in despair
For very terror of the nothing there.

This beast in one flat hand clutched vulture-wise
A glittering image of itself in jet,
And with the other groped about its eyes
To drive away the dreams that pestered it;
And never ceased its coils to toss and beat
The mire encumbering its feeble feet.

Sharp was its hunger, though continually
It seemed a cud of stones to ruminate,
And often like a dog let glittering lie
This meatless fare, its foolish gaze to sate;
Once more convulsively to stoop its jaw,
Or seize the morsel with an envious paw.

Indeed, it seemed a hidden enemy
Must lurk within the clouds above that bank,
It strained so wildly its pale, stubborn eye,
To pierce its own foul vapours dim and dank;
Till, wearied out, it raved in wrath and foam,
Daring that Nought Invisible to come.

Ay, and it seemed some strange delight to find
In this unmeaning din, till, suddenly,
As if it heard a rumour on the wind,
Or far away its freer children cry,
Lifting its face made-quiet, there it stayed,
Till died the echo its own rage had made.

That place alone was barren where it lay;
Flowers bloomed beyond, utterly sweet and fair;
And even its own dull heart might think to stay
In livelong thirst of a clear river there,
Flowing from unseen hills to unheard seas,
Through a still vale of yew and almond trees.

And then I spied in the lush green below
Its tortured belly, One, like silver, pale,
With fingers closed upon a rope of straw,
That bound the Beast, squat neck to hoary tail;
Lonely in all that verdure faint and deep,
He watched the monster as a shepherd sheep.

I marvelled at the power, strength, and rage
Of this poor creature in such slavery bound;
Fettered with worms of fear; forlorn with age;
Its blue wing-stumps stretched helpless on the ground;
While twilight faded into darkness deep,
And he who watched it piped its pangs asleep.

Walter de la Mare

Good-Bye

The last of last words spoken is, Good-bye -
The last dismantled flower in the weed-grown hedge,
The last thin rumour of a feeble bell far ringing,
The last blind rat to spurn the mildewed rye.

A hardening darkness glasses the haunted eye,
Shines into nothing the watcher's burnt-out candle,
Wreathes into scentless nothing the wasting incense,
Faints in the outer silence the hunting-cry.

Love of its muted music breathes no sigh,
Thought in her ivory tower gropes in her spinning,
Toss on in vain the whispering trees of Eden,
Last of all last words spoken is, Good-bye.

Walter de la Mare

Hi!

Hi! Handsome hunting man,
Fire your little gun,
Bang! Now that animal
Is dead and dumb and done.
Never more to peep again, creep again, leap again,
Eat or sleep or drink again, oh, what fun!

Walter de la Mare

How Sleep The Brave

Bitterly, England must thou grieve —
Though none of these poor men who died
But did within his soul believe
That death for thee was glorified.

Ever they watched it hovering near —
A mystery beyond thought to plumb —
And often, in loathing and in fear,
They heard cold danger whisper, Come! —

Heard, and obeyed. Oh, if thou weep
Such courage and honour, woe, despair;
Remember too that those who sleep
No more remorse can share.

Walter de la Mare

I Can't Abear

I can't abear a butcher,
I can't abide his meat,
The ugliest shop of all is his,
The ugliest in the street;
Bakers' are warm, cobblers' dark
Chemists' burn watery lights;
But oh, the sawdust butchers shop
That ugliest of sights.

Walter de la Mare

John Mouldy

I spied John Mouldy in his celler,
Deep down twenty steps of stone;
In the dusk he sat a-smiling
Smiling there all alone.

He read no book, he snuffed no candle;
The rats ran in, the rats ran out,
And far and near, the drip of water
Went whisp'ring about.

The dusk was still, with dew a-falling,
I saw the Dog-star bleak and grim,
I saw a slim brown rat of Norway
Creep over him.

I spied John Mouldy in his celler,
Deep down twenty steps of stone;
In the dusk he sat a-smiling
Smiling there all alone.

Walter de la Mare

Martha

"Once...Once upon a time..."
Over and over again,
Martha would tell us her stories,
In the hazel glen.

Hers were those clear gray eyes
You watch, and the story seems
Told by their beautifulness
Tranquil as dreams.

She'd sit with her two slim hands
Clasped round her bended knees;
While we on our elbows lolled,
And stared at ease.

Her voice and her narrow chin,
Her grave small lovely head,
Seemed half the meaning
Of the words she said.

"Once...Once upon a time..."
Like a dream you dream in the night,
Fairies and gnomes stole out
In the leaf-green light.

And her beauty far away
Would fade, as her voice ran on,
Till hazel and summer sun
And all were gone:--

All fordone and forgot;
And like clouds in the height of the sky,
Our hearts stood still in the hush
Of an age gone by.

Walter de la Mare

Melmillo

Three and thirty birds there stood
In an elder in a wood;
Called Melmillo -- flew off three,
Leaving thirty in the tree;
Called Melmillo -- nine now gone,
And the boughs held twenty-one;
Called Melmillo -- and eighteen
Left but three to nod and preen;
Called Melmillo -- three--two--one--
Now of birds were feathers none.

Then stole slim in
To that wood all dusk and green,
And with lean long palms outspread
Softly a strange dance did tread;
Not a note of music she
Had for echoing company;
All the birds were flown to rest
In the hollow of her breast;
In the wood -- thorn, elder willow --
Danced alone -- lone danced Melmillo.

Walter de la Mare

Miss Loo

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

It's always drowsy summer when
From out the past she comes again;
The westering sunshine in a pool
Floats in her parlour still and cool;
While the slim bird its lean wires shakes,
As into piercing song it breaks
Till Peter's pale-green eyes ajar
Dream, wake; wake, dream, in one brief bar;
And I am sitting , dull and shy
And she with gaze of vacancy,
And large hands folded on the tray,
Musing the afternoon away;
Her satin bosom heaving slow
With sighs that softly ebb and flow,
And her plain face in such dismay,
It seems unkind to look her way:
Until all cheerful back will come
Her cheerful gleaming spirit home:
And one would think that poor Miss Loo
Asked nothing else, if she had you.

Walter de la Mare

Miss T

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

Walter de la Mare

Mistletoe

Sitting under the mistletoe
(Pale-green, fairy mistletoe),
One last candle burning low,
All the sleepy dancers gone,
Just one candle burning on,
Shadows lurking everywhere:
Some one came, and kissed me there.

Tired I was; my head would go
Nodding under the mistletoe
(Pale-green, fairy mistletoe),
No footsteps came, no voice, but only,
Just as I sat there, sleepy, lonely,
Stooped in the still and shadowy air
Lips unseen - and kissed me there.

Walter de la Mare

Moonlight

The far moon maketh lovers wise
In her pale beauty trembling down,
Lending curved cheeks, dark lips, dark eyes,
A strangeness not their own.
And, though they shut their lids to kiss,
In starless darkness peace to win,
Even on that secret world from this
Her twilight enters in.

Walter de la Mare

Mulla-Mulgars' Journey Song

That one, alone,
Who's dared and gone
To seek the Magic Wonderstone,
No fear, or care,
Or black despair
Shall heed until his journey's done.

Who knows, where grows
The Mulgars' rose,
In valleys 'neath unmelting snows -
All secrets, he
Shall pierce and see,
And walk unharmed where'er he goes.

Walter de la Mare

Music

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

When music sounds, out of the water rise
Naiads whose beauty dims my waking eyes,
Rapt in strange dreams burns each enchanted face,
With solemn echoing stirs their dwelling-place.

When music sounds, all that I was I am
Ere to this haunt of brooding dust I came;
And from Time's woods break into distant song
The swift-winged hours, as I hasten along.

Walter de la Mare

Napoleon

'What is the world, O soldiers?

It is I:

I, this incessant snow,

This northern sky;

Soldiers, this solitude

Through which we go

Is I.'

Walter de la Mare

Nicholas Nye

Thistle and darnell and dock grew there,
And a bush, in the corner, of may,
On the orchard wall I used to sprawl
In the blazing heat of the day;

Half asleep and half awake,
While the birds went twittering by,
And nobody there my lone to share
But Nicholas Nye.

Nicholas Nye was lean and gray,
Lame of leg and old,
More than a score of donkey's years
He had been since he was foaled;
He munched the thistles, purple and spiked,
Would sometimes stoop and sigh,
And turn his head, as if he'd said,
'Poor Nicholas Nye! '

Alone with his shadow he'd drowse in the meadow,
Lazily swinging his tail,
At break of day he used to bray,-
Not much too hearty and hale;
But a wonderful gumption was under his skin,
And a clean calm light in his eye,
And once in a while; he'd smile:-
Would Nicholas Nye.

Seem to be smiling at me, he would,
From his bush in the corner, of may,-
Bony and ownerless, widowed and worn,
Knobble-kneed, lonely and gray;
And over the grass would seem to pass
'Neath the deep dark blue of the sky,
Something much better than words between me
And Nicholas Nye.

But dusk would come in the apple boughs,
The green of the glow-worm shine,

The birds in nest would crouch to rest,
And home I'd trudge to mine;
And there, in the moonlight, dark with dew,
Asking not wherefore nor why,
Would brood like a ghost, and as still as a post,
Old Nicholas Nye.

Walter de la Mare

Nod

Softly along the road of evening,
In a twilight dim with rose,
Wrinkled with age, and drenched with dew
Old Nod, the shepherd, goes.

His drowsy flock streams on before him,
Their fleeces charged with gold,
To where the sun's last beam leans low
On Nod the shepherd's fold.

The hedge is quick and green with briar,
From their sand the conies creep;
And all the birds that fly in heaven
Flock singing home to sleep.

His lambs outnumber a noon's roses,
Yet, when night's shadows fall,
His blind old sheep-dog, Slumber-soon,
Misses not one of all.

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

Walter de la Mare

November

THERE is wind where the rose was,
Cold rain where sweet grass was,
And clouds like sheep
Stream o'er the steep
Grey skies where the lark was.

Nought warm where your hand was,
Nought gold where your hair was,
But phantom, forlorn,
Beneath the thorn,
Your ghost where your face was.

Cold wind where your voice was,
Tears, tears where my heart was,
And ever with me,
Child, ever with me,
Silence where hope was.

Walter de la Mare

Off The Ground

Three jolly Farmers
Once bet a pound
Each dance the others would
Off the ground.
Out of their coats
They slipped right soon,
And neat and nicesome
Put each his shoon.
One--Two--Three!
And away they go,
Not too fast,
And not too slow;
Out from the elm-tree's
Noonday shadow,
Into the sun
And across the meadow.
Past the schoolroom,
With knees well bent,
Fingers a flicking,
They dancing went.
Up sides and over,
And round and round,
They crossed click-clacking
The Parish bound;
By Tupman's meadow
They did their mile,
Tee-to-tum
On a three-barred stile.
Then straight through Whipham,
Downhill to Week,
Footing it lightsome,
But not too quick,
Up fields to Watchet
And on through Wye,
Till seven fine churches
They'd seen slip by --
Seven fine churches,
And five old mills,
Farms in the valley,

And sheep on the hills;
Old Man's Acre
And Dead Man's Pool
All left behind,
As they danced through Wool.
And Wool gone by,
Like tops that seem
To spin in sleep
They danced in dream:
Withy -- Wellover --
Wassop -- Wo --
Like an old clock
Their heels did go.
A league and a league
And a league they went,
And not one weary,
And not one spent.
And lo, and behold!
Past Willow-cum-Leigh
Stretched with its waters
The great green sea.
Says Farmer Bates,
'I puffs and I blows,
What's under the water,
Why, no man knows !'
Says Farmer Giles,
'My mind comes weak,
And a good man drowned
Is far to seek. '
But Farmer Turvey,
On twirling toes,
Up's with his gaiters,
And in he goes:
Down where the mermaids
Pluck and play
On their twangling harps
In a sea-green day;
Down where the mermaids
Finned and fair,
Sleek with their combs
Their yellow hair. . . .
Bates and Giles --

On the shingle sat,
Gazing at Turvey's
Floating hat.
But never a ripple
Nor bubble told
Where he was supping
Off plates of gold.
Never an echo
Rilled through the sea
Of the feasting and dancing
And minstrelsy.
They called -- called -- called;
Came no reply:
Nought but the ripples'
Sandy sigh.
Then glum and silent
They sat instead,
Vacantly brooding
On home and bed,
Till both together
Stood up and said: --
'Us knows not, dreams not,
Where you be,
Turvey, unless
In the deep blue sea;
But axcusing silver --
And it comes most willing --
Here's us two paying our forty shilling;
For it's sartin sure, Turvey,
Safe and sound,
You danced us a square, Turvey,
Off the ground.'

Walter de la Mare

Old Susan

When Susan's work was done, she'd sit
With one fat guttering candle lit,
And window opened wide to win
The sweet night air to enter in;
There, with a thumb to keep her place
She'd read, with stern and wrinkled face.
Her mild eyes gliding very slow
Across the letters to and fro,
While wagged the guttering candle flame
In the wind that through the window came.
And sometimes in the silence she
Would mumble a sentence audibly,
Or shake her head as if to say,
"You silly souls, to act this way!"
And never a sound from night I'd hear,
Unless some far-off cock crowed clear;
Or her old shuffling thumb should turn
Another page; and rapt and stern,
Through her great glasses bent on me,
She'd glance into reality;
And shake her round old silvery head,
With--"You!--I thought you was in bed!"--
Only to tilt her book again,
And rooted in Romance remain.

Walter de la Mare

One Moment Take Thy Rest

One moment take thy rest.
Out of mere nought in space
Beauty moved human breast
To tell in this far face
A dream in noonday seen.
Never to fade or pass;
A breath-time's mute delight;
A joy in flight:
The aught desire doth mean
Sighing, Alas!

Walter de la Mare

Puss

Puss loves man's winter fire
Now that the sun so soon
Leaves the hours cold it warmed
In burning June.

She purrs full length before
The heaped-up hissing blaze,
Drowsy in slumber down
Her head she lays.

While he with whom she dwells
Sits snug in his inglenook,
Stretches his legs to the flame
And reads his book.

Walter de la Mare

Seeds

The seeds I sowed -
For week unseen -
Have pushed up pygmy
Shoots of green;
So frail you'd think
The tiniest stone
Would never let
A glimpse be shown.
But no; a pebble
Near them lies,
At least a cherry-stone
In size,
Which that mere sprout
Has heaved away,
To bask in sunshine,
See the Day.

Walter de la Mare

Sephina

Black lacqueys at the wide-flung door
Stand mute as men of wood.
Gleams like a pool the ballroom floor —
A burnished solitude.
A hundred waxen tapers shine
From silver sconces; softly pine
'Cello, fiddle, mandoline,
To music deftly wooed —
And dancers in cambric, satin, silk,
With glancing hair and cheeks like milk,
Wreathe, curtsey, intertwine.

The drowse of roses lulls the air
Wafted up the marble stair.
Like warbling water clucks the talk.
From room to room in splendour walk
Guests, smiling in the æry sheen;
Carmine and azure, white and green,
They stoop and languish, pace and preen
Bare shoulder, painted fan,
Gemmed wrist and finger, neck of swan;
And still the pluckt strings warble on;
Still from the snow-bowered, link-lit street
The muffled hooves of horses beat;
And harness rings; and foam-fleckt bit
Clanks as the slim heads toss and stare
From deep, dark eyes. Smiling, at ease,
Mount to the porch the pumped grandees
In lonely state, by twos, and threes,
Exchanging languid courtesies,
While torches fume and flare.

And now the banquet calls. A blare
Of squalling trumpets clots the air.
And, flocking out, streams up the rout;
And lilies nod to velvet's swish;
And peacocks prim on gilded dish,
Vast pies thick-glazed, and gaping fish,
Towering confections crisp as ice,

Jellies aglare like cockatrice,
With thousand savours tongues entice.
Fruits of all hues barbaric gloom —
Pomegranate, quince and peach and plum,
Mandarine, grape, and cherry clear
Englobe each glassy chandelier,
Where nectarous flowers their sweets distil —
Jessamine, tuberose, chamomill,
Wild-eye narcissus, anemone,
Tendril of ivy and vinery.

Now odorous wines the goblets fill;
Gold-cradled meats the menials bear
From gilded chair to gilded chair:
Now roars the talk like crashing seas,
Foams upward to the painted frieze,
Echoes and ebbs. Still surges in,
To yelp of hautboy and violin,
Plumed and bedazzling, rosed and rare,
Dance-bemused, with cheek aglow,
Stooping the green-twined portal through,
Sighing with laughter, debonair,
That concourse of the proud and fair —
And lo! 'La, la!
Mamma ... Mamma!
Falls a small cry in the dark and calls —
'I see you standing there!'

Fie, fie, Sephina! not in bed!
Crouched on the staircase overhead,
Like ghost she gloats, her lean hand laid
On alabaster balustrade,
And gazes on and on
Down on that wondrous to and fro
Till finger and foot are cold as snow,
And half the night is gone;
And dazzled eyes are sore bestead;
Nods drowsily the sleek-locked head;
And, vague and far, spins, fading out,
That rainbow-coloured, reeling rout,
And, with faint sighs, her spirit flies
Into deep sleep....

Come, Stranger, peep!
Was ever cheek so wan?

Walter de la Mare

Silver

Slowly, silently, now the moon
Walks the night in her silver shoon;
This way, and that, she peers, and sees
Silver fruit upon silver trees;
One by one the casements catch
Her beams beneath the silvery thatch;
Couched in his kennel, like a log,
With paws of silver sleeps the dog;
From their shadowy cote the white breasts peep
Of doves in silver feathered sleep
A harvest mouse goes scampering by,
With silver claws, and silver eye;
And moveless fish in the water gleam,
By silver reeds in a silver stream.

Walter de la Mare

Sleep

When all, and birds, and creeping beasts,
When the dark of night is deep,
From the moving wonder of their lives
Commit themselves to sleep.

Without a thought, or fear, they shut
The narrow gates of sense;
Heedless and quiet, in slumber turn
Their strength to impotence.

The transient strangeness of the earth
Their spirits no more see:
Within a silent gloom withdrawn,
They slumber in secrecy.

Two worlds they have--a globe forgot,
Wheeling from dark to light;
And all the enchanted realm of dream
That burgeons out of night.

Walter de la Mare

Snow

No breath of wind,
No gleam of sun –
Still the white snow
Whirls softly down
Twig and bough
And blade and thorn
All in an icy
Quiet, forlorn.
Whispering, rustling,
Through the air
On still and stone,
Roof, - everywhere,
It heaps its powdery
Crystal flakes,
Of every tree
A mountain makes;
'Til pale and faint
At shut of day
Stoops from the West
One wint'ry ray,
And, feathered in fire
Where ghosts the moon,
A robin shrills
His lonely tune.

Walter de la Mare

Some One

Some one came knocking
At my wee, small door;
Someone came knocking;
I'm sure-sure-sure;
I listened, I opened,
I looked to left and right,
But nought there was a stirring
In the still dark night;
Only the busy beetle
Tap-tapping in the wall,
Only from the forest
The screech-owl's call,
Only the cricket whistling
While the dewdrops fall,
So I know not who came knocking,
At all, at all, at all.

Walter de la Mare

Song of the Mad Prince

Who said, "Peacock Pie"?
The old King to the sparrow:
Who said, "Crops are ripe"?
Rust to the harrow:
Who said, "Where sleeps she now?
Where rests she now her head,
Bathed in eve's loveliness"? —
That's what I said.

Who said, "Ay, mum's the word"?
Sexton to willow:
Who said, "Green dusk for dreams,
Moss for a pillow"?

Who said, "All Time's delight
Hath she for narrow bed;
Life's troubled bubble broken"? —
That's what I said.

Walter de la Mare

Sotto Voce

To Edward Thomas

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

At foot — a few sparse harebells: blue
And still as were the friend's dark eyes
That dwelt on mine, transfixed through
With sudden ecstatic surmise.

'Hst!' he cried softly, smiling, and lo,
Stealing amidst that maze gold-green,
I heard a whispering music flow
From guileful throat of bird, unseen: —
So delicate, the straining ear
Scarce carried its faint syllabing
Into a heart caught-up to hear
That inmost pondering
Of bird-like self with self. We stood,
In happy trance-like solitude,
Harkening a lullay grieved and sweet —
As when on isle uncharted beat
'Gainst coral at the palm-tree's root,
With brine-clear, snow-white foam afloat,
The wailing, not of water or wind —
A husht, far, wild, divine lament,
When Prospero his wizardry bent
Winged Ariel to bind....
Then silence, and o'er-flooding noon.
I raised my head; smiled too. And he —
Moved his great hand, the magic gone —

Gently amused to see
My ignorant wonderment. He sighed.
'It was a nightingale,' he said,
'That sotto voce cons the song
He'll sing when dark is spread;
And Night's vague hours are sweet and long,
And we are laid abed.'

Walter de la Mare

Sunk Lyonesse

In sea-cold Lyonesse,
When the Sabbath eve shafts down
On the roofs, walls, belfries
Of the foundered town,
The Nereids pluck their lyres
Where the green translucency beats,
And with motionless eyes at gaze
Make ministrelly in the streets.

And the ocean water stirs
In salt-worn casement and porch.
Plies the blunt-nosed fish
With fire in his skull for torch.
And the ringing wires resound;
And the unearthly lovely weep,
In lament of the music they make
In the sullen courts of sleep:
Whose marble flowers bloom for aye:
And - lapped by the moon-guiled tide -
Mock their carver with heart of stone,
Caged in his stone-ribbed side.

Walter de la Mare

Suppose

Suppose ... and suppose that a wild little Horse of Magic
Came cantering out of the sky,
With bridle of silver, and into the saddle I mounted,
To fly — and to fly;

And we stretched up into the air, fleeting on in the sunshine,
A speck in the gleam,
On galloping hoofs, his mane in the wind out-flowing,
In a shadowy stream;

And oh, when, all lone, the gentle star of evening
Came crinkling into the blue,
A magical castle we saw in the air, like a cloud of moonlight,
As onward we flew;

And across the green moat on the drawbridge we foamed and we snorted,
And there was a beautiful Queen
Who smiled at me strangely; and spoke to my wild little Horse, too —
A lovely and beautiful Queen;

And she cried with delight — and delight — to her delicate maidens,
'Behold my daughter — my dear!'
And they crowned me with flowers, and then to their harps sate playing,
Solemn and clear;

And magical cakes and goblets were spread on the table;
And at window the birds came in;
Hopping along with bright eyes, pecking crumbs from the platters,
And sipped of the wine;

And splashing up — up to the roof tossed fountains of crystal;
And Princes in scarlet and green
Shot with their bows and arrows, and kneeled with their dishes
Of fruits for the Queen;

And we walked in a magical garden with rivers and bowers,
And my bed was of ivory and gold;
And the Queen breathed soft in my ear a song of enchantment —
And I never grew old....

And I never, never came back to the earth, oh, never and never;
How mother would cry and cry!
There'd be snow on the fields then, and all these sweet flowers in the winter
Would wither, and die....

Suppose ... and suppose .

Walter de la Mare

Tartary

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

If I were Lord of Tartary,
Trumpeters every day
To all my meals should summon me,
And in my courtyards bray;
And in the evening lamps should shine,
Yellow as honey, red as wine,
While harp, and flute, and mandoline
Made music sweet and gay.

If I were Lord of Tartary,
I'd wear a robe of beads,
White, and gold, and green they'd be --
And small and thick as seeds;
And ere should wane the morning star,
I'd don my robe and scimitar.
And zebras seven should draw my car
Through Tartary's dark gleades.

Lord of the fruits of Tartary.
Her rivers silver-pale!
Lord of the hills of Tartary.
Glen, thicket, wood, and dale!
Her flashing stars, her scented breeze,
Her trembling lakes, like foamless seas,
Her bird-delighting citron-trees,
In every purple vale!

Walter de la Mare

The Birthnight

Dearest, it was a night
That in its darkness rocked Orion's stars;
A sighing wind ran faintly white
Along the willows, and the cedar boughs
Laid their wide hands in stealthy peace across
The starry silence of their antique moss:
No sound save rushing air
Cold, yet all sweet with Spring,
And in thy mother's arms, couched weeping there,
Thou, lovely thing.

Walter de la Mare

The Children Of Stare

Winter is fallen early
On the house of Stare;
Birds in reverberating flocks
Haunt its ancestral box;
Bright are the plenteous berries
In clusters in the air.

Still is the fountain's music,
The dark pool icy still,
Whereupon a small and sanguine sun
Floats in a mirror on,
Into a West of crimson,
From a South of daffodil.

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

Their small and heightened faces
Like wine-red winter buds;
Their frolic bodies gentle as
Flakes in the air that pass,
Frail as the twirling petal
From the briar of the woods.

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

Thick mystery, wild peril,
Law like an iron rod:—
Yet sport they on in Spring's attire,
Each with his tiny fire
Blown to a core of ardour
By the awful breath of God.

Walter de la Mare

The Corner Stone

Sterile these stones
By time in ruin laid.
Yet many a creeping thing
Its haven has made
In these least crannies, where falls
Dark's dew, and noonday shade.

The claw of the tender bird
Finds lodgment here;
Dye-winged butterflies poise;
Emmet and beetle steer
Their busy course; the bee
Drones, laden, near.

Their myriad-mirrored eyes
Great day reflect.
By their exquisite farings
Is this granite specked;
Is trodden to infinite dust;
By gnawing lichens decked.

Toward what eventual dream
Sleeps its cold on,
When into ultimate dark
These lives shall be gone,
And even of man not a shadow remain
Of all he has done?

Walter de la Mare

The Empty House

See this house, how dark it is
Beneath its vast-boughed trees!
Not one trembling leaflet cries
To that Watcher in the skies—
'Remove, remove thy searching gaze,
Innocent of heaven's ways,
Brood not, Moon, so wildly bright,
On secrets hidden from sight.'

'Secrets,' sighs the night-wind,
'Vacancy is all I find;
Every keyhole I have made
Wails a summons, faint and sad,
No voice ever answers me,
Only vacancy.'
'Once, once ... ' the cricket shrills,
And far and near the quiet fills
With its tiny voice, and then
Hush falls again.

Mute shadows creeping slow
Mark how the hours go.
Every stone is mouldering slow.
And the least winds that blow
Some minutest atom shake,
Some fretting ruin make
In roof and walls. How black it is
Beneath these thick boughed trees!

Walter de la Mare

The Fly

How large unto the tiny fly
Must little things appear!-
A rosebud like a feather bed,
Its prickle like a spear;

A dewdrop like a looking-glass,
A hair like golden wire;
The smallest grain of mustard-see
As fierce as coals of fire;

A loaf of bread, a lofty hill;
A wasp, a cruel leopard;
And specks of sale as bright to see
As lambkins to a shepherd.

Walter de la Mare

The Fool Rings His Bells (MOTLEY)

Come, Death, I'd have a word with thee;
And thou, poor Innocency;
And Love - a lad with broken wing;
And Pity, too;
The Fool shall sing to you,
As Fools will sing.

Ay, music hath small sense,
And a tune's soon told,
And Earth is old,
And my poor wits are dense;
Yet have I secrets, - dar, my dear,
To breathe you all: Come near.
And lest some hideous listener tells,
I'll ring my bells.

They're all at war!
Yes, yes, their bodies go
'Neath burning sun and icy star
To chaunted songs of woe,
Dragging cold cannon through a mud
Of rain and blood;
The new moon glinting hard on eyes
Wide with insanities.

Hush! ... I use words
I hardly know the meaning of;
And the mute birds
Are glancing at Love!
From out their shade of leaf and flower,
Trembling at treacheries
Which even in noonday cower.
Heed, heed not what I said
Of frenzied hosts of men,
More fools than I,
On envy, hatred fed,
Who kill, and die -
Spake I not plainly, then?
Yet Pity whispered, 'Why? '

Thou silly thing, off to thy daisies go.
Mine was not news for child to know,
And Death - no ears hath. He hath supped where creep
Eyeless worms in hush of sleep;
Yet, when he smiles, the hand he draws
Athwart his grinning jaws
Faintly their thin bones rattle, and... There, there;
Hearken how my bells in the air
Drive away care! ...

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

There, now! he goes -
Old Bones; I've wearied him.
Ay, and the light doth dim,
And asleep's the rose,
And tired Innocence
In dreams is hence...
Come, Love, my lad,
Nodding that drawsy head,
'T is time thy prayers were said!

Walter de la Mare

The Ghost

Peace in thy hands,
Peace in thine eyes,
Peace on thy brow;
Flower of a moment in the eternal hour,
Peace with me now.

Not a wave breaks,
Not a bird calls,
My heart, like a sea,
Silent after a storm that hath died,
Sleeps within me.

All the night's dews,
All the world's leaves,
All winter's snow
Seem with their quiet to have stilled in life's dream
All sorrowing now.

Walter de la Mare

The Huntsmen

Three jolly gentlemen,
In coats of red,
Rode their horses
Up to bed.

Three jolly gentlemen
Snored till morn,
Their horses champing
The golden corn.

Three jolly gentlemen
At break of day,
Came clitter-clatter down the stairs
And galloped away.

Walter de la Mare

The Keys Of Morning

While at her bedroom window once,
Learning her task for school,
Little Louisa lonely sat
In the morning clear and cool,
She slanted her small bead-brown eyes
Across the empty street,
And saw Death softly watching her
In the sunshine pale and sweet.

His was a long lean sallow face;
He sat with half-shut eyes,
Like a old sailor in a ship
Becalmed 'neath tropic skies.
Beside him in the dust he had set
His staff and shady hat;
These, peeping small, Louisa saw
Quite clearly where she sat -
The thinness of his coal-black locks,
His hands so long and lean
They scarcely seemed to grasp at all
The keys that hung between:
Both were of gold, but one was small,
And with this last did he
Wag in the air, as if to say,
"Come hither, child, to me!"

Louisa laid her lesson book
On the cold window-sill;
And in the sleepy sunshine house
Went softly down, until
She stood in the half-opened door,
And peeped. But strange to say
Where Death just now had sunning sat
Only a shadow lay:
Just the tall chimney's round-topped cowl,
And the small sun behind,
Had with its shadow in the dust
Called sleepy Death to mind.
But most she thought how strange it was

Two keys that he should bear,
And that, when beckoning, he should wag
The littlest in the air.

Walter de la Mare

The Linnet

Upon this leafy bush
With thorns and roses in it,
Flutters a thing of light,
A twittering linnet.
And all the throbbing world
Of dew and sun and air
By this small parcel of life
Is made more fair;
As if each bramble-spray
And mounded gold-wreathed furze,
Harebell and little thyme,
Were only hers;
As if this beauty and grace
Did to one bird belong,
And, at a flutter of wing,
Might vanish in song.

Walter de la Mare

The Listeners

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

Walter de la Mare

The Market-Place

My mind is like a clamorous market-place.
All day in wind, rain, sun, its babel wells;
Voice answering to voice in tumult swells.
Chaffering and laughing, pushing for a place,
My thoughts haste on, gay, strange, poor, simple, base;
This one buys dust, and that a bauble sells:
But none to any scrutiny hints or tells
The haunting secrets hidden in each sad face.

The clamour quietens when the dark draws near;
Strange looms the earth in twilight of the West,
Lonely with one sweet star serene and clear,
Dwelling, when all this place is hushed to rest,
On vacant stall, gold, refuse, worst and best,
Abandoned utterly in haste and fear.

Walter de la Mare

The Mocking Fairy

'Won't you look out of your window, Mrs. Gill?'
Quoth the Fairy, nidding, nodding in the garden;
'Can't you look out of your window, Mrs. Gill?'
Quoth the Fairy, laughing softly in the garden;
But the air was still, the cherry boughs were still,
And the ivy-tod neath the empty sill,
And never from her window looked out Mrs. Gill
On the Fairy shrilly mocking in the garden.

'What have they done with you, you poor Mrs. Gill?'
Quoth the Fairy brightly glancing in the garden;
'Where have they hidden you, you poor old Mrs. Gill?'
Quoth the Fairy dancing lightly in the garden;
But night's faint veil now wrapped the hill,
Stark 'neath the stars stood the dead-still Mill,
And out of her cold cottage never answered Mrs. Gill
The Fairy mimbling, mambing in the garden.

Walter de la Mare

The Moth

Isled in the midnight air,
Musked with the dark's faint bloom,
Out into glooming and secret haunts
The flame cries, 'Come!'

Lovely in dye and fan,
A-tremble in shimmering grace,
A moth from her winter swoon
Uplifts her face:

Stares from her glamorous eyes;
Wafts her on plumes like mist;
In ecstasy swirls and sways
To her strange tryst.

Walter de la Mare

The Mother Bird

Through the green twilight of a hedge

I peered, with cheek on the cool leaves pressed,

And spied a bird upon a nest:

Two eyes she had beseeching me

Meekly and brave, and her brown breast

Throbb'd hot and quick above her heart;

And then she oped her dagger bill, -

'Twas not a chirp, as sparrows pipe

At break of day; 'twas not a trill,

As falters through the quiet even;

But one sharp solitary note,

One desperate, fierce, and vivid cry

Of valiant tears, and hopeless joy,

One passionate note of victory:

Off, like a fool afraid, I sneaked,

Smiling the smile the fool smiles best,

At the mother bird in the secret hedge

Patient upon her lonely nest.

Walter de la Mare

The Night-Swans

'Tis silence on the enchanted lake,
And silence in the air serene,
Save for the beating of her heart,
The lovely-eyed Evangeline.

She sings across the waters clear
And dark with trees and stars between,
The notes her fairy godmother
Taught her, the child Evangeline.

As might the unrippled pool reply,
Faltering an answer far and sweet,
Three swans as white as mountain snow
Swim mantling to her feet.

And still upon the lake they stay,
Their eyes black stars in all their snow,
And softly, in the glassy pool,
Their feet beat darkly to and fro.

She rides upon her little boat,
Her swans swim through the starry sheen,
Rowing her into Fairyland-
The lovely-eyed Evangeline.

'Tis silence on the enchanted lake,
And silence in the air serene;
Voices shall call in vain again
On earth the child Evangeline.

'Evangeline! Evangeline!'
Upstairs, downstairs, all in vain.
Her room is dim; her flowers faded;
She answers not again.

Walter de la Mare

The Old Men

Old and alone, sit we,
Caged, riddle-rid men;
Lost to earth's 'Listen!' and 'See!'
Thought's 'Wherefore?' and 'When?'

Only far memories stray
Of a past once lovely, but now
Wasted and faded away,
Like green leaves from the bough.

Vast broods the silence of night,
The ruinous moon
Lifts on our faces her light,
Whence all dreaming is gone.

We speak not; trembles each head;
In their sockets our eyes are still;
Desire as cold as the dead;
Without wonder or will.

And One, with a lanthorn, draws near,
At clash with the moon in our eyes:
'Where art thou?' he asks: 'I am here,'
One by one we arise.

And none lifts a hand to withhold
A friend from the touch of that foe:
Heart cries unto heart, 'Thou art old!'
Yet reluctant, we go.

Walter de la Mare

The Pigs And The Charcoal-Burner

The old Pig said to the little pigs,
'In the forest is truffles and mast,
Follow me then, all ye little pigs,
Follow me fast!'

The Charcoal-burner sat in the shade
With his chin oil his thumb,
And saw the big Pig and the little pigs
Chuffling come.

He watched 'neath a green and giant bough,
And the pigs in the ground
Made a wonderful grisling and gruzzling
And greedy sound.

And when, full-fed, they were gone, and Night
Walked her starry ways,
He stared with his cheeks in his hands
At his sullen blaze.

Walter de la Mare

The Remonstrance

I was at peace until you came
And set a careless mind aflame;
I lived in quiet; cold, content;
All longing in safe banishment,
Until your ghostly lips and eyes
Made wisdom unwise.

Naught was in me to tempt your feet
To seek a lodging. Quite forgot
Lay the sweet solitude we two
In childhood used to wander through;
Time's cold had closed my heart about,
And shut you out.

Well, and what then? . . . O vision grave,
Take all the little all I have!
Strip me of what in voiceless thought
Life's kept of life, un hoped, unsought! --
Reverie and dream that memory must
Hide deep in dust!

This only I say: Though cold and bare,
The haunted house you have chosen to share,
Still 'neath its walls the moonbeam goes
And trembles on the untended rose;
Still o'er its broken roof-tree rise
The starry arches of the skies;
And 'neath your lightest word shall be
The thunder of an ebbing sea.

Walter de la Mare

The Ruin

When the last colours of the day
Have from their burning ebbed away,
About that ruin, cold and lone,
The cricket shrills from stone to stone;
And scattering o'er its darkened green,
Bands of fairies may be seen,
Clattering like grasshoppers, their feet
Dancing a thistledown dance round it:
While the great gold of the mild moon
Tinges their tiny acorn shoon.

Walter de la Mare

The Scarecrow

All winter through I bow my head
beneath the driving rain;
the North Wind powders me with snow
and blows me black again;
at midnight 'neath a maze of stars
I flame with glittering rime,
and stand above the stubble, stiff
as mail at morning-prime.
But when that child called Spring, and all
his host of children come,
scattering their buds and dew upon
these acres of my home,
some rapture in my rags awakes;
I lift void eyes and scan
the sky for crows, those ravening foes,
of my strange master, Man.
I watch him striding lank behind
his clashing team, and know
soon will the wheat swish body high
where once lay a sterile snow;
soon I shall gaze across a sea
of sun-begotten grain,
which my unflinching watch hath sealed
for harvest once again.

Walter de la Mare

The Scribe

What lovely things
Thy hand hath made:
The smooth-plumed bird
In its emerald shade,
The seed of the grass,
The speck of the stone
Which the wayfaring ant
Stirs -- and hastes on!

Though I should sit
By some tarn in thy hills,
Using its ink
As the spirit wills
To write of Earth's wonders,
Its live, willed things,
Flit would the ages
On soundless wings
Ere unto Z
My pen drew nigh
Leviathan told,
And the honey-fly:
And still would remain
My wit to try --
My worn reeds broken,
The dark tarn dry,
All words forgotten --
Thou, Lord, and I.

Walter de la Mare

The Seas Of England

The seas of England are our old delight:
Let the loud billow of the shingly shore
Sing freedom on her breezes evermore
To all earth's ships that sailing heave in sight!

The gaunt sea-nettle be our fortitude,
Sturdily blowing where the clear wave sips;
O, be the glory of our men and ships
Rapturous, woe unheeding hardihood!

There is great courage in a land that hath
Liberty guarded by the unearthly seas;
And ev'n to find peace at the last in these
How many a sailor hath sailed down to death!

Their names are like a splendour in an old song;
Their record shines like bays along the years;
Their jubilation is the cry man hears
Sailing sun-fronted the vast deeps among.

The seas of England are our old delight:
Let the loud billow of the shingly shore
Sing freedom on her breezes evermore
To all earth's ships that sailing heave in sight!

Walter de la Mare

The Sleeper

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

But though her mind in dream now moved,
Still seemed her gaze to rest
From out beneath her fast-sealed lids,
Above her moving breast,
On Ann, as quite, quite still she stood;
Yet slumber lay so deep
Even her hands upon her lap
Seemed saturate with sleep.
And as Ann peeped, a cloudlike dread
Stole over her, and then,
On stealthy, mouselike feet she trod,
And tiptoed out again.

Walter de la Mare

The Song Of Finis

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

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

Walter de la Mare

The Song Of Shadows

"Sweep thy faint strings, Musician,
With thy long lean hand;
Downward the starry tapers burn,
Sinks soft the waning sand;
The old hound whimpers couched in sleep,
The embers smoulder low;
Across the walls the shadows
Come, and go.

Sweep softly thy strings, Musician,
The minutes mount to hours;
Frost on the windless casement weaves
A labyrinth of flowers;
Ghosts linger in the darkening air,
Hearken at the open door;
Music hath called them, dreaming,
Home once more."

Walter de la Mare

The Spirit Of Air

Coral and clear emerald,
And amber from the sea,
Lilac-coloured amethyst,
Chalcedony;
The lovely Spirit of Air
Floats on a cloud and doth ride,
Clad in the beauties of earth
Like a bride.

So doth she haunt me; and words
Tell but a tithe of the tale.
Sings all the sweetness of Spring
Even in the nightengale?
Nay, but with echoes she cries
Of the valley of love;
Dews on the thorns of her feet,
And darkness above.

Walter de la Mare

The Strangers

Dim-berried is the mistletoe
With globes of sheenless grey,
The holly mid ten thousand thorns
Smoulders its fires away;
And in the manger Jesus sleeps
This Christmas Day.

Bull unto bull with hollow throat
Makes echo every hill,
Cold sheep in pastures thick with snow
The air with bleating fill;
While of his mother's heart this Babe
Takes His sweet will.

All flowers and butterflies lie hid,
The blackbird and the thrush
Pipe but a little as they flit
Restless from bush to bush
Even to the robin Gabriel hath
Cried softly 'Hush!'

Now night's astir with burning stars
In darkness of the snow;
Burdened with frankincense and myrrh
And gold the Strangers go
Into a dusk where one dim lamp
Burns softly, lo!

No snowdrop yet its small head nods
In winds of winter drear;
No lark at casement in the sky
Sings matins shrill and clear;
Yet in this frozen mirk the Dawn
Breathes, Spring is here!

Walter de la Mare

The Sunken Garden

Speak not — whisper not;
Here bloweth thyme and bergamot;
Softly on the evening hour,
Secret herbs their spices shower,
Dark-spiked rosemary and myrrh,
Lean-stalked, purple lavender;
Hides within her bosom, too,
All her sorrows, bitter rue.

Breathe not — trespass not;
Of this green and darkling spot,
Latticed from the moon's beams,
Perchance a distant dreamer dreams;
Perchance upon its darkening air,
The unseen ghosts of children fare,
Faintly swinging, sway and sweep,
Like lovely sea-flowers in its deep;
While, unmoved, to watch and ward,
'Mid its gloomed and daisied sward,
Stands with bowed and dewy head
That one little leaden Lad.

Walter de la Mare

The Three Strangers

Far are those tranquil hills,
Dyed with fair evening's rose;
On urgent, secret errand bent,
A traveller goes.

Approach him strangers three,
Barefooted, cowed; their eyes
Scan the lone, hastening solitary
With dumb surmise.

One instant in close speech
With them he doth confer:
God-spced, he hasteneth on,
That anxious traveller...

I was that man — in a dream:
And each world's night in vain
I patient wait on sleep to unveil
Those vivid hills again.

Would that they three could know
How yet burns on in me
Love — from one lost in Paradise —
For their grave courtesy.

Walter de la Mare

The Titmouse

If you would happy company win,
Dangle a palm-nut from a tree,
Idly in green to sway and spin,
Its snow-pulped kernel for bait; and see,
A nimble titmouse enter in.

Out of earth's vast unknown of air,
Out of all summer, from wave to wave,
He'll perch, and prank his feathers fair,
Jangle a glass-clear wildering stave,
And take his commons there —

This tiny son of life; this spright,
By momentary Human sought,
Plume will his wing in the dappling light,
Clash timbrel shrill and gay —
And into time's enormous nought,
Sweet-fed, will flit away.

Walter de la Mare

The Tryst

Flee into some forgotten night and be
Of all dark long my moon-bright company:
Beyond the rumour even of Paradise come,
There, out of all remembrance, make our home:
Seek we some close hid shadow for our lair,
Hollowed by Noah's mouse beneath the chair
Wherein the Omnipotent, in slumber bound,
Nods till the piteous Trump of Judgment sound.
Perchance Leviathan of the deep sea
Would lease a lost mermaid's grot to me,
There of your beauty we would joyance make —

A music wistful for the sea-nymph's sake:
Haply Elijah, o'er his spokes of fire,
Cresting steep Leo, or the heavenly Lyre,
Spied, tranced in azure of inanest space,
Some eyrie hostel, meet for human grace,
Where two might happy be — just you and I —

Lost in the uttermost of Eternity.
Think! in Time's smallest clock's minutest beat
Might there not rest be found for wandering feet?
Or, 'twixt the sleep and wake of Helen's dream,
Silence wherein to sing love's requiem?

No, no. Nor earth, nor air, nor fire, nor deep
Could lull poor mortal longingness asleep.
Somewhere there nothing is; and there lost Man
Shall win what changeless vague of peace he can.

Walter de la Mare

The Veil

I think and think: yet still I fail —
Why must this lady wear a veil?
Why thus elect to mask her face
Beneath that dainty web of lace?
The tip of a small nose I see,
And two red lips, set curiously
Like twin-born berries on one stem,
And yet, she has netted even them.
Her eyes, 'tis plain, survey with ease
Whate'er to glance upon they please.
Yet, whether hazel, gray, or blue,
Or that even lovelier lilac hue,
I cannot guess: why — why deny
Such beauty to the passer-by?
Out of a bush a nightingale
May expound his song; from 'neath that veil
A happy mouth no doubt can make
English sound sweeter for its sake.
But then, why muffle in like this
What every blossomy wind would kiss?
Why in that little night disguise
A daybreak face, those starry eyes?

Walter de la Mare

The Widow

Grief hath pacified her face;
Even hope might share so still a place;
Yet, on the silence of her heart,
Haply, if a strange footfall start,
Or a chance word of ecstasy
Cry through dim cloistered memory,
Into her eyes her soul will steal
To gaze into the irrevocable --
As if death had not power to keep
One who has loved her long asleep.

Now all things lovely she looks on
Seem lovely in oblivion;
And all things mute what shall not be
Richer than any melody.
Her narrow hands, like birds that make
A nest for some old instinct's sake,
Have hollowed a refuge for her face --
A narrow and a quiet place --
Where, far from the world's light, she may
See clearer what is passed away.

And only little children know
Through what dark gates her smile may go.

Walter de la Mare

The World Of Dream

Now, through the dusk
With muffled bell
The Dustman comes
The World to tell,
Night's elfin lanterns
Burn and gleam
in the twilight, wonderful
World of Dream.

Hollow and dim
Sleep's boat doth ride,
Heavily still
At the waterside.
Patter, patter,
The children come,
Yawning and sleepy,
Out of the gloom.

Like droning bees
in a garden green.
Over the thwarts
They clamber in.
And lovely Sleep
With long-drawn oar
Turns away
From the whispering shore.

Over the water
Like roses glide
Her hundreds of passengers
Packed inside,
To where in her garden
Tremble and gleam
The harps and lamps
Of the World of Dream.

Walter de la Mare

Tit For Tat

Have you been catching fish, Tom Noddy?
Have you snared a weeping hare?
Have you whistled 'No Nunny' and gunned a poor bunny,
Or blinded a bird of the air?

Have you trod like a murderer through the green woods,
Through the dewy deep dingles and glooms,
While every small creature screamed shrill to Dame Nature
'He comes - and he comes!'

Wonder I very much do, Tom Noddy,
If ever, when off you roam,
An ogre from space will stoop a lean face,
And lug you home:

Lug you home over his fence, Tom Noddy,
Of thorn-sticks nine yards high,
With your bent knees strung round his old iron gun
And your head a dan-dangling by:

And hung you up stiff on a hook, Tom Noddy,
From a stone-cold pantry shelf,
Whence your eyes will glare in an empty stare,
Till you are cooked yourself!

Walter de la Mare

Tom's Little Dog

Tom told his dog called Tim to beg,
And up at once he sat,
His two clear amber eyes fixed fast,
His haunches on his poised a lump of sugar on
His nose; then, 'Trust! ' says he;
Stiff as a guardsman sat his Tim;
Never a hair stirred he.

'Paid for! ' says Tom; and in a trice
Up jerked that moist black nose;
A snap of teeth, a crunch, a munch,
And down the sugar goes!

Walter de la Mare

Unstooping

Low on his fours the Lion
Treads with the surly Bear;
But Men straight upward from the dust
Walk with their heads in the air;
The free sweet winds of heaven,
The sunlight from on high
Beat on their clear bright cheeks and browns
As they go striding by;
The doors of all their houses
They arch so they may go,
Uplifted o'er the four-foot beasts,
Unstooping, to and fro.

Walter de la Mare

Up And Down

Down the Hill of Ludgate,
Up the Hill of Fleet,
To and fro and East and West
With people flows the street;
Even the King of England
On Temple Bar must beat
For leave to ride to Ludgate
Down the Hill of Fleet.

Walter de la Mare

Wanderers

Wide are the meadows of night,
And daisies are shining there,
Tossing their lovely dews,
Lustrous and fair;

And through these sweet fields go,
Wanderers amid the stars --
Venus, Mercury, Uranus, Neptune,
Saturn, Jupiter, Mars.

'Tired in their silver, they move,
And circling, whisper and say,
Fair are the blossoming meads of delight
Through which we stray.

Walter de la Mare

When The Rose Is Faded

When the rose is faded,
Memory may still dwell on
Her beauty shadowed,
And the sweet smell gone.

That vanishing loveliness,
That burdening breath,
No bond of life hath then,
Nor grief of death.

'Tis the immortal thought
Whose passion still
Makes the changing
The unchangeable.

Oh, thus thy beauty,
Loveliest on earth to me,
Dark with no sorrow, shines
And burns, with thee.

Walter de la Mare

Why?

Ever, ever
Stir and shiver
The reeds and rushes
By the river:
Ever, ever,
As if in dream,
The lone moon's silver
Sleeks the stream.
What old sorrow,
What lost love,
Moon, reeds, rushes,
Dream you of?

Walter de la Mare

Winter

Clouded with snow
The cold winds blow,
And shrill on leafless bough
The robin with its burning breast
Alone sings now.

The rayless sun,
Day's journey done,
Sheds its last ebbing light
On fields in leagues of beauty spread
Unearthly white.

Thick draws the dark,
And spark by spark,
The frost-fires kindle, and soon
Over that sea of frozen foam
Floats the white moon.

Walter de la Mare

Winter Dusk

Dark frost was in the air without,
The dusk was still with cold and gloom,
When less than even a shadow came
And stood within the room.

But the three around the fire,
None turned a questioning head to look,
Still read a clear voice, on and on,
Still stooped they o'er their book.

The children watched their mother's eyes
Moving on softly line to line;
It seemed to listen too -- that shade,
Yet made no outward sign.

The fire-flames crooned a tiny song,
No cold wind moved the wintry tree;
The children both in Faerie dreamed
Beside their mother's knee.

And nearer yet that spirit drew
Above that heedless one, intent
Only on what the simple words
Of her small story meant.

No voiceless sorrow grieved her mind,
No memory her bosom stirred,
Nor dreamed she, as she read to two,
'Twas surely three who heard.

Yet when, the story done, she smiled
From face to face, serene and clear,
A love, half dead, sprang up, as she
Leaned close and drew them near.

Walter de la Mare