

# Poems By 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*

**Poems by Walter de la Mare** evoke a sense of wonder and enchantment, capturing the essence of human emotion and the beauty of the natural world. Walter de la Mare, an English poet, novelist, and short story writer, is celebrated for his ability to weave intricate imagery and profound themes into his

poems. Born in 1873, de la Mare's literary career spanned several decades, during which he produced a remarkable body of work that continues to resonate with readers today. This article delves into the life, themes, and notable poems of Walter de la Mare, offering a comprehensive overview of his contributions to English literature.

## **Life and Career of Walter de la Mare**

Walter de la Mare was born on April 25, 1873, in Charlton, Kent. He was educated at St. Paul's School in London and later worked in various capacities, including as a clerk and an editor. De la Mare's literary career began in the early 20th century, and he quickly gained recognition for his unique voice and imaginative storytelling. His work often explored themes of childhood, nature, and the supernatural, drawing on his own experiences and insights.

De la Mare's poetry is characterized by its musicality, vivid imagery, and a sense of nostalgia. His ability to evoke emotions through simple yet profound language has earned him a place among the great English poets. He published numerous collections of poetry, children's literature, and prose, with his most famous works being "Songs of Childhood" and "The Listeners."

## **Themes in Walter de la Mare's Poetry**

Walter de la Mare's poetry encompasses a variety of themes, many of which are interwoven throughout his works. Some of the most prominent themes include:

### **1. Nature and the Natural World**

De la Mare had a deep appreciation for nature, and this is reflected in many of his poems. He often depicted the beauty of the landscape, the changing seasons, and the delicate balance of life. His poems invite readers to immerse themselves in the natural world, encouraging a sense of tranquility and connection.

### **2. Childhood and Innocence**

Childhood is a recurring theme in de la Mare's poetry. He often reflects on the innocence and wonder of youth, exploring the joys and fears that accompany it. His poems evoke nostalgia for a simpler time, inviting readers to reminisce about their own childhood experiences.

### **3. The Supernatural and the Mystical**

De la Mare was fascinated by the supernatural, and many of his poems contain elements of fantasy and mysticism. He often blurred the lines between reality and imagination, creating enchanting worlds that captivate the reader's mind. This theme allows for a deeper exploration of the human

psyche and the mysteries of existence.

## 4. Isolation and Solitude

Another significant theme in de la Mare's poetry is the concept of isolation. Many of his characters experience moments of solitude, leading to introspection and self-discovery. De la Mare's exploration of loneliness resonates with readers, as it reflects a universal aspect of the human experience.

## Notable Poems by Walter de la Mare

Walter de la Mare's body of work includes numerous poems that have stood the test of time. Here are some of his most notable poems:

- **The Listeners** - This poem tells the story of a traveler who arrives at a mysterious house and seeks a response from its occupants. The haunting atmosphere and unanswered questions create a sense of intrigue and suspense.
- **Silver** - In this poem, de la Mare beautifully captures the magic of moonlight illuminating the world at night. The imagery is rich and evocative, creating a serene and dreamlike quality.
- **Dreamers** - This poem reflects on the power of dreams and imagination, celebrating the ability to escape reality and explore the depths of the subconscious.
- **Song of the Madman** - This piece delves into the mind of a madman, exploring themes of sanity, perception, and the complexities of human emotion.
- **All Sweet and Comforting** - A tender exploration of love and companionship, this poem highlights the warmth and solace that relationships can bring.

## Analysis of Key Poems

To better understand Walter de la Mare's style and thematic concerns, let's analyze a few key poems in greater depth.

### The Listeners

"The Listeners" is perhaps de la Mare's most famous poem. It opens with a traveler who knocks on the door of a seemingly abandoned house, calling out to its occupants. The poem's structure is marked by a rhythmic cadence that enhances its eerie quality. As the traveler waits for a reply, the silence becomes palpable, and the reader is left to ponder the nature of the listeners—who they are and why

they remain silent. The poem masterfully captures the tension between the known and the unknown, reflecting de la Mare's fascination with the supernatural.

## **Silver**

In "Silver," de la Mare paints a vivid picture of a moonlit night, using rich imagery to evoke a sense of tranquility and beauty. The poem's language is lyrical, with a musical quality that mirrors the serene setting. De la Mare's ability to create a dreamlike atmosphere allows readers to feel the magic of the night, inviting them to experience the wonder of nature. The theme of transformation is evident, as the ordinary world is transformed into something extraordinary under the moon's glow.

## **Dreamers**

"Dreamers" celebrates the power of imagination and the importance of dreams in human life. De la Mare emphasizes the beauty of dreaming as a means of escape from reality, allowing individuals to explore their innermost thoughts and desires. The poem encourages readers to embrace their dreams, highlighting the significance of creativity and the human spirit.

## **The Legacy of Walter de la Mare**

Walter de la Mare's contributions to poetry extend beyond his written works; he has inspired countless writers and poets with his imaginative approach and profound themes. His ability to evoke emotion through simple language and imagery continues to resonate with readers across generations. De la Mare's exploration of childhood, nature, and the supernatural reflects the complexities of human experience, making his poetry timeless and relevant.

As we reflect on the life and work of Walter de la Mare, it is clear that his poems offer more than just beautiful language; they provide a lens through which we can explore our own emotions, thoughts, and experiences. His legacy endures, reminding us of the power of poetry to illuminate the human condition and inspire wonder in the world around us. Whether through the haunting echoes of "The Listeners" or the serene beauty of "Silver," de la Mare's poems invite us to dream, reflect, and connect with the deeper mysteries of life.

## **Frequently Asked Questions**

### **Who is Walter de la Mare?**

Walter de la Mare was an English poet, short story writer, and novelist, known for his children's literature and lyrical poetry, born in 1873 and died in 1956.

### **What themes are commonly found in Walter de la Mare's**

## **poems?**

His poems often explore themes of nature, childhood, dreams, and the supernatural, conveying a sense of mystery and a deep appreciation for the imagination.

## **What is one of Walter de la Mare's most famous poems?**

One of his most famous poems is 'The Listeners,' which tells a haunting story of a traveler seeking to enter a mysterious house.

## **How does Walter de la Mare's writing style differ from his contemporaries?**

De la Mare's writing is characterized by its musicality, rich imagery, and a focus on the emotional and mystical aspects of human experience, setting it apart from more straightforward modernist styles.

## **Did Walter de la Mare write poetry for children?**

Yes, he wrote several children's poems, with works like 'The Swing' and 'The Old Song' being popular for their whimsical and imaginative qualities.

## **What is the significance of nature in de la Mare's poetry?**

Nature plays a crucial role in de la Mare's poetry, often serving as a backdrop that enhances the themes of solitude, reflection, and the connection between the real and the fantastical.

## **What literary awards did Walter de la Mare receive?**

Walter de la Mare received several accolades, including the James Tait Black Memorial Prize for fiction and was also appointed a Fellow of the Royal Society of Literature.

## **Can you name a poem by de la Mare that reflects a sense of melancholy?**

The poem 'The Ghost' reflects a sense of melancholy, exploring themes of loss and the passage of time through a ghostly narrative.

## **How did Walter de la Mare influence modern poetry?**

Walter de la Mare influenced modern poetry through his innovative use of imagery, rhythm, and an exploration of psychological depth, inspiring later poets to engage with similar themes.

## **What is a common critical interpretation of 'The Listeners'?**

Critics often interpret 'The Listeners' as an exploration of isolation and the unknown, suggesting that the poem represents the human quest for connection in a world that may be indifferent.

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