

Walter de la Mare

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Walter John de la Mare, OM CH (April 25, 1873 – June 22, 1956), was an English poet, short story writer, and novelist, probably best remembered for his works for children and "The Listeners". He was born in Kent (at 83 Maryon Road, Charlton [1] - now part of the London Borough of Greenwich), descended from a family of French Huguenots, and was educated at St Paul's Choir School. His first book, *Songs of Childhood*, was published under the name Walter Ramal. He worked in the statistics department of the London office of Standard Oil for eighteen years while struggling to bring up a family, but nevertheless found enough time to write, and in 1908, though the efforts of Sir Henry Newbolt he received a Civil List pension which enabled him to concentrate on writing.

One of de la Mare's special interests was the imagination, and this contributed both to the popularity of his children's writing and to his other work occasionally being taken less seriously than it deserved.

De la Mare also wrote some subtle psychological horror stories; "Seaton's Aunt" and "Out of the Deep" are noteworthy examples. His 1921 novel *Memoirs of a Midget* won the James Tait Black Memorial Prize for fiction.

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The imagination

With perhaps allowable stereotyping considering his time period, de la Mare described two distinct

"types" of imagination — although "aspects" might be a better term: the childlike and the boylike. It was at the border between the two that Shakespeare, Dante, and the rest of the great poets lay.

De la Mare claimed that all children fall into the category of having a childlike imagination at first, which is usually replaced at some point in their lives. In his lecture, "Rupert Brooke and the Intellectual Imagination," he argued that children ". . . are not so closely confined and bound in by their groping senses. Facts to them are the liveliest of chameleons . . . They are contemplatives, solitaires, fakirs, who sink again and again out of the noise and fever of existence and into a waking vision." Doris Ross McCrosson summarizes this passage, "Children are, in short, visionaries." This visionary view of life can be seen as either vital creativity and ingenuity, or fatal disconnection from reality (or, in a limited sense, both).

The increasing intrusions of the external world upon the mind, however, frighten the childlike imagination, which "retires like a shocked snail into its shell." From then onward the boyish

imagination flourishes, the "intellectual, analytical type."

By adulthood (de la Mare proposed), the childlike imagination has either retreated for ever or grown bold enough to face the real world. Thus emerge the two extremes of the spectrum of adult minds: the mind molded by the boylike is "logical" and "deductive." That shaped by the childlike becomes "intuitive, inductive." De la Mare's summary of this distinction is, "The one knows that beauty is truth, the other reveals that truth is beauty." Another way he puts it is that the visionary's source of poetry is within, while the intellectual's sources are without — external — in "action, knowledge of things, and experience," as McCrosson puts it. De la Mare hastens to add that this does not make the intellectual's poetry any less good, but it is clear where his own preference lies.

A note to avoid confusion: The term "imagination" in the lecture "Rupert Brooke and the Intellectual Imagination" is used to refer to both the intellectual and the visionary. To simplify and clarify his language, de la Mare generally used the more conventional "reason"

and "imagination" when discussing the same idea elsewhere.

The Listeners

This is probably Walter de la Mare's most famous poem. It narrates (in third person) the story of a mysterious man coming to a house in the night on horseback, and subsequently failing, to deliver a message and fulfill a promise. Nobody is there but the "Listeners" (named in the title), who seem to be merely spectral. It is apparent that "The Listeners" hear his knocking and request for assistance, however they choose to ignore it. Some people think that the poem represents missed opportunity on the part of the traveler. The house meant something to him, so he returned to it, but he came back too late and there was nothing left but shadows and memories. It is also sometimes thought to be referenced in *The Third Policeman*. The Narrator visits a house and knocks twice, but to no avail, as in *The Listeners*.

Come Hither

Come Hither was an anthology, mostly of poetry

with some prose. It has a frame story, and can be read on several levels. It was first published in 1923, and was a success; further editions followed. Alongside the children's literature aspect, it also provides a selection of the leading Georgian poets (from de la Mare's perspective). It is arguably also the best account of their 'hinterland', documenting thematic concerns and a selection of their predecessors.

Poets and other writers included (some just mentioned) are:

Claude Collier Abbott - Lascelles Abercrombie - William Allingham - Martin Armstrong - John Aubrey - Saint Augustine - Francis Bacon - William Barnes - Richard Barnfield - H. H. Bashford - Eric N. Batterham - Francis Beaumont - Thomas Lovell Beddoes - Hilaire Belloc - Charles Best - Laurence Binyon - William Blake - Edmund Blunden - Gordon Bottomley - Nicholas Breton - Robert Bridges - Emily Brontë - Rupert Brooke - Sir Thomas Browne - William Cullen Bryant - Lord Buckhurst - John Bunyan - Robert Burns - Robert Burton - Lord Byron - Jeremiah John Callanan - Thomas Campbell - Thomas Campion - Ethna Carbery - Thomas Carew -

William Cartwright - Benvenuto Cellini - George
Chapman - Charles I of England - Thomas
Chatterton - Geoffrey Chaucer - John Clare -
William Cleland - Mary Coleridge - Samuel
Taylor Coleridge - Padraic Colum - Henry
Constable - Richard Corbet - Frances Cornford -
William Cornish - G. G. Coulton - Abraham
Cowley - George Crabbe - Allan Cunningham -
Charles Dalmon - Samuel Daniel - George Darley
- Sir William Davenant - Francis Davidson - Sir
John Davies - William H. Davies - Edward L.
Davison - Anna Bunston De Bary - Thomas
Dekker - Olivier de la Marche - Thomas De
Quincey - Lord De Tabley - Richard Watson
Dixon - Sydney Dobell - John Donne - Charles M.
Doughty - Michael Drayton - John Drinkwater -
William Drummond - William Dunbar -
Courtenay Dunn - Elizabeth I of England - Jean
Elliot - Havelock Ellis - Vivian Locke Ellis -
Ralph Waldo Emerson - Eleanor Farjeon - Sir
Samuel Ferguson - James Elroy Flecker -
Marjorie Fleming - John Fletcher - Colin Francis -
John Freeman - Robert Frost - Thomas Fuller -
Margaret Cecilia Furse - Crosbie Garstin - Wilfrid
Gibson - Humphrey Gifford - Mary
Wollstonecraft Godwin - Oliver Goldsmith -
Barnabe Googe - Edmund Gosse - John

Woodcock Graves - Robert Graves - Thomas
Gray - Robert Greene - Viscountess Grey -
Edward Hall - John Hamilton - Thomas Hardy -
Stephen Hawes - Robert Hayman - Felicia
Hemans - Henry VIII of England - George
Herbert - Robert Herrick - Thomas Heywood -
Ralph Hodgson - James Hogg - Thomas Hood -
Gerard Manley Hopkins - Julia Ward Howe -
Mary Howitt - W. H. Hudson - Alexander Hume -
Gwen John - M. M. Johnson - Ben Jonson - John
Keats - Henry Killigrew - Henry King - Charles
Kingsley - Rudyard Kipling - Robert Kirk -
Charles Lamb - Walter Savage Landor - Lady
Anne Lindsay - Henry Wadsworth Longfellow -
Sir Richard Lovelace - E. V. Lucas - John
Lydgate - John Lyly - Sidney Royse Lysaght -
Thomas Babington Macaulay - W. MacGillivray -
Fiona MacLeod - Hector MacNeill - Francis
Mahony - Sir John Mandeville - James Clarence
Mangan - Ruth Manning-Sanders - John Maplet -
John Marriot - Frederick Marryat - Andrew
Marvell - John Masefield - George Meredith -
Charlotte Mew - Kuno Meyer - Alice Meynell -
Viola Meynell - John Milton - Harold Monro -
Alexander Montgomerie - T. Sturge Moore - Sir
Thomas More - William Morris - Anthony
Munday - Thomas Nash - Sir Henry Newbolt -

Alfred Noyes - Friar Odoric - William Henry
Ogilvie - John O'Keefe - Amelia Opie - Conal
O'Riordan - Seamus O'Sullivan - Sir Thomas
Overbury - Wilfred Owen - Coventry Patmore - F.
J. Patmore - Thomas Love Peacock - Plotinus -
Joseph Plunkett - Edgar Allan Poe - Marco Polo -
Alexander Pope - Sir Walter Raleigh - Elizabeth
Ramal - Allan Ramsay - Thomas Ravenscroft -
Lizette Woodworth Reese - Forrest Reid - Hugh
Rhodes - Madeline Caron Rock - Christina
Rossetti - Dante Gabriel Rossetti - Richard
Rowlands - William Rowley - John Ruskin -
Siegfried Sassoon - Reginald Scot - Alexander
Scott - Sir Walter Scott - William Bell Scott -
William Shakespeare - Edward Shanks - William
Sharp - Gilbert Sheldon - Percy Bysshe Shelley -
James Shirley - Dora Sigerson Shorter - Sir Henry
Sidney - Sir Philip Sidney - Edith Sitwell - John
Skelton - Bernard Sleight - Robert Southey -
Robert Southwell - Edmund Spenser - J. C. Squire
- James Stephens - Robert Louis Stevenson - Sir
John Suckling - Earl of Surrey - Algernon Charles
Swinburne - Sir William Temple - Alfred Lord
Tennyson - Edward Thomas - Thomas the
Rhymer - Francis Thompson - James Thomson -
Lord Thurlow - H. M. Tomlinson - Edward
Topsell - Thomas Traherne - Herbert Trench -

John de Trevisa - George Turberville - Walter J.
Turner - Thomas Tusser - Katharine Tynan -
Henry Vaughan - Thomas Vautor - Edmund
Waller - Isaac Walton - Isaac Watts - Mary Webb
- John Webster - John Wedderburn - Walt
Whitman - George Wither - J. Wolcot - Margaret
L. Woods - Dorothy Wordsworth - William
Wordsworth - Sir Henry Wotton - Elizabeth M.
Wright - Elinor Wylie - W. B. Yeats - Filson
Young - Francis Brett Young

Works

Novels

- *Henry Brocken* (1904)
- *The Three Mulla Mulgars* (1910)
- *The Return* (1910)
- *Memoirs of a Midget* (1921)
- *At First Sight* (1930)

Short story collections

- *The Riddle and Other Stories* (1923)
- *Ding Dong Bell* (1924)
- *Broomsticks and Other Tales* (1925)
- *The Connoisseur and Other Stories* (1926)

- *On the Edge* (1930)
- *The Lord Fish* (1930)
- *The Walter de la Mare Omnibus* (1933)
- *The Wind Blows Over* (1936)
- *The Nap and Other Stories* (1936)
- *The Best Stories of Walter de la Mare* (1942)
- *A Beginning and Other Stories* (1955)
- *Eight Tales* (1971)

Poetry

- *Songs of Childhood* (1902)
- *The Listeners* (1912)
- *Peacock Pie* (1913)
- *The Marionettes* (1918)
- *O Lovely England* (1952)
- *Silver*

Plays

- *Crossings: A Fairy Play* (1923)

Nonfiction

- *Some Women Novelists of the 'Seventies* (1929)
- *Desert Islands and Robinson Crusoe* (1930)


Anthologies edited

- *Come Hither* (1923)
- *Behold, This Dreamer!* (1939)

References

- Bleiler, Everett (1948). *The Checklist of Fantastic Literature*. Chicago: Shasta Publishers, 96-97.
- *Imagination of the Heart: The Life of Walter de la Mare* (1993) Theresa Whistler
- *Walter de la Mare* (1966) Doris Ross McCrosson

External links

-  Works by Walter de la Mare on Wikisource
- Works by Walter de la Mare at Project Gutenberg
- Walter de la Mare in Twickenham

See also

- List of horror fiction authors
- *The Queen's Book of the Red Cross*

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