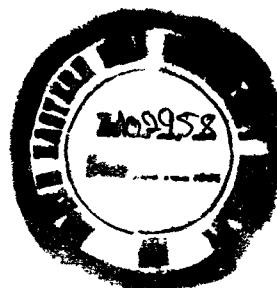


**A PORTRAIT OF A CHILD AND ITS WORLD
IN WALTER DE LA MARE'S
POETRY : A SELECTIVE STUDY**

By *Ray*
Sukla Roy

DISSERTATION
SUBMITTED
IN PART FULFILMENT OF THE REQUIREMENT FOR THE DEGREE OF
MASTER OF PHILOSOPHY
(M. Phil.)



DEPARTMENT OF ENGLISH
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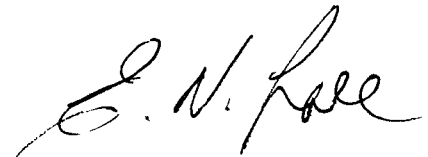
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10 November 1992

I certify that the dissertation entitled "*A Portrait of a Child and Its World in Walter De La Mare's Poetry: A Selective Study*" submitted by Sukla Roy, in partial fulfilment of the requirement for the degree of Master of Philosophy of the North-Eastern Hill University, Shillong, is the record of original investigation carried out by her under my supervision.

She has been duly registered and the dissertation presented is worthy of being considered for the award of the M.Phil degree. The work has not been submitted for any degree of any other University.

SHILLONG
The 10th November 1992



(E. N. Lall)

Professor and Head

TO
THE CHILD IN
EVERY HUMAN-HEART

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SUKLA ROY

CHAPTER - ONE

INTRODUCTION

Complexity and contradiction, futility and confusion in every sphere of life characterizes the twentieth century. Rapid industrialisation, new scientific invention and two world wars, brought a dynamic change all over the world. For the tradition-bound people of England this change is so radical and unforeseen that it becomes difficult for them to accept this changing scenario. This change seems to strike a great blow at the very foundation of English society.

The writers of the twentieth century have attempted to give a complete picture of this waste-land in their writings. The literary world of this period is crowded with photographic details of despair and frustration experienced by the human beings. A number of writers have meticulously highlighted in their writings all the negative aspects of human life. Their aim and function is to make people aware of the harsh reality of life and the malady of the present-day world. But one thing they forget is that their constant focus on stark reality is bound to drive people on the edge of morbidity. People in this grim situation look for some hope in life and some solace for their misery and grief in the writings of contemporary writers. Unfortunately these are totally denied to them by the writers of this period who view life as all strife and agony. They forget that life is a unique

phénoménon of this world and not a series of negative aspects.

Walter De La Mare is one of those rare writers who appears on this bleak literary scene to assure the people that all is not yet lost. C.D. Lewis' commemorative poem in honour of De La Mare's seventy-fifth birthday draws one's attention to the feeling that all is not lost.

You bear
 Gifts that, although men commonly flout them
 Being hardened, or born, to live without them,
 Are none the less rare.
 Pass, friend, and fare you well, and may all
 such travellers be
 Speeded
 Who bring us news we had almost forgot we needed.¹

Walter De La Mare's poetry informs us that the essence of beauty and life is perennial. This vast universe is an abode of unfathomable mysteries: Life and beauty will prevail over all odd happenings in this present day world. De La Mare in his poem "Farewell" expresses his idea that even now one can cast a last glance on all that is beautiful. Pessimism and melancholy may be the prevailing mood of the present-day world, but gaiety is still alive all around. He tells us that in spite of all gloom around, the world is breath-takingly beautiful and attractive.

It is very difficult for human beings not to be tempted by this world. Each moment a new soul enters this world to embark on a journey of exploration. The new soul begins its

explorative journey in the form of a child-figure equipped with all divine qualities like love, wonder, belief and innocence. These are the qualities which help it to be one with the universe and the possessor of all joy and happiness. Walter De La Mare's uniqueness lies in the presentation of this child figure in his poems as well as allowing us entry into the mythical world of a child, a world which is real to a child and always will be there as long as the human race exists on this earth.

De La Mare believes that the world with all its beauty can never be lost, even though the world's odd happenings may shake the **foundation** of life's existence. Moreover, he feels that tradition and culture play a great role in the shaping of a child's mode of thinking. In Carl Jung's terms this racial tradition and culture is the "collective unconscious". According to Jung on this "collective unconscious" rest the primordial images common to humanity which he calls "archetypes".² These "thoughtforms" of humanity are universal and according to Jung the "collective unconscious is entirely universal and its content can be found everywhere."³ De La Mare's theory of the unconscious echoes the same idea. He call this an "unplumbable well".⁴ According to De La Mare this is the source of all that makes a being human and he believes that this "unplumbable well" does not begin to fill upon birth nor that its "reviving waters" get drained away

at the time of death. It is always there in human-beings and the poet's function is only to stimulate thoughts and ideas that lie dormant in that "well".

Abundant mythological figures like fairies, elves, goblins, witches, ogres and dwarfs can be noticed in De La Mare's poems. These supernatural beings, for De La Mare, are inseparable from the human race and the origin of these mythological personages is as old as that of the human race in this world. Different aspects of nature, both delightful and fearful are represented through these mythological personages. The impact of these figures on the mental world of a child is immense. Modern psychologists also admit the important role played by the "folk-fairy tale" ⁵ in building up a child's mental world.

A "child figure" in verse and the "Child-Poem" ⁶ are nothing new in the literary world. The "child-poem" has behind it a long and rich literary tradition. But no one has explored so deeply the world of a child or has taken a keen interest in portraying the image of a child in his poems as has Walter De La Mare. He never wavers in his belief in the beauty and the immortality of human spirit. These are flashes of eternity which he sees at their loveliest and strongest in childhood. A considerable bulk of his poetry, therefore, concerns itself "with that cosmos which is essentially the cosmos of childhood". ⁷

Walter John De La Mare was born at Charlton in Kent on 25 April 1873. His first literary work Songs of Childhood was produced in 1902 and preferring not to disclose his identity he signed himself as Walter Ramal. Henry Broken, a prose romance was published in 1904 and went under the same name. After that all his literary works bear the real name of the author. His works are one of the most individual production that this century has given us. Frederick T. Wood views him as the sole representative of "Pure Poetry" which he defines as having "no ulterior object; poetry that is merely meant to be pleasing, beautiful and musical; poetry which springs from a belief that the highest function of the artist is to give delight and not to preach or to formulate a philosophy." ⁸

As Van Gogh's paintings indicate the painter's immense lust for light, similarly each scrap of De La Mare's work points to his immense love for beauty and joy of life and the world. Only a child knows the secret of this joy and beauty. Hence, again and again De La Mare's poems turn to a child and its world, till it becomes the pivotal point of his poetry. He gives a new dimension to a child and its world in his poems.

De La Mare is never content with this world which seems to him merely an appearance of a greater reality. The poet is always in search of that reality -- a real world -- from where he is banished. In poem after poem, he has expressed

this aching sense of exile. His poetry brings to our eyes and ears another world -- a world beyond Time, a world lying just beyond this one. This world can be visited in moments of heightened vision especially by children and poets. Dream is one way of entry into this world and death is another. To enter this world one "must become as a child". So, "a child" becomes the key-word of his poetry. Children inhabit this dream world with the same naturalness as they inhabit the ordinary world and that is the reason behind so much delight and wonder in a child's world. But this child's world is not of all beauty. There is also fear and terror, evil and hopelessness and above all, mystery. De La Mare has minutely observed this world of a child and presented this in an exquisite manner in his poetry.

With the appearance of his first work Songs of Childhood in 1902 it seems to everyone that a genius had arrived in the literary scene who possessed an individual vision and a fresh and authentic poetic voice. Over fifty years of his literary life Walter De La Mare leads his readers young and old to a land where magic and music, joy, beauty and fear are all intricately inter-woven. Children find immense joy in his poems and grown-ups are stirred to deep thought. De La Mare's poems are apparently simple as they suggest unsuspected depths of meaning beyond what the words ostensibly say.

The "Child-poem" had appeared in English literature as early as the 14th century. "The Pearl" is the earliest child-poem in the English language; it is an elegy by an unknown author. The poet laments the premature death of his daughter. Having fallen asleep on the grave he travels to a strange land in his dream where he meets a white-robed maiden. He quickly recognises her as his daughter. The maiden answers all his questions and silences all his doubts and rebellious thoughts one by one, taking instances from the scriptures. But the most remarkable thing in the poem is the deep note of joy -- the wonderful happiness of the child. In literature the child and childhood have been presented in a new image and form since that time, moreover this image and form go through changes with the changing outlook of the poet.

It is said that Traherne, Vaughan, Blake and Wordsworth are the four corner stones of "child-poetry". But in Walter De La Mare the literary world finds for the first time, the portrayal of a child and childhood" in its wholeness, recognising it to be elemental, wayward, unfathomable and divine."⁹

A close study of De La Mare's poems reveals that he uses the child and its world to provide him with a symbol for his own as well as men's spiritual experience in this world. Perkins states that "the central importance in De La Mare's

poetry is of states or of moments when the common day of adult routine falls away or has not yet imposed itself." ¹⁰ He goes on to say that childhood for De La Mare is the lost "Eden of the heart".¹¹ In De La Mare's view a deeper and truer kind of joy and wonder is known to a child and one can again possess that true unknowable, beautiful world by re-entering the mind of a child. His endeavour is to find out "reality" which in his view is made up of intersecting planes or interwoven aspects and only some parts of which are accessible to one's senses and reason; so he writes: "Two worlds have we: without; within;/But all that sense can mete and span,/Until it confirmation win /From heart and soul, is death to man." ["Dreams"].

To De La Mare the external world of fact and time which can be seen, touched and heard, measured and analysed is no more important than the inner world which can be apprehended by some faculty other than the senses and reason. To see anything in its true perspective, De La Mare opines that one has to observe the outer world with one's physical eyes and then turn to innerself and judge temporal by the values of the eternal. One needs the confirmation of heart and soul. De La Mare suggests that only in childhood and in dreams the heart and soul meet. To hold both these worlds in balance one has to recapture the imagination of the dreamer and the alertness of the child. One must dream, but dream as a child

does, with eyes wide open. It is because of this that both child and dream have such an important place in his poetry.

As a poet he belongs to that small company of major poets like William Blake, Robert Louis Stevenson, Christina Rossetti, Rudyard Kipling who wrote for the young. But in output, range and quality he has surpassed them all. Collected Rhymes and Verses (1947) contains nearly all the poems -- over six hundreds of them -- which he wrote "with the young in mind". Besides these poems, he has written hardly any poem where he has not used the word "child".

Commenting on De La Mare's poems for children Leonard Clark quotes Richard Church who says in his A Twentieth Century Gallery (1943) that the effect of these poems are aeolian.¹² Richard Church likens the effect of De La Mare's poetry to listening to the humming sound through the wires near a telegraph pole in heavy, frosty weather.¹³ A child takes this sound as the voice of the messages passing through the wire and to a grown-up this sound brings back a sad nostalgia -- nostalgic music of time, of vanished humanity. The magic touch of De La Mare's poems has made the small mute things of earth vocal and the common thing uncommon. He shows both children and adults how to see beauty and wonder in the most unlikely places. For instance in "Old Shallover" one follows an invitation:

- 'Come!' said Old Shellover.
 'What?' says Creep.
 'The horny old Gardener's fast asleep;
 The fat cock Thrush
 To his nest has gone;
 And the dew shines bright
 In the rising Moon;
 Old Sallie Worm from her hole doth peep:
 Come!' said Old Shellover.
 'Ay!' said creep.

Even though he uses imagery drawn from the world of nature the poet succeeds in transforming the night-enchanted garden into an alien place of menace and beauty. The garden is now given over to the lowliest forms of life like snail, slug and sallie worm. Man, "horny old Gardener" is no more than an archetypal ogre to these creatures; so is the thrush. These alien and tyrannous beings are withdrawn to the distant land of sleep. Profound silence and shimmering beauty now reign there. Only the tenuous drawl of the wakeful molluscs break the stillness of the surroundings. If one can enter this brilliant dream-like scene one can arrive at a better understanding of harmony that exists in the natural world.

De La Mare's poetry reminds one that there is something in this earth, the essence of poetry is one among them, that time cannot change. The violent changes of the contemporary world cannot affect the essence of poetry as it is eternal. This is why his Peacock Pie even now is considered as the

finest volume of verse for children written in this century. In support of this view one can quote Clark's comment on Peacock Pie to the effect that "for all the changes in the social climate since De La Mare baked his extraordinary pie the ingredients for children remain the same." ¹⁴ Peacock Pie has withstood the test of time and still now has remained wonderful "because its patina has the property of being able to stay bright for ever." ¹⁵

Music saturated poems with rich quaint fancy mark the unique features of his poetry. His poems carry such an exquisite vowel melody that haunts the ear of a child though the meaning of half the words used in the poem remains beyond his reach. But the beauty of words in the poem a child can surprisingly enjoy. De La Mare has proved himself the wizard of delicate and cunning rhythm.

Writing on the effect of De La Mare's poems on children R.L. Mégroz refers to one report of a lecturer in speech-training for the Glasgow Education Authority on the teaching of poetry where the teacher asked a little girl of about nine, after a general reading in class of Walter De La Mare's poem "Nod", which line she liked the best; the answer was "His ram's bell rings 'neath an arch of stars." ¹⁶ The reason the little girl gave was that "The first half of the line is full of the bell sounds and the second half is all big and quiet like the sky at night." ¹⁷

• This comment testifies to the effect of long echoing vowel melody and beauty of words on a child. But the true meaning of the poem lies elsewhere. De La Mare has deftly exploited stock responses to evoke archetypal feeling of rest and security.

The genius of De La Mare leads one into a land of haunting mystery and delight. Like "toneless ditties" of Keats one can sense the charm of his poetry. But it seems to be impossible to define or explain his poetry. The subtle form of aesthetic consciousness of the poet has given these poems their beings. His poetry, says M. Hunterwoods, reminds one of the all pervading "Spirit of Pity" of Hardy's Dynast; one cannot express its infinite sympathy and refinement in words.¹⁸ Artistic restraint, clarity of vision and delicacy of touch are the salient traits of De La Mare's poems. He weaves words, tones and thoughts in his poems with great subtlety that to perceive them one needs the aid of something greater and outside the rational mind and the senses. "To attempt, to judge, the artistry of De La Mare", writes Hunterwoods "is like writing a treatise on a spider's web or on a drop of dew"¹⁹ and also adds that the secret of the web's structure may be revealed but at the price of destroying it into fragments; no amount of minutest observation can detect more beauty in a drop of dew. The qualities of brightness in dew and the coarseness in the web depend not on anybody's

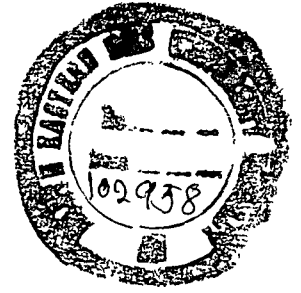
appreciation. It is very difficult to pigeonhole him. De La Mare remains an elusive figure, an enigma.

In one sense he may be called a symbolist poet as he tries to convey description subtly through intuition, by suggestion of sound and colour, by reflection of cool light. "Andy's Love Song" may be cited as one of the poems where this symbolic technique of De La Mare has been displayed. "Me who have sailed/Leagues across/Foam haunted/By the albatross". The sound, rhythm and the name of the place in the poem at once arouse in the reader's mind Coleridge's ¹⁸⁰⁴ "Ancient Mariner".

Like Modernist poets De La Mare likes to dispense with logical and chronological expression in his poetry. Logical and chronological expression has been replaced in his poem by the irrational convention of children's verse and its allied form such as folk and fairy rhyme and tale. Some of his poems for children are nonsense and verbal puzzles. The beautiful poem 'The Song of the Mad Prince' comes under this category of nonsensical poetry. But these inconsequential, nonsensical images are adopted by the poet as a device to make a comment on life. The poignancy of loss that is expressed in the poem seems to be intensified by the suggestions of colour and feasting, harvest and the passage of seasons and death. At the same time the poem suggests that any disproportionate indulgence in grief should be checked. In H. Coombe's

view it is perhaps the strongest poem that is written by De La Mare.²⁰

De La Mare's new way of presentment has bestowed a special charm on the subjects that are collected from day to day life. He finds bizzare suggestions in common objects. One can notice De La Mare's strategy for giving emphasis on apparently insignificant details and thus turning them into impressive symbols. Prof. Olivero finds in the song of a bird in De La Mare's poem "Beware" a mystic warning against night which is the image of death drawing rapidly near bringing with her the Lord of Life, the Giver of Eternity.²¹ "The Dwelling-place" is another poem of De La Mare which reminds one of Poe's "Conqueror Worm" may be read as an allegory of life. In the poem "The Dark Chateau" De La Mare leads his readers to a dark castle perched on a cliff, shrouded with mystery. Nobody can enter there as it is a dream castle that appears in an unknown land of the poet's dream, among cypress and rose groves and disappears always at dawn. De La Mare glorifies the hawthorn as an emblem of everlasting love in the poem "The Hawthorn Hath a Deathly Smell". To him other blossoms with their perfumes and hues, with their splendour, beauty and delight pass away with the passing of summer while this hawthorn shrub on the grave of sacred affection quietly waits for the Judgement Day in heaven.



The spirit of man, De La Mare believes, has the power to transcend the limitation imposed on it by time and space. The presence of supernatural in his poetry, actually stems from this deep awareness of spiritual force. The notable part of his work is that in most cases the actual supernatural phenomenon never occurs. The atmosphere of other-worldiness has been created by the poet's skilful usage "of words and sound sequences, of values and association of ideas." ²² Nowhere do his readers experience "uncomfortable feelings of incongruity" ²³ or think that De La Mare's "cannons of art" ²⁴ are violated. De La Mare's art of presenting the supernatural in poetry is diverse. It is pure fantasy in some as "I saw Three Witches", "The Phantom" and "Bewitched". But its more complex and delicate form is a form of extreme sensitiveness and it has the power to influence anyone psychically. The supreme specimen of this kind is his poem "The Listeners".

The very opening line of the poem is eerie and weird. Deathly stillness has enveloped the whole surrounding; only the traveller's voice is vibrating in the air. "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." ["The Listeners"]

The keynote of the prevailing atmosphere of the poem is revealed right from these few first lines and uncanny seems to be the appropriate epithet of this note. The silence of the

surrounding place, the solitariness of the house fills one's mind with a great sense of awe. One feels it constantly and waits patiently that something is going to happen which never happens in reality.

Another striking point in Walter De La Mare is his concern more for psychic reaction to an experience than to an experience as such. "For him the whole of earthly existence is the story of response of the psychic self to whatever man encounters on his journey through the world."²⁵ Keeping this in view De La Mare may be described as a "Psychic Poet".²⁶

He is sometimes abused as an escapist as he differs in his view from the accepted definition of reality and the relationship of conventional existence. But undeniably there is an inner world whose existence can only be apprehended by some other faculty than the senses and reason. The senses and reason can be of help to perceive only the external world of facts. De La Mare writes: "Two worlds have we: without; within;". Neither of these two worlds can be ignored. The man who accepts the outer world is called normally the realist and the man who accepts the inner world an escapist. But inversely the realist can be labelled as an escapist as he tries to elude the other life which still exists within.

The meaning of reality defies any sort of definition as no specific law exists there to denote what is real

and what is not especially in the field of poetry. T. Heywood writes in his essay "Contemporaneity and Escape" that Coleridge's poem "Kubla Khan" is no less real than Andrew Marvell's "Ode upon Cromwell's Return From Ireland", though it is a dream poem.²⁷ It implies that reality exists in the imagination of the poet and in his ability to put it across. The only real thing in the world of a poet, is his inspiration. De La Mare has not tried to focus directly on contemporary life in his poems; he has confessed to this fact in his poem "At War".

A world at war: and I sit here at peace!
 Shame chills the cheek at such stark heedlessness.
 Yet earth-life always is at war with woe,
 Inward and outward. The same Fiend for foe
 Stalks this world's wilderness.
 And were I not to my own evil blind,
 How dread a shambles were my waking mind!

He is in search for greater reality over-powering all evils that are always at war with the innerself.

Truly one cannot observe in De La Mare's poetry any reflection of this age or any other specific time as his poetry goes beyond all time, metamorphosing every day life and revealing the mystery in reality. D.R. McCrosson comments that the term topicality can in no way be given to his finest poetry and also to a great deal of his fine poems.²⁸ His poetry reveals that it is neither a criticism of life nor an escape

from life; what it aims at is to heighten and intensify life. De La Mare, in H.C. Duffin's view, has ennobled all the major themes of life as he has made them an eternal part of the world of spirit.²⁹ The reality which De La Mare presents in his poetry is beyond language or in otherword the unreality is the reality in his poetic world. He listens intently first in the recess of his heart to what is beyond human language and than presents in his poetry such things whose Midas touch can transmute, transfigure life marvellously in value and beauty. Michael Schmidt calls him "the conscious poet of the unconscious though in no facile psychological sense"³⁰ To De la Mare, writes Schmidt "unconscious means inarticulable, the limbo in which language, to have power can be used only connotatively".³¹ On reading his poetry one can experience a strange ethereal state of the mind.

De La Mare is an individual poet and one notices that a mystic under-current runs throughout his work. It seems that in his inmost heart De La Mare listens to the hymn of Immortality -- Immortality of love, beauty and the human soul. The apparent simplicity of his lines contains unsuspected depth of meaning; and a fine intellect coupled with keen-sensitivity required to unearth this depth. His poems appeal only to the wise, wide-eyed, mystical spirit of eternal childhood lurking forever in the higher mental state of each one of us. With this in mind De La Mare makes the portrait

of a child and its world the focal point of his poetic world.

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CHAPTER - TWO

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THE IMAGE OF A CHILD IN WATER DE LA MARE'S POEMS

If I could but be happy,
As you, dear, are happy!-
Like green fields in May
All my heart gay;
Like pure April skies
Clear light in my eyes;
Yes, and shake a small tongue
In sweet sallies of song,
And dance with my shadow
In the sun in the meadow,
And lie down to rest,
Joy in my breast!

[To A Child]

Children are not newcomers as a subject of literature. Their appearance in art, literature, drama embodies a complex mixture of fantasy and reality. Each literary period of which we have any record has its own version of a child and childhood. The portrayal of a child in literary form, specially in poetry differs from age to age. But there is unanimity among poets in the recognition of the potentialities of children. This sense of childhood's vast potentialities and a child's unawareness of its own inner wealth and its unquestioning acceptance of the order of things in which it finds itself is what turns everybody so fondly to it and also draws

reverential utterance from the poet like Vaughan: "I cannot reach it; and my striving eye/Dazzles at it as at Eternity."

One thing is quite certain that with the passage of time, the image of a child and its world has also undergone a great change. Among the poets of the Twentieth Century W.H. Davies, Robert Bridges, Alfred Noyes, John Masefield and Walter De La Mare have written poems about a child and childhood. Among them, Walter De La Mare is undoubtedly unique, for he came to the English literary scene as a new herald of a child's world which has never been explored before by any other poet, in such great depth.

The portrayal of a child in Blake's poetry is that of a mystic enjoying heaven; L. Stevenson portrays a child as either pensive or gay and Christina Rossett's "Children" seem to be very personal to her. But De La Mare sees childhood "in its wholeness, recognising it to be elemental, wayward, unfathomable and divine."¹ A close study of De La Mare's poems unfolds a beautiful portrayal of a child which traces a natural development - from its passive state to a state of full activity.

It is said that Swinburne is the king of child-worshippers among the poets and that no one has written more beautifully of children than he. In his Étude Réaliste he sings in praise of Babyhood. There are three little songs in it -- one in praise of a baby's feet, the second in praise of a baby's hands and the third of a baby's eyes. "A baby's feet

like sea-shells pink,/Might tempt, should heaven see meet,/An
 angel's lips to kiss, we think,/A baby's feet . . ." Some sort
 of exultation is noticeable in his poem. But the same baby-
 hood -- the passive state of a child is more gracefully des-
 cribed by De La Mare in his poem "Cecil": "... her hands
 and feet/The angels muse upon, and God/Hath shut a glimpse
 of Paradise/In each blue eye".

De La Mare's world is the world of subtlety, a soft
 and delicate world. It gets its full reflection in the por-
 trayal of a child. He looks for a world which is less unsatis-
 factory than this visible world, and for De La Mare, man
 constitutes the plainly unsatisfactory element in this world.
 So he is not poetically interested in man. The picture that
 is etched out in his poems is the portrait of a child who
 is like a flower in the human garden. To convey his immense
 love for a child he writes in "Envoy": "Child, do you love
 the flower/Shining with colour and dew/Lighting its transient
 hour?/So I love you."

To him a child is nothing more than an embodiment of
 "pure life", "a glorious bud of being", a great unsolved
 mystery, a life uncorrupted with worldly experience. For
 "a child" wells up in De La Mare's mind a great wonder, an
 immense love, an unbounded delight. So he writes in the poem
 "The Sleeping Beauty", "How many a changing moon hath lit/
 The unchanging roses of her face!/Her mirror ever broods

on it/In silver stillness of the days."

He has drawn this picture as if "this beauty" is a creature of the other world. De La Mare's yearning for this perfect beauty makes him aware also about its transcendence. This fear leads him to seek the help of the elves, the dwellers of the unknown world

. . . Little elves,
 Call to her magically sweet,
 Lest of her very tenderness
 She do forsake this rough brown earth
 And return to us no more.

[Cecil]

In Songs of Childhood he portrays a happy and carefree child. The back-drop of its existence is green meadows; elves and fairies are its sole companions, its days are full of joy and laughter. This delightful child of Walter De La Mare recalls to one's mind the Blakean "child" of Songs of Innocence.

All these portraits characterise De La Mare as a great lover of Life. This "pure being" surrounded by mystery arouses in his mind a feeling of awe and wonder. He again and again bows down to this unfathomable mystery and expresses his own feelings through "child-poetry". It seems that to him a child is nothing but the symbol of the "Infinite Soul" "a transcendent spirit" imposed upon time and space. But at the same time he cannot resist himself from envying it.

as he states: "Only, with envy, bid thee watch this face /That says so much, so flawlessly, /And in how small a space!" ["A Child Asleep"]

He is envious because such a tiny, static figure keeps within it a dynamic force of which an adult man has no share.

The child is like a half-folded April bud on "winter-haunted trees", full of promise and full of vitality.

The portrait of a child in a passive state is now replaced by the portrayal of an active child, for De La Mare's "child" is now no more "a sleepy child". The outer world is calling him "O come you out, O come you out" and the child in the poem "The Child In The story Awakes" ardently requests his nurse to open the casement for, "Wildly the garden peals with singing /And hooting through the dewy pines /The goblins of the dark are winging" -- as if the outside world has arranged a great festival of delight and he is all eager to join this festivity.

De La Mare's "child" has now entered a world that is full of wonder; life seems to him like a riddle, a mystery. Like all great mystics he is absorbed in his own world and at the same time he is also the creator of his imaginary world, his own universe. "In his dark eye lay a wild universe, / Wild forests, peaks, and crests; / Angels and fairies, giants, wolves and he / Were that world's only guests. ["The Universe"] .

The real ordinary outside world does not appeal to him; his own imaginary world is the real world to him. His values are completely different from that of the adult world. So, ". . . only God alone/Could, armed with all His power and wisdom, make/Earths richer than his own." ["The Universe"].

Though children want and even condescend to court our love and our praise, they take little interest in the things we prize; so De La Mare laments: "O man! - thy dreams, thy passions, hopes, desires!-/He in his pity keep/A homely bed where love may lull a child's/Fond Universe asleep!" ["The Universe"]

Life is no doubt the first and foremost consideration of De La Mare, but that does not make De La Mare forgetful of the presence of death in one's life. The idea of the proximity of life and death, nonetheless, is always at work in his mind and many of his poems reflect this idea. Death is always with one; even the new-born child carries within itself the burgeoning seed of its death. De La Mare in the poem "The Night-Swans" narrates skilfully the death of a beautiful child Evangeline. The poem opens with an all pervading "silence" on the "enchanted lake" and "silence in the air serene". Sibilant 'S' recurring in "silence" and in "serene" creates an atmosphere of its own. The word "silence" recurs twice at the beginning of the first two lines that adds concreteness to the abstract "non-silence". This is how a sorrowful event is brought before us by the poet.

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

Little Evangeline sang the notes that her fairy godmother
 taught her and three swans came to her as if in response
 to her song. The little child and the three swans went across
 the lake to fairy land; now no one can find her on this earth.
 "Tis silence on the enchanted lake,/And silence in the air
 serene;/Voices shall call in vain again/On earth the child
 Evangeline." ["The Night-Swans"].

The event of a little child's death has been described
 as a journey from life here to fairy land. The poet gives
 an impressionistic picture of this sorrowful and deeply
 significant event. The little girl sang "across the waters
 clear/And dark with trees and stars between." The haze gives
 us the suggestion of the indeterminate fairy-land lurking
 behind the show of things. Nature or the non-self responds
 to her; and the three swans imply the three forces of birth,
 maintenance and annihilation (cf. Three women as per Freud).

One profound truth is conveyed through this poem that
 the human being is insignificant against this vast Universe.
 Quiet earth enveloped in darkness is associated with great
 mystery. It is very difficult for a "solitary-soul", a human
 being to cast away the spell of this mystery. Like Evangeline

it too has to leave for an unknown destination. The quest for something indefinite, something unknown is the essence of human life.

De' La Mare's children in "The Children of Stare" display a different kind of picture. They are full of action, the great challengers of time. They are the symbol of youthfulness and of vital life. The poem is a marvellous transcription of a rural world where children are playful surrounded by a harsh world devoid of love and vitality.

The poem describes the approach of a winter evening on the house of Stare. Both nature and animals are preparing themselves to meet this winter which has come in early. "Birds in reverberating flocks/Haunt its ancestral box". The light fails and darkness looms large. It is curious to see children playing in this cold winter. Their strength is no more than that of petal against Time.

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.

[The Children of Stare]

But "their laughter rings like timberels" under the ominous evening sky and their fates are also foredoomed to death

under the ravages of Time. The horror of Time have been brought home by "Thick mystery, wild peril/Law like an iron rod". Yet they are quite indifferent and their defiance is against Time, against winter. Their armour is their "tiny fire", their life-spirit which "the awful breath of God" has blown to the core of their ardour. They symbolize Eros set against the all powerful Thanatos. They are indomitable. They are the image of "love, beauty and happiness -- the sacred trinity of life" ² The children of Stare are not aware of death which is intricately inter-woven with life. Life is full of terror but the children hear only its fine music.

De La Mare's "Child" can see the realities of existence among which death is also included though without full comprehension. In "Peeping Tom" De La Mare has illustrated the reaction of a child in the presence of death, a mysterious phenomenon of life. The beauty of the poem lies in that by mere suggestion of a few significant words the poet visualises the idea of death and the situation that follows it. The speaker is Tom himself; "I was there - by the curtains/When some men brought a box:/And one at the house of/Miss Emily knocks:"

"Box" is here obviously coffin, but poor Tom fails to understand it. So he wonders at the presence of strange-men who have brought a narrow box to Miss Emily's house.

What purpose this box will serve to Miss Emily he does not know and is also beyond his powers of comprehension. Neither he knows "...why all her blinds/Have been hanging so low/These dumb foggy days". He only knows that only last week he saw her "potting out for the winter ... balcony flowers" and this Sunday,

She mused there a space,
Gazing into the street, with
The vacantest face:

Then turned her long nose
And looked up at the skies --
One you would not have thought
Weather-wise!

[Peeping Tom]

The departure of the men from Miss Emily's house returns him to the present. He notices them as they climb "in their square varnished carriage" and drive away, out of his sight. "Then the road became quiet:/Her house still and staid--/Like a Stage -- while you wait/For the Harlequinade..."

The curiosity of the child is not yet appeased; he still looks on and awaits with expectation. When the horse with the carriage carrying the men "One ferrety-fair --/With gentleman's hat, and/Whiskers and hair" leaves the place, stillness again clamps on the road. Emily's house also becomes "stiff and staid" as it was when she was alive but now displays

an air of a stage where the next "Harlequinade" is going to be staged. The role of the child is here merely the role of a detached observer but the poet with a subtle skill places the child on par with a god. Dorris Ross McCrosson says that "the child almost seems to be as a god looking upon the stage of the world waiting for the show to begin again."³ But the be-mused child returns to the present with a wonder, "But what can miss Emily/Want with a box/So long, narrow, shallow/And without any locks?"

Children in De La Mare's poems, observes Duffin, are "akin to fairies, to animals, to the spirit-world - to anything rather than to adult humans".⁴ Little Louisa in "The Keys of Morning" is not surprised when sitting by the bedroom window in the early morning. "She slanted her small bead-brown eyes/Across the empty street,/And saw Death softly watching her/In the sunshine pale and sweet." [The Keys of Morning]

It simply arouses her curiosity. She quietly goes down when he waves a little key in front of her, as if to say, "Come hither, child, to me!". One's heart stands still, but she peeps through the half-opened door and discovers the illusion." Where Death just now had sunning sat/Only a shadow lay." No doubt, she has a mental-picture of "Death", but she is not at all afraid of it. She wondered "...how strange it was/Two keys that he should bear/And that, when beckoning, he would wag/The littlest in the air."

In the poem "The Funeral" De La Mare shows the child's detached attitude to death as a concrete fact. The children -- Susan, Tom and persona -- totally ignore the occasion for their being "dressed up in black" to attend a burial ceremony. The ceremony has the least effect on their mind as one can understand from what the persona points to, that is the trees, flowers, birds and the wind in Susan's hair. These are the objects of their attraction and later on their interest is drawn towards the tea that is served in their nursery. It seems that they have removed themselves from the scene of sorrow and pain. One also wonders how being oblivious of the solemn ceremony the child persona speaks about the thrushes' songs that fill the air outside the window of their nursery and of Tom who has fallen asleep. The persona's concern for Tom is revealed from the statement "He was tired, poor thing." The poem sharply illustrates that to a child a living person and thing is more important than a dead one.

Sometimes death as an unknown, mysterious phenomenon both attracts and repels the child. "Dry August Burned" illustrates this type of mental dilemma of a little girl. In it a small girl on seeing a newly-shot hare lying limp on the kitchen table is overtaken by grief and cries her heart out. Soon her weeping is interrupted by the thudding sound of the artillery team on their way to manoeuvres in a field

nearby, and she runs out-of-door to watch them pass. "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." ["Dry August Burned"]. and into the kitchen where she finds her mother. And then the child, "her tear-stained cheek now flushed with red" looks for the rabbit and asks her mother "Please, may I go and see it skinned?" Suddenly she discovers a great fascination for death.

In the poem "Keep Innocency" De La Mare shows a child's love for war-fare, which seems to his elders terrible and cruel. A child, "sees the sweet pomp sweep hurtling by;/But he sees not death's blood and tears,/Sees not the plunging of the spears."

De La Mare's child is more natural with the flora and the fauna of its surroundings. They are the symbols of power, freedom, strangeness and beauty. Their language is silence, colour, grace, sweet or raucous noise. But to a child it is not at all a problem to understand them nor their language. They are more familiar, more near to a child than an adult world. A child and Nature are in continuum. The material world around him is taken for granted by average man but to a child it is a series of the most marvellous phenomena. Each and every object of this world astounds it and it feels immense love and pity for every object whether it is animate

or inanimate one.

The poem "Nicholas Nye" presents a child with great sympathy for an old, lean, lame donkey. This donkey is also like this child a "lone" soul. So, this "Bony and ownerless, widowed and worn,/Knobble-kneed, lonely and grey" donkey from his bush in the corner seems to be smiling at the child. And there exists between them "Something much better than words". These two solitary souls can perfectly understand each other and the language of communication between them is "silence".

In the poem "Reserved" the expression of this feeling of compassion and the child's love for fauna is rather a poignant one. The cruel and mindless behaviour of the adult person shocks him sharply. He cannot take the matter easily when he finds out that the poor old-horse of the baker was killed as it was a "useless bag of bones". A nice new motor van will now replace the old horse. He cannot even support his nanny's act of shooing away the squirrel with her gloves. To her lively squirrel is merely a cause of distraction to her reading. Her comment "they ought to beshot" has also grieved him deeply. He reports his teacher's words to his mother, " 'Goldfinches, Mother, owls and mice,/Tom-tis and bunnies and jays - / Everything in my picture-books/Will soon be gone, she says.' " ["Reserved"].

But to his mother also, these creatures: "Though exquisitely made,/Steal, or are dirty and dangerous,/Or else they are bad for Trade". ["Reserved"]. But to this child, every creature in this world has its own place. His values are completely different from that of an adult represented by his hard-headed teacher. He expresses his wonders to his mother in the aforesaid poem,

'...when poor Noah
Was alone in the rain and dark,
He can ever have thought what wicked things
Were round him in the Ark....
And are all children - like the rest -
Like me, as Nannie says, a pest?'

He is terrified by the idea of a place devoid of all these creatures, made of stones, dark and cold. He is more akin to these creatures than to any adult human being, so the child of this poem "Reserved" expresses his deep concern for all these creatures.

The role of a mother and her influence on a child's world is immense and a child too has great concern for its mother. The little boy of the poem "Why" tries to find out the cause that makes his mother "weep and sigh", It is the time for rest,

The evening light has ceased to shine,
The wind has fallen asleep;

...

...

The world is silent; it is night;
 The stars are in the sky;
 No knock would come as late as this,
 No footsteps go by;

[Why]

So, he is surprised to find his mother still sleepless in such a quiet, restful hour.

In "Full Circle" De La Mare is offering an amusing picture of a child who is all concern for his mother. Here he is depicting a child contrary to the child of "The Universe" who is not at all indifferent to the mother's love and care and moreover eager to return this love. This child imagines himself in his mother's place and his mother a little child like him:

When thou art as little as I am, Mother,
 And I as old as thou,
 I'll feed thee on wild-bee honeycomb,
 And milk from my cow.
 I'll make thee a swan's-down bed, Mother;
 Watch over thee then will I.
 And if in a far-away dream you start
 I'll sing thee lullaby.
 It's many - Oh, ages and ages, Mother,
 We've shared, we two. Soon, now:
 Thou shalt be happy, grown again young,
 And I as old as thou.

[Full Circle]

One interesting thing that is noticeable in both these pictures is the child's possessive attitude towards his mother.

In a small world of mother and child there is no place for a third person. In the poem "Why" the child says, "I want us now to be alone,/Just you and I." So, "why do you sigh, Mother, Why do you sigh?" His saying implies that his very presence should be a comfort and consolation to his miserable mother.

Again in "Full circle" the child says: "It's many - oh, ages and ages, mother,/We've shared, we two." This is not the utterance of a particular child to a particular mother. From time immemorial, in this manner, a child has been telling his mother "in our world, we are only two."

The relationship of a child with nature adds a new dimension to its life and its world. But in the case of an adult man the picture is totally different. Against the vast back-drop of inanimate nature man is nothing but "a mere item in its multitudinousness" ⁵ He moves there like a pigmy god and "has differentiated himself so thoroughly that nature and he are bitter enemies" ⁶ The apparent hostility of nature is revealed by its total indifference to any human affair. But whether an antagonism or unconcern, the indisputable fact is that there is a gulf between man and nature; and this gulf is so great that it produces in an "imaginative mind an assured sense of magic in all the doings of nature". ⁷ This assured sense at times also images Nature as the great

fairy. With a child this relationship takes on a new colour, as to a child every object of nature has its own independent existence and everything is bound together by a pervasive harmony: a child is one with nature.

A child in "Sleepy Head" can hear the unheard music of gnomies, the dweller of the other world. Promptly he leaves the comfort of his bed to respond to their call and to join in their dance and song, but with the light of the morning the gnomies vanish with their unearthly song and in its place there comes a red robin with its song of buttercup and dew. He sees fairies dancing in a ring and hears a linnet singing near. The fairies fade away but the linnet's song goes on. The real world and the world of spirit exist side by side and nothing can obstruct their friendly co-existence for, a child can move with ease from one to the other.

In the poem "The Phantom", little Ann, a frightened, solitary child in an old deserted house finds her courage back and her solace of mind restored at the sight of a phantom child. She does not feel lonely, now she has as her companion a beautiful spirit, a lonely child like her who pines for love that is not found on the earth in her life-time. The loving and sympathetic soul of a child sees no harm in establishing a relationship between herself and the ethereal child.

A child experiences no fear in the midst of Nature.

In the little green orchard, at twilight, the little girl has heard voices calling her softly. She is rather charmed than afraid by the call of the mysterious voice. She says,

...When the moon's been bright,
Shedding her lonesome light,
And moths like ghosties come,
And the horned snail leaves home:
I've sat there, whispering and listening there,
In the little green orchard;

The inexplicable mystery instead of filling her with a sense of awe enchants her mind as she savours the whole scene with mixed feelings.

In the poem "When She was in her Garden" the readers are told that little Elizabeth heard a distant but shrill and sweet music. The song spoke of happiness only to be found in Greenwood where elves and fairies danced and sang. In the poem the unseen voices were calling the little girl to join them; she was not sure whether it was part of a dream or not. The whistle of the bird and the droning of the bees were only breaking the silence of the place. To pass from this actual world to the world of spirit was not at all difficult for her. The call of fairies made her heart stand-still, she was under their spell. But the call of her mother for dinner brought her back to reality. De La Mare's child is quite at ease in both these worlds and which one of these

two worlds is more real to a child is a point of debate.

The charm of a mysterious call is not always beneficial for a child. It does great harm to a child in the poem "The Pedlar". Like Laura of Rossetti's "Goblin Market" little Lettice also succumbs to the temptation of a "fairy-pedlar". She buys the forbidden fruits from the pedlar in exchange for one lock of her hair and is doomed for ever.

But in the poem "The Ogre" two children of Trebarwith Sands are saved from the ogre as they are asleep in a state of self-surrender and completely unaware of the danger. The name of Jesu uttered in the mother's lullaby from the kitchen saves them from evil, embodied in the form of an ogre.

The poem "Hark" presents a portrait of a fearful child. Here a little child Charles is in the grip of an inexplicable fear, fear of darkness associated with night. The sound of the wind in the keyhole or the nibbling sound of the mouse has terrified him beyond all measures. He "sits up in bed, with tousled head, / White as chalk, scarce able to talk." No words can console him now; he desperately looks for company but finds nothing only darkness around him.

De La Mare's "Child" is also at times a keen observer of nature. Even a tiny white snow-flake has some significance for him. A newly-fallen snow-flake in the poem "The Snowflake"

cries out: "Before I melt,/Come, look at me." It then goes on to boast how "Of a green forest/In one night/I make a wilderness/Of white:"The might of the snowflake is established, but reality has its power also. The snowflake admits of this reality by stating "Breathe, and I vanish/Instantly." The fate of the snowflake is known to a child but it still loves the snowflake.

Change even in the minutest detail in nature around him does not escape a child's eye. He feels an unbounded joy when all on a sudden he discovers the seed he sowed a few weeks before and left 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.

[Seeds]

He notices in detail how a small sprout, seemingly with no power to push even the tiniest stone has heaved away a pebble of the size of a cherry-stone to see sunlight.

Life seems to be a mechanical process and without charm to a child if it is not in the midst of nature. In the poem "The Bookworm" a child expresses his intense desire to be always in close touch with nature. His mind only longs for beautiful nature with its green meadows, with its cool shady-woods where violets grow. He wants to see the stride of a plough-man, to hear the hoarse sound of sea-water breaking its waves against the shore, to strain his eyes for one glimpse of a sea-mew wheeling back to her rock-perched mate. That is his right place, his world. He does not like to be shut up in the dry world of books. Even the "breathing cows" drowsing at the gate draws his attention. He wants to take part in this lively flow of life. It seems that a kind of unity, a subtle but a strong bondage is there among all beings of nature to set them in a great harmony. Rilke in his famous Duino Elegy points to this all pervasive harmony. His experience in the castle Duino is behind this idea. Sometimes in 1912 he had the chance to rest himself in the garden of that castle. Suddenly a strange sensation overpowered him; "everything he saw had its own significant and independent existence: every object of Nature was bound together by an all pervasive harmony".⁸ The boy in "The Bookworm" also feels a sense of great harmony with nature and if there is a right place for him, it exists in the midst of nature.

The impact of Nature becomes so intense on a child

that sometimes he even forgets his own existence. It seems that the essence of his being is mingled with Nature. Velazquez's genius accurately caught this rare moment of a child in one of his paintings. This inspired De La Mare to delineate a boy in his poem "Portrait of a Boy". This boy like, Meursalt, the hero of Camus novel The Stranger is an indifferent observer of this world. But unlike the cold, indifferent and hostile aspect of nature which Meursalt meets here nature exudes love and friendship to this boy. Nature knows that the child's presence here on this earth is like the presence of "the copious April clouds" in the evening. The portrait presents a boy who is in everything but at the same time he is in nothing. This is regarded as the highest-state of mind according to Vedantic philosophy. "Hath not life/So strangely shod his feet" he can discard this world at any moment and start for his heavenly abode, his original place.

The plight of a child deprived of nature's blessings is depicted in the poem "The Slum Child". De La Mare here portrays a child in the setting of a materialistic world who is not with nature. No flower grows where he lives, no leafy tree spreads a canopy over his youthful head, he has no where to go. "In leafless Summer's stench and noise", he sits and plays with other lean-faced boys and girls like

him with "sticks and stones". The "Homeless" child in the "night-hung town" then goes in search of some food and rests or empty-bellied lies down somewhere and weeps himself to sleep. Deprived of all cares and love and not blessed with the proximity of nature, this wretched child, the poet observes, still retains in its "spectral bones" a "self" - "A self beyond surmise". This is the hidden power of a child and childhood.

This undefinable power is a great mystery. It is also a mystery how Pollie, a little simpleton, in the poem "Pollie", can express love, wonder and grace in a perfect way whereas every lesson allotted to her as soon as learned is clean forgot: "L-o-v ...? I prompt. And she/Smiles, but I catch no 'E'".

Two worlds, the world of Nature and the world of its own creation, fascinates a child. In the poem "The Bookworm" De La Mare presents Jack, an indignant child who says "I'm tired - oh, tired of books" for "ink and print" cannot bring back "something" that is lost forever. His desire is only for the green fields. But in the poem "Books" Jack is closely shut up in his world of books. Nature's call falls deaf on his ears as he is deeply absorbed now in his multitudinous readings. The music and meaning of words are now his only love and interest and he appears to be oblivious of his natural surroundings.

Moreover, in the poem "The Rainbow" De La Mare has given a synthesised picture of these two portraits. Here a boy is portrayed as he is in serene aloofness, absorbed in his reading, but not quite indifferent to nature. He has spotted out a place for his reading "in shelter of a willow" by a clear stream. Suddenly there descends from April clouds, "crystal drops of rain" and in an instant, transcending all hues there spans a rainbow in the east. The boy's attention is drawn to this and he raises his head "to scan the radiant scene" and smiles as if in a dream.

Nature has decked this earth with marvellous objects and beauties. He is the most unfortunate one who cannot see all these marvellous things. This tragedy of life also is depicted by De La Mare with great sympathy in the poem "The Blind Boy". The blind boy is unaware of all lovely and beautiful things that light reveals. All these sights are meaningless to this blind boy as they cannot bring any delight for him. But he is not deprived of everything because as a source of bringing delight to a child the power of sound is no less supreme than the power of light. "An exquisite whisper of sound" brings a great delight to this blind boy. His face is lit up with a smile. It seems that delight is a great legacy of God to a child; nothing can stand in the way of a child to get this delight - the great bliss of God.

De La Mare's poems like a rich art gallery offer numerous miniature portraits of a child. Each of them speaks not only of an individual child but greater than that - the portrait of a child that is ageless and universal. Each detail in the portrait is very subtle and delicate and tells the story of all human life. Careful observation opens to a perceptive mind a unique image of an aloof and serene child. Nowhere is De La Mare's "child" a frivolous, easy-going, mindless creature.

Basic values of life like simplicity, love, joy, contentment, belief and faith prevail over everything in this world and Walter De La Mare finds their fullest expression in a child. A child in his vision occupies a special place and hence through the portrayal of a child in his poems De La Mare tries to embody those abstract ideas into concrete forms. His child is a detached, thoughtful, solitary soul. In his eyes a child is nothing but the replica of human soul shut up in its own world. De La Mare's "child" is hardly seen in any company than that of Nature.

Mankind owes its very existence to Nature. Both philosophically and scientifically it is said that the human body is made up of five elements: air, water, fire, earth and sky, and each element exerts a great influence on the human body and mind. As a child's mind is not clouded with the

experiences of life, the action of each element raises vibration easily in the rhythm of its life; so it is happy as a bird, gay as sunlight. Nature with all its mystery and supernatural elements is not something alien to a child. From birth to death man's life is completely attuned to nature. Distance from nature brings complication and calamities in human life. As a child is close to nature, it enjoys heavenly bliss and finds delight everywhere.

De La Mare's "child" is full of delight but this delight is always tinged with some inexplicable melancholy. The war-torn world of the present century casts its shadow on the gay world of a child. De La Mare's "child" is very delicate and frail. But this frailty can be compared with the frailty of a newly-sprouted seed. A child possesses that much energy which can bring joy and vitality for the sustenance of its life. Perpetuation and progress of a civilisation depends on a tiny, frail, happy child; for a child is the very root of human existence. Hence a child and its world is the focal point of De La Mare's poetry.

END NOTES:

1. D.L. Kick Patrick, Editor, Twentieth Century Children Writers Macmillan 1978, p.366.
2. H.C. Duffin, Walter De La Mare : A Study of His Poetry, Sidgwick and Jackson Ltd., London, 1949, p.199 .

3. Dorris Ross McCrosson, William College, Walter De La Mare, Twayne Publisher Inc., New York, 1966, p.70.
4. H.C. Duffin, Walter De La Mare : A Study of His Poetry, Books For Libraries Press, Freeport New York, p.84.
5. Ibid, p.80.
6. Ibid., p.80.
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8. Stuart Holroyd, "The Poet, the Saint and the Modern World", The Poetry Review, Vol.46, 1955, The Poetry Society, London, p.150.

CHAPTER - THREE

THE STUDY OF A CHILD'S WORLD AND THE
POET'S VISION OF THIS WORLD

Children - alone - are grave,
Even in play with some poor grown-up's toy;
Solemn at heart, and wise:
Whence else their secret joy?
And the deep sleep they crave?

[Love]

The poet of Songs of Childhood, Peacock Pie discovers that the source of "their secret joy" lies in their own world, the world which is their own creation. De La Mare's deep interest in a child and its world inspires him to observe it minutely and record it meticulously in his poetry. His artistic skill portrays the world of a child as interesting but in no way extraordinary for it is the imagination of a child that turns it into something magical and extraordinary. The portrayal of a world that is etched out in his beautiful poems is rich in colour and form, but it owes its very existence to the imagination of a child. The poet reveals this truth in his poem "The Universe". "In his dark eyes lay a wild universe,-/Wild forest, peaks and crests;/Angels and fairies, giants, wolves and he/Were that world's only guests."

In this "Fond Universe" a child is absorbed in his own thought. The poet "heard a little child beneath the stars/

Talk as he ran along/To some sweet riddle in his mind that seemed/A-tiptoe into song." ["The Universe"]. A child lives in a world of make-believe. The world of the grown-up is to a child an inexhaustible astonishment and despair. So the poet writes in the same poem, "O Man! - thy dreams, thy passions, hopes, desires!- /He in his pity keep."

For a child everything is full of absorbing interest; he finds wonder even in the common place. The material world is granted for the adult but a child sees in it a series of marvellous phenomena. The rich imagination of a child can transmute it in all fanciful forms. An upturned table can be transformed in its imagination into a ship or the hearth-rug into a magic carpet.

A child's mind can be compared to Aladdin's lamp. At a moment's notice it can turn a common-day world into a land of wonder. By imaginative power a child can create for its ownself a world which is perfect as well as beautiful as a soap bubble. It is a world where the entry of any geographer and zoologist is totally forbidden. Laws of the work-a-day world of an adult here simply do not obtain and work.

Fantasy and wonder are two important components of the world that is created by a child. To a child's mind the sole reality is an insubstantial dream land - a reality that is beyond our understanding. That world sometimes liberate

one's mind and transports it into a fairy land of music and flowers and sometimes into a supernatural world or makes one meet with the mermaid, the unicorn and fiery dragon-- the dwellers in the child's world. A child's imagination peoples the vague unknown with witches on broom-sticks and fairies and beasts that are a king's children in disguise. A sense of awe and wonder awakens in a child's mind a search for the marvellous in common-place and things.

De La Mare's Songs of Childhood and Peacock Pie lead one to that inventive world of a child where any moment any impossible thing may happen and one willingly suspends all sense of disbelief. Each object in this world appear exquisitely false and yet exquisitely true. "Arabia" illustrates this indefiniteness.

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.

"Moon", "Star", "Noon-day skies" - all are exquisitely real and visible. But these words "ghost". "phantom", "pale" rob

them of their reality and present a world and its princes about which nothing definite can be said.

The volume Songs of Childhood (1902) brings to the literary scene a unique world of a child, full of romantic beauty, the innocent, untroubled world of a child. "Songs" are carefree, happy songs of childhood recalling to one's mind Songs of Innocence of Blake. These are songs of green meadows, of fairies, of birds and 'butter-cups and reflect childish joy in beauty and laughter. Each poem with its naivety and freshness offers a picture of life that is vibrating with enormous delight and energy. "The Buckle" is one such poem where the poet delineates the quickness and eagerness of a little girl and her boundless joy over some trifle things.

I had a silver buckle,
I sewed it on my shoe,
And 'neath a sprig of mistletoe
I danced the evening through!

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

I had a yellow riband,
I tied it in my hair,
That, walking in the garden
The birds might see it there.

I had a secret laughter,
I laughed it near the wall:
Only the ivy and the wind
May tell of it at all.

A silver buckle on its own is an insignificant object but to a little girl a priceless possession. It brings to her such happiness that she dances "evening through". In the list of her valuable possession she includes "a bunch of cowslips" and also "a yellow riband". These objects bring to her mind at a time both the feeling of enormous joy and dark fear. She fears the loss of the elves' attention to her as this bunch of cowslips will rob all their attention to it and that will be unbearable to her; and hence she keeps it hidden in "a grot". On the otherhand she feels proud of her "yellow riband" and decides to show to birds by tying it on her hair. De La Mare like a master painter with a few strokes of the brush shows that within these little fear, hopes and pride thrives a child's world. Also the poet subtly shows that a child's mind consists of over-brimming joy which is next to divinity. The adult people are deprived of this heavenly joy.

But in the last stanza of the poem with a little twist of some innocent words De La Mare makes his readers land into a world that is not a particular, individual world of a particular child but into a universal world of all children. Forrest Reid comments that "suddenly the garden is flooded with a light from the shore of an eternal childhood."¹ "I had a secret laughter, / I laughed it near the wall:" Inexplicably

these words produce a slight shock, surprise in the readers' mind and also recognition in the memory of their own childhood. The depth of meaning opens a door for the grown up readers to a world in which truth and beauty are seen as attributes and aspects of one eternal Reality.

The volume Songs of Childhood presents a world of a child full of magic and music - not magic alone but the magic evoked by the music, by rhythmic language. It is a carefree world where a child can even think of himself as a Lord of Tartary. The poem "Tartary" tells us about a child who feels:

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.

This kind of description is possible for a poet who has taken possession of the personality of a delightful child. At the same time the poet De La Mare "can remain himself the artist, the thinker of primitive fantasy, the epicure in pleasing imaginary and wistful inconsequences".² His poems for children and about children testify to these traits in De La Mare's poetic nature.

The uncharted globe of a child's mind, uncorrupted by work-a-day experience can see those things and find joy in those matters which seems to an adult either meaningless or baffling. A child only knows and understands the magic of nature. To a child nature itself seems a great fairy. In the poem "The Fairies Dancing" a small child hears the fairies sing as they dance, while the stars quiver as if with sound till with the first flush of dawn they die away.

To a child there is no impassable abyss between fairy land and the common day world. The child in the poem "Sleepy Head" hears the uncanny music of gnomies. They are calling him to join in their merriment when the child tip-toes to the window and stoops in the dim moon to put on his shoes, "The sweet sweet singing died sadly away,/And the light of the morning peeped through:/Then instead of the gnomies there came a red robin/To sing of the buttercups and dew." ["Sleepy Head"].

Gnomies, red robin, buttercups and dew - dream and reality - all are interwoven in a child's world. A child feels a great affection for and is in harmony with all these animate and inanimate objects of nature. This relationship aligns a child with nature and enables a child to find beauty and joy in all matters of the world; even common things such as stones, birds, trees stir its mind with great joy and

wonder. All these are nothing but object of excitement for a child. In a child's world every minute introduces new things, it never knows what will take place next. In the poem "I saw Three Witches" a child narrates how it,

... saw three witches
 Asleep in a valley,
 Their heads in a row, like stone in a flood,
 Till the moon, creeping upward,
 Looked white through the valley,
 And turned them to bushes in bright scarlet bud.

From the moment it awakes in the morning, it goes on exploring untiringly till tired and sleepy it turn its back on the marvel land. "When the adventures are over, the ogre is gone whinnying down the dale, the wolf is routed, the witches are once more only 'three crows upon a bough'." ³ At the end of the fun-packed day, the exhausted little explorer seeks its shelter in the comforting assurance of sleep. Nature is there to take the child into a far-away dreamland. The poem "Lullaby" presents that restful picture of a child's world.

Sleep, sleep thou lovely one!
 Time comes to keep night-watch with thee,
 Nodding with roses, and the sea
 Saith 'Peace! Peace!' amid his foam.
 'O be still!'
 The wind cries up the whispering hill -
 Sleep, sleep, thou lovely one!

The world of a child is our common day world, but the way it is presented lends it the unknown, strange and uncommon shade. The enquiring and unprejudiced mind of a child discovers it as if for the first time, no matter whether hundreds of other persons have discovered it earlier. The intensity of a child's experience in an instant moves that faculty of a child which enables it to see something uncommon in common objects. So an unending number of questions come crowding in a child's world.

The most common and pleasurable experience in life is eating and drinking. But one seldom stops to think how our body is nourished. But this calls forth great wonder in a child who remarks astoundingly in "Miss T": "It is very odd thing-/As odd as can be-/That whatever Miss T. eats/Turns into Miss T". Sometimes a child expresses a kind of wonder and curiosity which may be called metaphysical, as for example in "Mrs Earth", "Mrs Earth and Mr Sun/Can tan my skin, and tire my toes,/But all that I'm thinking of, ever shall think,/Why, neither knows."

This never-ending "why" always accompanies a child. The answer to this "why" may not always be found and a child also never despairs over the absence of an answer. The presence of this unending, untiring series of questions in a child's mind is important and the poem "Reserved" exemplifies

this. The adult's materialistic view of life makes a little boy exasperated, and so he tells his mother,

'I was thinking, Mother, of that poor old horse
 They killed the other day;
 Nannie says it was only a bag of bones,
 But I hated it taken away.'
 'Of course, sweet; but now the baker's man
 Will soon have a nice new motor van.'

He is at a loss to understand the adult's attitude to life and the prospect of getting a nice motor van on the part of the baker's man seems to his mind the least inspiring idea. His anguished mind can in no way accept the idea that the creatures like goldfinches, owls, mice, Tom-tits, bunnies and jay though exquisitely made are dirty and dangerous and are bad for trade. As the materialism of the adult world is beyond his understanding, innocently he only wants to know from his mother,

... if when poor Noah
 Was alone in the rain and dark,
 He can ever have thought what wicked things
 Were round him in the Ark, ...
 And are all children - like the rest -
 Like me, as Nannie says, a pest?,

This innocent query of a little boy is not so simple as it may appear, it poses a challenge to the adult's materialism.

In a child's world poor old horse, bunnies, tom-tits, goldfinches, jay, mice have their own significance and value. To a child they are more useful than a motor-van and trade, and a De La Mareian child finds a ship more interesting for his trip to an unknown land than a journey by motor-van. In the poem "The Silver Penny" a little boy expresses this wish to a sailor. He wants to take a trip in a ship with his little sister, so he says, "Sailor-man, I'll give to you/My bright silver penny,/If out to sea you'll sail me/And my dear sister Jenny." A born romantic, the De La Mareian child, like all adventurers of the Middle Ages wants to take a journey to an unknown, unexplored wonderland and is completely unaware of the danger of the trip.

De La Mare is well aware of the feeling and thoughts of children, he does not find them confined to their groping senses. De La Mare suggests that out of noises and the fever of existence again and again they sink into waking vision. In such a waking vision, Little Louisa of "The Keys of Morning" sees from her bed room window "sallow faced Death" watching her softly and wagging a small golden key in the air. She quietly goes there:

...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.

A twofold explanation can be given to the whole situation. Death always allures life and is in itself a great inexplicable mystery. Little Louisa, who here represents life feels an irresistible attraction to this sallow-faced Death. But the presence of Louisa, the vital force of life has forced Death itself to escape leaving behind only the shadow of a tall chimney. Or the whole situation may be viewed as the hallucination of the little girl.

De La Mare portrays a child's world which occupies a region midway between the outer-world and the world-within. There is the world of sight, touch and listening - the external world of facts and time which can be measured and analysed. But besides this there is an inner world apprehended by some faculties other than the senses or the reason. De La Mare shows that a child is the dweller of both these worlds and this is why the world is "Elden-New" to a child; everything in it to a child retains its freshness and wonder. A comet flaming across the night-sky is no doubt marvellous to a child but equally marvellous are common things that come in its way.

Yet what is common as lovely may be:
 The petalled daisy, a honey bell,
 A pebble, a branch of moss, a gem
 Of dew, or fallen rain - if we
 A moment in their beauty dwell;
 Entranced, alone, see only them.

[The Spark]

To a child the largest object and the small - "Leviathan and honey bee are of equal worth" ⁴ and objects of absorbing interest. Not only are the hills beautiful but "The speck of stone/Which the way faring ant/Stirs - and hastes on!" ["The Scribe"] is no less beautiful and is an object of attraction to a child. This microscopic adjustment of vision lends colour to its world.

"The poet reveals a rare insight, a delicate intuition when dealing with the psychology of children" ⁵, says Prof. Olivero. With intense vividness De La Mare repossesses the emotions of childhood which is no doubt a sure sign of genius as once "Baudelaire declared that genius is nothing but childhood recovered at will". ⁶ The distinctive quality of his writing is that unlike Wordsworth he never regrets for the heavenly brightness of infancy gone for ever from the dim old garden of the weary soul. He rather feels the elation of this celestial brightness that ever glows in the heart of human being. As a matter of fact this feeling inspires him in portraying a child's fairy-land that glitters with fanciful birds and golden butterflies, but at the same time it is a world of gnomies and dwarfs, witches and ogre. In such a world cruelty, mystery, nonsense, fantasy and love - all exist together. If there is any truth that prevails in a child's world, then it is beauty. There is, therefore, in a child's world mystery, magic and wonder.

This so called natural and supernatural world are of equal importance and real to a child. The unfettered mind of a child, not clouded by experience can, therefore, hear the unearthly music of fairies dancing under the moon. In the poem "The Fairies Dancing" the child persona says:

I heard the fairies in a ring
Sing as they tripped a lilting round
Soft as the moon on wavering wing.
The starlight shook as if with sound,
As if with echoing and the stars
Pranked their bright eyes with trembling gleams;

A child is completely attuned to all these animate and inanimate objects of nature - to all earthly and unearthly beings; and in its eyes all cosmic objects are throbbing with life.

In De La Mare's poems for children the use of the word "Ghost" is given a new meaning. Far from being "unreal" it has become a part of reality in a child's world. "Ghost in De La Mare's term is more closely identified with the Anglo-Saxon word from which it is derived: gāst, spirit, soul, breath".⁷ In some circumstances a ghost or a phantom proves to be a sweet companion to a child. The poem "The Phantom" illustrates this.

The poem describes a little girl who is terrified not by the presence of a phantom child but by the unfathomable

silence of the surroundings. The presence of the phantom child, rather, has helped to restore her courage and her sense of security. She meets the lonely phantom child in a large unused dark room of her granny's house. Its way of approach steals much of its unearthliness. The phantom child comes softly through the corridor singing an old forgotten song. Its unreal existence gets concrete shape in the following lines of the poem:

Her eyes were of the azure fire
 That hovers in wintry flame;
 Her raiment wild and yellow as furze
 That spouteth out the same;

 And in her hand she bore no flower,
 But on her head a wreath
 Of faded flowers that did yet
 Smell sweetly after death....

The description is so vivid and realistic and only when we come to the word "death" that we realize that the poet is talking about an unreal, non-living being - a phantom child. But she is not like other malignant grim ghosts - the unquiet ghosts of dead and restless men - that haunt woods and glen, houses and pools. She is only a child of the other world, still pining for love which she did never get in her life when she was alive. The appearance of the phantom child "in an old unfriendly house" with "an old forgotten song" on

her lips exemplifies De La Mare's belief in "the law of the Conservation of the Spirit - nothing created and nothing destroyed" ⁸ This belief always leads De La Mare to delineate such figures of the other-world whose supernatural elements seem neither queer nor awe-inspiring to any one. They are the dwellers of this vast universe as other living beings.

Far from being terrified the little girl of the poem finds great solace and comfort in the presence of the phantom child. Being contended and consoled she now starts reading. "Seated upon her tapestry-stool,/Her fairy-book laid by./She gazes into the fire, knowing/She hath sweet company." Her terror vanishes at the sight of the phantom child and also her lonely soul is happy on getting this company. This contentment, this unswerving belief in everything, this desire for a relationship with any object whether animate or inanimate, natural or super-natural is nothing but picture of divinity witnessing to the truism that to enter the kingdom of Heaven a man must "become a child".

As there is no sharp distinction between animate and inanimate objects in its world a child can easily project its ownself into another being of nature. It is not difficult for the child in the poem "The Little Bird" to imagine its own self as a small bird. "When all the guests were gone - and/All was still as still can be,/ In from the dark ivy

hopped a/Wee small bird. And that was Me."

De La Mare believes that much of one's life rests on illusion and that it is often impossible to separate the illusion from what is called "real". But it never poses a problem to a child for both worlds "the illusory" and "the real", are equally important and true to it. In the poem "The Hare" a child's sighting of an old witch-hare in the black furrow of a field at night as described for us: "She cocked a lissome ear,/And she eyed the moon so bright,/And she nibbled of the green." The child whispers, "'Whsst! witch hare',/Away like a ghostie o'er the field/She fled, and left the moonlight there".

Two remarkable points are here for us to ponder over: one is that the child is not at all afraid of the dark as the poet states that in its nocturnal adventure the child meets the hare; the next one is that the child never fails to find kinship with nature, even with a hare which seems to it witch-hare. Darkness passes away and along with it the image of "ghostie-hare"; what remains behind is only the bright moon-light. This inter-woven pattern of light and shade - illusory and real - is the true picture of a child's world.

This is a world where the lowliest creation like Shellover,

Sallie Worm, Creep have their distinctive existence and personality. To a child they are almost as real as human beings. Their nocturnal adventure and famous duologue of Shellover and Creep is one of the most interesting part in a child's world. In the poem "Old Shellover" one meets a world that is in the border land of two worlds: real and unreal. A dialogue proceeds between a snail and slug,

'Come!' said Old Shellover.
 'What?' says Creep.
 'The horny old Gardener's fast asleep;
 The fat cock Thrush
 To his nest has gone;
 And the dew shines bright
 In the rising Moon;
 Old Sallie Worm from her hole doth peep:
 Come!' said Old Shellover.
 'Ay!' said Creep.

The poem presents a picture of complete peace and harmony - a place of safety and security, so a child is also at ease in this nocturnal world.

But darkness is not always agreeable to a child as at times it feels fear in the dark. De La Mare's concern about that fear is expressed in the poem "Hark": "My little Charles is afraid of the dark". This comprehension and sympathy

for a child's fear is beautifully expressed in another memorable poem "Afraid". "Here lies, but seven years old, our little maid./Once of the darkness Oh, so sore afraid!/ Light of the World - remember that small fear;/ And when nor moon nor stars do shine, draw near!" To De La Mare the distinction between this world and the world of spirit is but a matter of degree, it does not make any difference whether the child is alive or not - what matters most is only the fear of the child.

Another poem "The Sleeper" illustrates the complex feeling of a child where fear is the nucleus of that feeling. A girl comes into the house one summer's day and feels that she must creep. "So silent was the clear cool house." She pushes open the door and finds her mother in deep sleep in that eerie stillness.

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.

A cloudlike fear grips her, for she thinks that the quiet house and the stillness of the atmosphere suggest that her stealthy entrance might have disturbed some shadows or startled

some ghosts. Also she fears lest she makes her mother cross by waking her by the sound of her foot steps. So she feels it safe to depart silently from that place of eerie silence.

In a child's world, a mould is an object of great fascination. De La Mare illustrates this in the poem "John Mouldy" in which John Mouldy, a mould not only attracts a little child but also induces a nameless fear in its mind. Twenty steps down in a cellar, an inquisitive child all on a sudden discovers a mould of an old man, but a real man to the child. He stands there stock still, rooted in the path staring in fascination at the rat running over John Mouldy while "In the dusk he sat a-smiling,/Smiling there alone" ["John Mouldy"]. An eerie feeling is conjured up by these words "a-smiling, smiling there alone". The poem continues "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." An enigmatic and weird feeling wells up in the mind of the child. Horrified though he is, a great fascination he feels for the mould. The next few lines of the poem depict a strange kind of beauty. "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."

Commenting on these lines Forrest Reid says that some-

thing gruesome is indicated by "the whispering water unless it be that 'slim brown rat of Norway'",⁹ but at the same time it is beautiful. "With the first two lines of the third stanza, the cold pure beauty of the sky at nightfall arches above us."¹⁰ Undoubtedly the beauty of the poem is deceptively quiet, deceptively undemonstrative; but the effect is cumulative.

With this child readers too, go back to their childhood days where lived a person who seemed to fascinate one and around whom one's infantile imagination wove all kinds of fantastic ideas. This sense of awe and wonder, this consciousness of the marvellous in the common place and things, De La Mare says again and again is the unique possession of childhood.

"John Mouldy" would lose all his awful fascination if he is seen in a sun-lit room and hence he is seated in a cellar "deep down twenty steps of stone". A subdued atmosphere is created in the poem by turning light into dusk and sounds into whisper; movement is here shown only as stealthy and silent; here rats "creep over the floor." The choice of words in the poem, the way of presenting the content all suggest to some eeriness, some weirdness in the poem. But the real intention of the poet lies elsewhere. He wants to

say that like love and sweet dreams this nightmare is also an inevitable part of a child's world as well as also a part of human existence.

Goodness of life, according to De La Mare "is rooted in wonder, awe and reverence for the beauty and strangeness of creation." ¹¹ A sense of wonder is not something one has to learn, for human beings are born with it. In course of time man loses it and with it also he loses all variegated colours of life. A child is the proud possessor of that precious sense of "wonder"; and this wonder awakens in a child's mind a feeling of compassion for all human beings, as well as non-human things in nature.

In some way or other De La Mare feels deeply that all living beings as well as non-living ones share some common feeling which is indescribable or inexplicable and which can only be felt or sensed. As a child is more akin to fairies, to animals, to the spirit world, it is not difficult for a child to understand the feelings of other objects of nature. It can easily impose the image of its own self on other objects of nature to make them appear alive. So in a child's world every animal is a speaking-animal, every object is a live-object. From a psychological point of view it is quite normal. However, a child with all its ideas and thoughts when it

turns to an adult world it finds itself lost and confused. It feels secured and restored only in its fanciful world.

The poem "I Can't Abear" illustrates a child's love for animals and this love leads the child to despise a butcher's shop. He expresses his feeling strongly in the following lines:

The ugliest shop of all is his,
The ugliest in the street;
Baker's are warm, cobbler's dark,
Chemists' burn watery lights;
But oh, the sawdust butcher's shop,
That ugliest of sights!

Why the butcher's shop is the ugliest one in the street to a child is understandable, for a child cannot bear the sight of such cruelty that this shop displays. But in the poem "Dry August Burned" the feeling of a child over a dead rabbit is expressed in an interesting manner. The child first wept out her heart when she saw the newly-shot hare lying limp on the kitchen table. Next moment her attention was distracted by the sound of soldiers on their way to manoeuvres in a field nearby. She ran out to watch them passing by. When this tumult and wonder had gone, the girl turned and ran elf-like into the house again and then into the kitchen. The next moment she told her mother that she wanted to see

the rabbit skinned. Attraction and repulsion for cruelty are both in work at the same time in a child's mind. The poem shows that "De La Mare's vision of childhood is not by any means sentimentalised or unrealistic: his appraisal was shrewd." ¹²

The poem "Keep Innocency" reveals another facet of a child's mind. Life is full of terrors no doubt, but a child only hears fine music in it being quite unaware of these terrors. The horror of war can not make its way into a child's mind.

...All the strident horror of
Horse and rider, in red defeat,
Is only music fine enough
To lull him into slumber sweet
In fields where ewe and lambkin bleat.

War, to an adult, is nothing but the grim picture of terror and bloodshed. But a child is quite indifferent to all such destruction that is rampant around him, so "with a mild and serious eye" it dreams of war as "sweet chivalry", "pomp" and "music".

A child partakes in all the activities of life but with great detachment. The present moment is only true and real to a child, even death cannot perturb a child. A child's

attitude towards death as a concrete fact is shown in the poem "The Funeral". There "Susan, Tom and Me" ignore the occasion for their being "dressed up in black" and are engaged solely with "trees, flowers, birds and the wind in Susan's hair." The child describes the funeral ceremony in the following lines,

They took us to the graves,
Susan and Tom and me,
Where the long grasses grow
And the funeral tree:
We stood and watched; and the wind
Came softly out of the sky
And blew in Susan's hair,
As I stood close by.

These three children were there physically, but nothing could touch their mind deeply. With their detached mind they went back to their nursery and had their tea. Only one thing was real to them, not death but life. The speaker child showed its concern over Tom who fell asleep in a chair, "He was so tired, poor thing". The child's attention next was drawn to the thrushes' song: life is more attractive, more charming than death.

A child's cold detachment and indifference to the outer world is stated clearly in another poem "Immanent".

The drone of war-plane neared, and dimmed away,
 The child, above high-tide mark, still toiled on.
 Salt water welled the trench that in his play
 He'd dug as moat for fort and garrison.

Lovely as Eros, and half-naked too,
 He heaped dried beach-drift, kindled it, and lo!
 A furious furnace roared, the sea winds blew ...
 Vengeance divine! And death to every foe!

Young god! - and not ev'n Nature eyed askance
 The fire-doomed Empire of a myriad Ants.

The child is absorbed in his own play being oblivious of everything. The droning sound of the war-plane could not break his attention, he did not even care for the trench which he had dug and did not mind when the "Empire of a myriad Ants" was doomed by the roaring fire he had kindled. He was not even conscious of what destruction his mindless action had brought to the "Ant's Empire". By reflecting on the indifference of a child in this poem, De La Mare wants to point "the indifference of mankind to life which is in itself merely the reflection of the supreme indifference of Nature." ¹³

In another poem De La Mare introduces his readers to a different world of a child where the child finds more pleasure in seeing than in being seen. In the poem "The Window" one hears a child state:

Behind the blinds I sit and watch
The people passing - passing by;
And not a single one can see
My tiny watching eye.

They cannot see my little room,
All yellow with the shaded sun,
They do not even know I'm here;
Nor'll guess when I am gone.

The child does not mind if its departure is not noticed by others. It only wants to find joy by looking at the stream of life. Life always attracts a child and so it finds the presence of life, in whatever form, everywhere. This consciousness of the invisible presence of life amidst flowers, trees and in every place makes this world charming and fascinating to a child.

However, this consciousness of an invisible presence in the midst of nature may awake a certain feeling of fear in the mind of a child. But sometimes this fear even fascinates a child. A little girl in the poem "The Little Green Orchard" feels that some one is always sitting in the little green orchard. Still, she likes to be there in the dusk and wants to taste that nameless eerie feelings. She has often heard voices calling softly in that orchard.

Not that I am afraid of being there,
 In the little green orchard;
 Why, when the moon's been bright,
 Shedding her lonesome light,
 And moths like ghosties come,
 And the horned snail leaves home:
 I've sat there, whispering and listening there,
 In the little green orchard.

[The Little Green Orchard]

To keep her company, nature is always present. She is afraid, but at the same time she isn't, as the moon is there "shedding her lonesome light". She enjoys the whole situation and concludes her narration by saying: "When you are most alone,/ All but the silence gone.../Someone is waiting and watching there,/In the little green orchard."

In De La Mare's view the universe is not only queerer than one supposes but queerer than one can suppose. Defying all apprehension of human beings there always remains an impression of unreality and unpredictability of the tangible world. Therefore, "inanimate nature itself, however well known to be the product of forces more or less understood, has a habit of silencing our condenscending exposition with a gesture of strageness." ¹⁴ Only imaginative people sense this and only to a child all its magic and beauty are revealed. A child can feel the presence of the dweller of the spiritual world and can make fancy its inseperable companion. To ignore

all these presences is to ignore that half of life which is crowded with inexplicable phenomena. As a child's imagination is "intuitive and inductive" it finds no difficulty in drawing on the "natural" and "supernatural" elements. The supernatural world is vitally present as the world of sense to a child. In the world of a child such supernatural beings as fairies, gnomies, witches and ogres can make their presence felt, for a child's imagination is not yet corrupted by the work-a-day experience of life.

Truly, fairies, witches and ogres are there chiefly to please children, and only the grimmest grown-up will refuse to accept the charming fairy who gives "Old Sam Shore" three wishes. According to Duffin, "Sam's Three Wishes: or Life's Little Whirligig" is one of the memorable poems of our time."¹⁵ The narrative has the charm of the quite familiar as well as the magic of something new. Though the story goes round the fantastic trifle, the fascination begins right from the beginning of the first two lines: "I'm thinking and thinking", said Old Sam Shore, / 'Twere somebody knocking I heard at the door".

An air of suspense is created and with Sam Shore readers also wait behind the closed door with bated breath. Sam opens the door and finds a good fairy who says, "I'm come for old

sake's sake to bring thee a present./Three wishes, three wishes are thine, Sam Shore." Accordingly astounded Sam Shore asks "for a fat goose" as his first wish; for his second one he desires to have his old mother back with him, for he tells the fairy: "If there was one thing she could n't refuse/'Twas a sweet thick slice from the breast of goose". With his utterance, "on her stick, pushing out of the night,/ Tap-tapping along, herself and no other',/Came who but the shape of his dear old Mother!" She enters the scene saying: "Why, Sam, ... the bird be turning,/For my nose tells I that the skin's a-burning!"

Sam's third and final wish is that both he and his mother can get back their youth; this is also granted by the fairy. Once again he is a boy and his mother young. The tale continues: again they get older, mother dies and he is once more old Sam. One night as he sits alone in his lonely cottage "gloomily glooming" at his meagre meal, he hears something at the door in "deep, dead, wonderful silence":

- Soft as a rattle counting her seeds
 In the midst of a tangle of withered-up weeds -
 Came a faint, faint knocking, a rustle like silk,
 And a breath at the keyhole as soft as milk -
 Still as the flit of a moth. And then...
 That infinitesimal knocking again.

It is again the good fairy. The poet's envoi begins: "But if Sam's story you'd read to the end,/Turn back to page I, and press onwards, dear friend;" The poem concludes with an observation "For all sober records of life (come to write 'em)/Are bound to continue - well - ad infinitum."

Thus under the garb of a simple fairy-tale of a child's world De La Mare reveals a great truth about human life. Life is an "élan Vital" - a continuous process - carrying with it the tradition and history of mankind. We may pause to think whether Sam's second life is a dream between two taps at the door or a miracle. The poem is no doubt the imaginative vision of "Life's little whirligig."

The poet speaks of another and more sophisticated Sam of the poem of the same name, who lived by the sea and was tempted by a mermaid, also by some lovely naids who symbolize beauty. Moreover, De La Mare points to a mocking fairy whom Charles William, a boy finds "dreadful".

Besides, these there is a realistic ogre whom the name of Jesus prevented from eating two children in Trebarwith Vale. "Into their dreams no shadow fell/Of his disastrous thumb/Groping discreet, and gradual,/Across the quiet room." Also he speaks of the pedlar in the poem of the same name

who comes from some other sinister world to allure "Sweet Lettice", a little girl with his unholy wares.

What will you buy, sweetheart? - Here's honey comb,
 And mottled pippins, and sweet mulberry pies,
 Comfits and peaches, snowy cherry bloom,
 To keep in water for to make night sweet:
 All that you want, sweetheart, - come, taste and eat!

[The Pedlar]

Tempted by his "sugared words" the child is eager to buy. She asks whisperingly "what must I pay?" In reply the pedlar demands only one lock of hair and that will be enough gold for him. Hearing this the whole woodland shudders; a drowsy squirrel and "many another woodland tongue beside" warn the child not to trust the pedlar. "'Pluck not a hair!' a hidden rabbit cried,/'With but one hair he'll steal thy heart away,/
 Then only sorrow shall your lattice hide:/Go in! all honest pedlars come by day."

But the dead silence in the drowsy wood is broken by the pedlar's voice "Here's syrup for to lull sweet maids to sleep;/And bells for dreams, and fairy wine and food/All day your heart in happiness to keep." It is really hard for a lonely child to resist this temptation. She takes the scissors to cut one golden lock of her hair and gives it to the pedlar.

Like Laura of "Goblin Market" little Lettice thus could

not resist the temptation of the pedlar. She succumbs to it and is doomed for ever. A child's world is always threatened by temptation which may come in the jolly form of fairy, elves, gnomies or in the sinister form of ogre, dwarf, witch or a pedlar from the dark world.

A child's world always rotates round these mythological figures whose origin are much older than their names. They are as old as human race, as old as the belief in spirits residing in woods, hills, lonely places and the nether world. To De La Mare they are part of this world and their presence is always felt in "the collective unconscious". A fresh uncluttered mind of a child is sensitive and responsive to this world of spirits in a degree which is impossible to an adult.

Fairy tales play an important role in the development of a child's mind and the existence of mythological figures assume importance in a child's world. By dealing with universal human problems particularly those which preoccupy the child's mind these "folk-fairy tales" speak to a child's "budding ego and encourage its development, while at the same time relieving preconscious and unconscious pressure." ¹⁶ De La Mare's uniqueness lies in that his portrayal of a child's world is not unrealistic or unscientific. His poetry presents a child's world with all its minutest detail.

De La Mare portrays a world of a child and also that of an adult and the region which lies "between the conscious mind of our time and the great deep of collective unconscious." ¹⁷ De La Mare believes that "in that region the self has continual existence - transmuted, to be sure, but always there". ¹⁸ According to him "the self neither comes from anywhere nor goes anywhere. It is." ¹⁹

Self in transmuted form is present everywhere. This form is sometimes mentioned as "the presence" by De La Mare. These presences in De La Mare's poem "The Revenant", "The Ghost" and "Thus Her Tale" for example - are ghosts in the sense in which most children think of them: spirit of the dead returning.

Not only every creature is inhabited by a spirit but every house, every garden, every place where man once has been, retains ghosts, presences. De La Mare calls them "Listeners". The presence of this listener though immaterial can be seen in some winter evening. In the poem "Winter Dusk" a mother reads a lovely narrative to her two children: "Nor dreamed she, as she read to two,/'Twas surely three who heard". She seems to know of, to intuit the presence of this undreamed intruder: "Yet when, the story done, she smiled/From face to face, serene and clear,/A love, half dread, sprang

up, as she/Leaned close and drew them near."

In another poem "Silence" this immaterial presence can be felt when two friends talk.

When, all at peace, two friends at ease alone
Talk out their hearts - yet still,
Between the grace-notes of
The voice of love
From each to each
Trembles a rarer speech,
And with its presence every pause doth fill.

De La Mare feels and also tries to show in his poems that every house, every place has its own "personality". One can experience this feeling when one goes to visit an ancient structure and can feel the presence of those who were there long before. This feeling is expressed in the poet's warning, "Breathe not - tresspass not" in the poem "The Sunken Garden",

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 the deep;

In the poem "The Old Stone House" De La Mare captures the feeling of terrors and curiosity that all children have when they must pass a house that is haunted:

Nothing on the grey roof, nothing on the brown,
Only a little greening where the rain drips down;
Nobody at the window, nobody at the door,
Only a little hollow which a foot once wore;
But still I tread on tiptoe, still tiptoe on I go,
Past nettles, porch, and weedy well, for oh, I know
A friendless face is peering, and a clear still eye
Peeps closely through the casement as my step goes by.

Then there comes De La Mare's oft-quoted famous poem "The Listeners". All children are intent to hear the anecdote of a lonely traveller. The story of the poem is trivial and does not seem to have any important role; the situation and the mood of the poem play the key-role here. The story says that a traveller rides upto a deserted house, dismounts from the horse, knocks loudly thrice upon the door. In return he receives no answer. He is not able to discern the visible sign about the place. So he remounts and bidding the shadow witness that he has kept his promise to return, rides away again. A series of questions come crowding in one's mind. What is the story behind it? Who was the traveller and what was his promise that seems to play such an important part? Why was the house empty? Alongside the child readers also wonder but in no way unravel this strange situation. Mystery is deepened by indefiniteness and uncertainty.

De La Mare's artistic skill makes the very stillness

and silence of the poem "The Listeners" instinct with life. It seems that the loneliest spot of the poem is charged with mystery and that proclaims a presence which is beyond human comprehension. The very opening of the poem presents a weird and eerie atmosphere with the traveller's voice vibrating through a deathly stillness. "'Is there anybody there?' said the Traveller,/Knocking on the moon-lit door;/And his horse in the silence champed the grasses/Of the forest's ferny floor."

The keynote of the prevailing atmosphere can be felt instantly through those few lines. Readers can feel that the very loneliness and silence are full of a real but invisible life, and in every nook and cranny of the deserted house lurk unseen listeners. "... a host of phantom listeners/That dwelt on the lone house then/Stood listening in the quiet of the moon-light/To that voice of the world of men."

The poem presents a graphic picture of "expectation". "The horse, the bird, the forest, the turret, the leaf-fringed sill all are fixed in a moment of intense expectation against the moonlight and the enfolding silence."²⁰ They all help like the words of the Traveller himself to define, to decode the silence. "His question 'Is there anybody there?' and his

last challenge, 'Tell them I came, and no one answered' resonate against the silence underlining its enigma and finality."²¹

When plunging hoofs of the travellers were gone, "the silence surged softly backward". The enigmatic situation of "The Listeners" recalls in our mind Poe's "Ulalume" and its dream situation. A characteristic of De La Mare's writings is that atmosphere itself is the hero; human characters are mere cyphers, unreal and not very human. The difference between Poe and De La Mare is that whereas "Poe's horror is visual and extremely objective; De La Mare's can only be sensed by some hidden instrument of mind and is intensely subjective."²²

One can even wonder whether the traveller, in other words it may be said "the self" visits this world of "Non-self" as if to keep some commitment. But like "K" of Kafka's Castle "the self" cannot establish its contact with the world of "non-self" or the world of dead till it journeys to death where "self" and "non-self" unite. The existential situation has been delineated in terms of supernatural situation. Thanatos in children is thus sublimated.

By journeying through a child's world De La Mare's arrives at the conclusion that the dominant expression of a child is gravity, seriousness, only a few of us have that much energy to be serious at their pitch. Both life and world baffle a child and are a great riddle to a child.

De La Mare shows in his poems that a child's world consists of unfathomable seriousness, unbounded joy and nameless fear, immense compassion and contentment. The poet has given this world of a child the place of "Eden" - the lost paradise of human beings. Children consider his poetry the treasure house of their world and De La Mare on the other hand has used a child and its world to provide symbols for men's spiritual experience in this world.

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CHAPTER - FOUR

WALTER DE LA MARE'S SYMBOLIC USE OF A CHILD
AND ITS WORLD

And he? - the sport of contraries in sleep!-
To childhood had returned; gone grief and woe;
That Eden of the heart, and fellowship
With innocence, that only children know;

[The Traveller]

These lines illustrate De La Mare's view on childhood. It is that state of being where grief and woe, joy and delight are subtle shades of moods; innocence and happiness are the key-factors of this state of being. De La Mare describes this stage as the "Eden of the heart". In addition he uses children as symbols in his poetry.

There is no denying that De La Mare wrote the finest poetry of the twentieth century for children, and about children. But it is noticed that the child and its world play a significant role in De La Mare's poetry.

Each of his poems, short or long, for or about children, always conveys some message of the mystery of life and the unfathomable spirit of human beings. "Like Vaughan, Traherene, Blake and Wordsworth De La Mare also believes that man in his early years is closer than at any other time to understanding the truth of things." ¹ Only in his early years man can

enjoy the bliss of peace and contentment. A man can never truly recapture the contentment of a small boy by the river which he portrays in the poem "A Sunday".

A child in the Sabbath peace, there -
Down by the full-bosomed river,
Sun on the tide-way, flutter of wind,
Water-cluck, -Ever ... for ever ...

Time itself seemed to cease there -

So the world of a child takes a place of great importance in his poems. J.B. Priestly observes that "the world De La Mare prefers to move in is one that has been pieced together by the imagination of childhood, made up of childish memories of life and books, nursery rhymes, fairy tales, ballads and quaint memorable passages from strange old volumes".² It seems that in De La Mare's conception the world of a child is that place where a man can find reality as sin and doubt have not yet settled themselves to blur the vision of a man.

In Collected Rhymes and Verses a volume of poems intended for children, three out of four "rhymes and verses" are poems giving delight to children, but at the same time "moving the sensitive and experienced readers to tears, to dream, to an understanding of life and of what lies behind life."³ In Collected poems, a companion volume of Collected Rhymes and Verses, "De La Mare writes 'as a child', in the sense of that wisest

of all wise sayings, which declares that to enter the kingdom of God a man must 'become as a child'.⁴

Unlike Chaucer, Wordsworth, Browning, Shelley, De La Mare is not "poetically interested in mankind"⁵ and he "turns his back on the appalling mess that 'Man has made of man'"⁶ But under two conditions De La Mare finds a man "ideally interesting and beautiful - when he is a child and when he is in love."⁷

An interesting point to be observed is that right from the turn of the 14th century both known poets and the unknown authors express in poems their attitude and concern about children and their world in their own singular ways. To learn all those one has to travel a long way through the history of "child-poetry". "To study a child in poetry is to study the history of man's own spiritual evolution."⁸ The world has taken long time to understand what Christ meant when He said "Of Such is the kingdom of Heaven." Blake, then Wordsworth "open the eyes of the world to the truth of the divinity of childhood."⁹ Man is not born in sin but comes "trailing clouds of glory" and "Heaven lies about us in our infancy" and there terminates the assumption that children are born in sin and devil must be thrashed out of them.

"This change of attitude towards children", says Alston

"is the most reassuring and significant evidence of the spiritual development of man." ¹⁰ One can not foster divinity in children unless one realizes it in one's own life and that is the sure indication of responsiveness to the spiritual element of life.

Poets of different ages have seen the "Child" in their own singular way and as a result the child figure is shaped and reshaped bearing the mental reflection of a particular poet. The child of Blake is a mystic figure as it reflects the element of the poet's mystic absorption. Wordsworth has studied the child with painful seriousness and has portrayed it in the same. Whereas the approach of A.A. Milne and Eleanor Farjeon to children is like a jolly elder brother joining in their game or like a teacher guiding them in their work, Longfellow and Jean Ingelow are guided by tender parental love. Rose Fyleman and W. Allingham find a great delight in children's fancies and one can notice this in their work. The contribution of Christina Rossetti in the "Child-Poem" is undoubtedly noteworthy but it is not free from the charge of sentimentalism in her work. But De La Mare's work presents a portrait of a child and its world in English literature which is not only unparalleled but is the result of the poet's deep study and keen observation of a child and its world. The chequered picture of childhood with its variegated colour and contents steps out not only from his Songs of Childhood

and Peacock Pie but more or less from all volumes of his verse. From this one can get an all-round and real portrait of a child; but at the same time this does not escape one's notice that the poet's appraisal of a child and childhood is also illuminating one and no where De La Mare allows any sort of idealisation or sentimentalisation in this portrayal.

De La Mare looks at a child and its world from a completely different perspective, for his real intention lies else where. A greater usage he offers to a child and its world in his poetry. To him childhood is the lost "Eden of the heart" and he uses this in his poems as the symbol of a "State of Mind". Joy and wonder that are deeper and truer than our adult sense of fact, is known to a child. "By re-entering the mind of the child, one can possess again the eerie, unknowable, beautiful world that truly is" ¹¹ and De La Mare wants to be in touch with that beautiful world.

De La Mare's greatest concern lies in "the creation of a dream like tone implying a tangible but non-specific transcendent reality." ¹² This reality can only be presented by images - it is a reality beyond all languages. But this is not a world of illusion, rather it may be called a world of imagination. John Atkins writes that the human race once possessed to an extra-ordinary degree a faculty, known as "Imagination"

and in course of time this faculty was replaced by another faculty called "Reason" which is a poor substitute for "Imagination".¹³ "Reason utilises the five senses and by skilful manipulation and coordination has elicited many truths from dark corners. But there are certain other truths that cannot be elicited without the aid of a sixth sense."¹⁴ Here imagination" is the poet's weapon and with the help of "Imagination" he explores that unknown land which lies between life and death, sleep and dream.

Madelin Alston refers to a little poem of Reed Moorhouse in her article "Children and Poets" where we are told how three little goblins found a sleeping baby and each decided to give her a gift; one gave her beauty, another wealth, but the third gave her the best gift of all - a gift to enable her to "see fairies everywhere."¹⁵ With this great gift of "imagination" the majority of human beings start out on life's journey. Soon the world closes round him and he becomes too eager to snatch at glittering and perishable things that ultimately bring no joy. In this rough hassle of life his great gift of imagination is lost forever and life seems to him dull and dreary. A child can preserve this gift, so life is a magic casement to a child and the world is full of wonder with all its richness.

Despite this desperately interesting world a child becomes

all forgetful of its surrounding and looks for something which it knows not. The poem "Portrait of a Boy" inspired by Velazquez presents to us a child who "With meek, wild face he stands; and in his eye/Deeps where the empyrean ever broods," does not know what he is looking for, what is the secret behind his brooding. But the poet knows and he states:

... we know his secret, hath not life
 So strangely shod his feet lest, suddenly,
 He should remember him - the babbling strife
 Of Venus' sparrows - lest he stoop and fly,
 Chafing at earth, into that April sky?

[Portrait of a Boy]

It seems that the boy is exiled here as this world is not his proper place to live in for his real abode is in somewhere else. This quest motif, this aching sense of being exiled is an important theme of De La Mare's poetry. This quest is nothing but his craving for total communion with reality. Only with an unspoilt sense of wonder and by deep understanding of the imagination one can apprehend reality. A child is the possessor of these qualities and only to a child this reality is revealed.

As De La Mare advances in his poetic world it seems that he turns the child figure into a symbol not only of the state of mind, but of the human soul itself, one who is completely

alone and absorbed in its own thoughts. Tagore beautifully expresses this state of the human soul in one of his innumerable songs. The Bengali version of the song goes like this:

ĀMI KĀN PETE ROI/O ĀMĀR ĀPAN HRIDAYA/GAHAN DWĀRE/BĀRE
BĀRE/ĀMI KĀN PETE ROI. ¹⁶ (I lean my ear to hear some deep
notes in the deep silence of my heart's core). To come in
contact with "Reality" one has to listen the call of one's
innermost self. Once the barrier that lies between one's outer
and inner self is removed, one can visualise the Reality.

The human soul is ensiled in this vast silence for this
silence is its everlasting companion too. De La Mare shows
through many of his poems that silence and every vacant place
instead of being vacant and silent are crowded with invisible
"presences" and "unheard tunes". These "presences" keep company
with a child. Silence lends an intensity and depth to the
bursting noise that is ever present in one's mind which resem-
bles a market place. In the poem "The Market-Place" the poet-
persona states:

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.

A child or human soul likes to live in this stream of consciousness. It is not touched by anything or by any happening of the world. It is like "Brahma", the highest God of Vedanta philosophy, who is like a great swan (Parama Hansa) floating on the everflowing stream but surprisingly, water cannot soak its feathers. Similarly, a child or human soul is a partaker of every event of life and the world but nothing can touch its mind. It remains unaffected and unmoved by any happening of the outer world. The poems like "The Funeral" and "Immanent" illustrate this side of a child's character.

In dealing with children and childhood De La Mare's attitude has become somewhat mystical. But nowhere in his poem any trace of idealisation or sentimentalisation of the image of a child can be detected. Childhood, he projects, rather as a state of being where jaded, sated experience of adulthood has not yet imposed itself, not yet blurred the clear vision of a child. So, it is not impossible for a child to see something uncommon in a common thing, to find joy and wonder even in a life that seems to an adult dull and dreary. That is why Ramprasad, a famous Tantrik Saint of Bengal prayed to his supreme reality, the goddess Kali: Let my age advance, there is no harm in it; but keep my mind childlike. (Bengali version : Boyas bārūḅ tāya kshati nai/Manti āmar shishu rākho.)

That is the ardent prayer of one who wants to know the meaning of reality and De La Mare states that to reach that goal one must have the mind of a child.

De La Mare's intense yearning for reality drives him to another deep desire - a desire for beauty. But here in this world, he writes: "Beauty vanishes; beauty passes; / However rare - rare it be; / ("An Epitaph") and he wants to have a place "Where blooms the flower when her petals fade, / Where sleepth echo by earth's music made, / Where all things transient to the changeless win." ("Vain Questioning").

Reading De La Mare's poems F.T. Wood remarks that the poet sees the world as a pageant of change against a backdrop of eternity but man himself is something the same. "For besides his mortal part he has a real 'person' which is immortal, without beginning or an end and has gathered to itself the almost forgotten experiences of innumerable ages." ¹⁷ Everything in this material world changes but this "self" the immortal, real part of human being is constant and changeless. In the poem "The Portrait" De La Mare writes: "Old: Yet unchanged". "It is is the great mystery in the heart of the individual, which makes him just what he is and differentiates him from other individuals." ¹⁸ De La Mare goes a little further. Implicit in the theme of his poetry is, an alternative to the historical

Descent of Man. John Atkins discusses this idea of De La Mare beautifully. Atkins observes that confining De La Mare's philosophy to a single life-time one is aware of a circle beginning with childhood and ending with old age, but the end and the beginning are the same point.¹⁹ The age of childhood recalls in one's mind the age of dimly remembered mystery. Age and experience dispels this mystery and replaces it with harsh reality. But the mystery of human nature is that it cannot bear too much reality. So, there is a gradual return to mystery which one feels has a close resemblance to the first stage of life i.e. childhood. Atkins continues in his writing that this process, seen from De La Mare's point of view, is "'Appearance-Disappearance-Reappearance'. Reappearance is a recurring form of Appearance, the two are one."²⁰ In the poem "Second Childhood" De La Mare writes, "What! heartsick still, grown old and grey,/And second childhood on its way?"

In the poem "Life Lives On Life" De La Mare says that life is nothing but a mere "stale old tale". Here everything is transient, the only "immortal days" are the days of childhood. Keeping this view in mind the poet states in the poem "Life Lives On Life" that when at peace, man finds his head is conversing with his heart about "Clear good sense/Of a childhood past and gone". "The blessed eyes" of childhood

make the old heart and head of a person to stay for a while before the "latchless door" of death. This is the magic charm of childhood.

In many of his verses De La Mare repeatedly expresses this idea that the soul when enters a body shares a "self". The "Self" which soul shares in birth is innocent, joyful and harmless as a child. He shares this idea with Tagore that a child is like a soul eternal and universal irrespective of time and place. It is as tender, beautiful and fresh as it was thousand and thousand years before. It is ever-new for it is the creation of Nature; but the adult human being is more or less the creation of man himself.

In the poem "Once" he writes: "I spent with my self as a child; alone, in a world of wonder-/Air, and light and flowers;/Tenderness, longing, grief, intermingling with bodiless beings/Shared else with none." In "The Last Chapter", he writes again, "I am living more alone than I did;/This life tends inward, as the body ages." Advancement of age brings to man experiences that at times sickens his heart; so the poet writes in the same poem that "sick heart" of a man knows no more "as when a child's", "His infinite energy and beauty near."

De La Mare uses the world of children as symbol for



man's spiritual experience in this world. A human being is a lone traveller here; loneliness is an undeniable part of our human predicament. This "loneliness is defined against nothing; indeed, it relates to the perennial human awareness of nothing, which underlies our particular histories, often tingling them with a sense of the unreal." ²¹ In human life if there is any long lasting relationship it is only with transcendence. Life is a pilgrimage among the strangest hazards to that unknown country wherefrom no traveller returns. His poem "The Night-Swans" depicts that journey. In this short poem he unfolds the whole history of the human soul through a mere suggestion of three swans. Three swans imply the three forces of birth, maintenance and annihilation.

The human soul like the traveller in his poem "The Listeners" comes to this world to keep faith. He may not be greeted by anybody and others may not keep their own faith, but like the traveller uttering the last challenge "Tell them I came and no one answered" (The Listeners) he has to depart for unknown destination. A quest guided by loyalties which might or might not be honoured is itself important.

In various ways and in different verses De La Mare expresses this idea of quest - a quest for a perfect world - a world,

"where all things, transient to the changeless win" ("Vain Questioning"). As a child a human being is always in touch with this perfect real world and hence it finds joy everywhere, in every trivial thing of nature. Adam in paradise is no more happy than a child. A child never feels an attraction for the so-called worldly wealth, nor does it accept the thoughts and creeds of others and forgets its own. A child is not "ever the slave of every proud desire" ("Humanity"). De La Mare continues in the same poem ("Humanity")

Then stooped our Manhood nearer, deep and still,
 As from earth's mountains an unvoyaged sea;
 Hushed my faint voice in its great peace until
 It seemed but a bird's cry in eternity;
 And in its future loomed the undreamable,
 And in its past slept simple man like me.

In manhood we lose our simplicity and the naivete of a child "Still out of ecstasy turn trembling back/To earth's same empty track/Of leaden day by day, and hour by hour, and be/Of all things lovely the cold mortuary" ("Life"). A man is fully aware of his weakness for this world, but for him there is no way out of this helpless situation. He is rather mesmerised by this situation; as if the dictum "ergo sum" (I think, therefore I am) asserts itself in him. Aptly this condition is described by De La Mare in his poem "Napolean".

'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.'

Still, a man cannot find peace, get contentment. So in the poem "The Exile" his earnest prayer rings: "Loosed from remorse and hope and love's distress/Enrobe me again in my lost nakedness". This nakedness, this state of unattachment is nothing but the hall mark of childhood. After a long circuit of life only to some "most happy men" is given this grace to come back to heaven - the heaven where they in childhood used to dwell. Life is the school where with long labour they have learned that unchanging celestial light gleams "only where innocence or wisdom dreams". The happy child is always at peace in that first home. Life only adds wisdom," and at length it brings us/Where springs the fountain of her genius" ("To Some Most Happy Men"). There still remains a great question whether life can retrieve the wisdom that a man had as a child. In the poem "In a Library" De La Mare expresses that doubt, "Would-would that there were/A book on that shelf/To teach an old man/To teach himself!" Then the old man might sit "even with self-reconciled" retrieving the wisdom he lost, "when a child". But the point of regret is that, "It is our fates/Like tapers, we/Life's pure wax waste/Unheedingly." ["A Stave"].

Man's soul starts its journey in this world alone with a power of vision. It finds here as its companions "Air and light and flowers;/Tenderness, longing, grief intermingling with bodiless beings"("Once"). Pride has not yet found its full grip on man's pure soul. The beauty of the earth has then a great meaning to it. Spring is the "unageing sweetness"; her trees as if from paradise, have borrowed "their shining simpleness"; her flowers are "like flames of crystal brightness." With the advent of age pride gains its supreme hold over the soul. Therefore,

Once I could gaze until these seemed to me
 Only my mind's own splendours in disguise,
 But now their inward beauty is lost and faded:
 They are the haunts of alien voices now -
 An alien wonderment of light beams forth -
 No more the secret reflex of my soul.

[Pride Hath Its Fruits Also]

The secret reflex of a soul is a natural phenomenon in a child. This reflex enables a child to find delight even on the eve of the hour of doom; the poem "The Children of Stare" illustrates this for in it De La Mare presents a graphic picture of an impending peril before the children of Stare. The setting of Nature is such that the readers can sense this ominous hour in their pulse, though the children are completely unaware of it. This mysterious, perilous situation does not affect them as they are all armed with a "tiny-fire" which

is God's gift to them. This "tiny-fire" enables them to sport on even on the eve of doom and gives them power to go expressing joy and laughter.

Annihilation is not the last word of all things in this world. It is a kind of transformation from one form to another. De La Mare's supernatural theory justifies this. They are not extra-terrestrial something, but the continuation of one presence in another form. The poem "The Ghost" tries to lift the corner of this veil. It goes like this:

'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.'

Life is a continuous process - "an élan vital". A pure soul, therefore, is not afraid of any destruction. It remains unstirred in the face of annihilation for it is the removal of a great barrier itself and eternity. De La Mare equates this "pure soul" to a child. He carries this idea in his mind even in his writing of nonsensical poems for children. His famous poem "The Song of the Mad Prince" embodies this idea

beautifully. It pretends to be a nonsensical poem for children and at a glance seems to be a verbal game or puzzle to its reader. The poem starts with a question "Who said?" which creates an enigmatic atmosphere of challenge. Six of the sixteen short lines of this poem interspersed with this question "Who said?" tempt its reader to find an associative connection behind this illogical and nonsensical discourse. The poem begins: "Who said, 'Peacock Pie'?/The old king to the sparrow:/ Who said, 'Crops are ripe?'/Rust to the harrow: "

Rust's conversation with the harrow about the ripeness of the crop may be taken as logical but surely eyes will be raised in askance when one hears the old king's talk about peacock pie to the sparrow. "Who was this old king and why did he say a crazy thing like this about peacock pie to the sparrow?", "What have the old king and the sparrow to do with the harrow and the crops? - all these questions come crowding in one's mind. One cannot fit the parts of the poem logically. But Perkins says that "there are enough hints of logical associative connection to keep the one from taking the poem as mere nonsense." ²² The convention of madness which was a common practice in Elizabethan drama to ascertain some truth inaccessible to a sane mind is displayed in this poem. Thus at the end of the poem the crazy speaker "voices an insight or conviction that the sane mind could never know." ²³ The poem

concludes, "Who said, 'All Time's delight/Hath she for narrow bed;/Life's troubled bubble broken'?-/That's what I said:"

Death is the theme of "The Song of the Mad Prince". But death does not mean here annihilation; it is "Life's troubled bubble broken" and "All Time's delight/Hath she now for narrow bed". The very expression "life's troubled bubble broken" is archetypal since it corresponds to Sankara's Vedantic view. [cf. 'Ghatakasha' (the sky that is reflected in the water of a small pot) and 'Patakasha' (boundless sky)]. The sky is boundless, something vast. But when it is reflected in the water of a small pot it gets bound. When the pot is broken, it again becomes the usual boundless sky. Similarly the very idea of "Life" is a vast boundless phenomenon. When it enters a body it gets a certain shape and limitation is imposed on it. Death liberates it from the bondage of this body and helps it to merge into eternity, its real abode. Death is the fruition that implies enjoyment of "all time's delight".

An analysis of De La Mare's poem for or about children reveals that it is not the work of a man putting himself in the place of a child, but that of a child's heart surviving in a man with all manner of unearthly apprehensions. These deep understandings constantly bring him word of those things in heaven and earth that are undreamed of.

A child's image that emerges out of his magical poems is not something frail or ephemeral. It is the root of life, source materials of his poems. This child image might be called the "Leit Motif" of his poem. There are very few poems of De La Mare that do not contain the word "Child" or "Childhood". In one poem, he describes "Time" as a "heedless child" under whose "toying scimitar" fall "a daisy and the most distant star!" Human beings, too, are things but of a moment. But, Time, "poor youngling of Eternity" is too "but of moment".

A question comes to one's mind: What is then "real" in this ever-changing scenario? De La Mare has not offered any decisive answer to this question, but has made his readers aware of this situation. Through his poems he shows up that to face this bewildering situation of "real" and "unreal", one should see life in its entirety and the world with a child's mind. "Reason or Intellect" and "Intuition" - these are two ways which enables man to live in this world and experience life. Reason or Intellect can be of great help to a person in the world of fact and senses. But there are many things in this world and life that Reason or Intellect cannot decipher and there intuition comes to one's help. When the human soul enter this world it brings with it the faculties of sense organs and at the same time some spiritual faculties such as hope, love and joy. ²⁴ As a child in De La Mare's poems

symbolises an uncorrupted "Pure-Soul", all these faculties find their fullest expression in the image of a child. De La Mare starts with Songs of Childhood where he shows the expression of a child's pure delight even over trifles. A child's unswerving faith and its love for all objects and creatures are described in Poems, in The Listeners and Other Poems, in Peacock Pie, The Veil and Other Poems in Motley and in all other volumes of his poems. From all these volumes one image emerges as a constant, that is the image of a child and its world. In the end this child image is turned into the mark of individuality of De La Mare, his 'signature' in his work. It becomes the key-word - a pivotal point on which rotates the poetic world of De La Mare. He himself declares that he always has the young in his mind when he writes. In his view "A child" is the essence of nature and existence.

Tagore in one of his songs of Gita-bitan Vol.II says: The sky is full of stars and the Sun, The Universe is full of lives; I have got my place among them, my soul is therefore, moved with great wonder.²⁵ De La Mare's child echoes this delight and sense of wonder. This wonder ruffles its mind to ask questions, the answer to which eludes even a great metaphysician. In the poem "Me" a great surprise has been expressed though in an undemonstrative way: "As long as I live/ I shall always be/ My self - and no other, / Just me."

This is also De La Mare's approach to life. Like a child he prefers to gaze and to question and he does not attempt to get any dogmatic answer or to formulate any creed. But in one fact he is certain that is the possibility of the transcendence of the spirit of man over the limits imposed by time and space. In the poem "The Flight" De La Mare writes: "Stand watch - O days, no number keep/Of hours when this dark clay is blind./When the world's clocks are dumb in sleep/'Tis then I seek my kind."

Due to this deep awareness of spiritual forces, one can find that a sense of the supernatural is always present in De La Mare's verses. The presence of this supernatural force is ever felt by a De La Mareian child, but it produces a mixed feeling in the mind of a child. De La Mare always presents a child in his poem as a lonely child, as lonely as the sky. It has no class, nor does it belong to any particular period and bears no personal history. If it has any relationship, any bond, that is only with transience. Its isolation is like that of the soul itself, amidst the law of change. Its gaiety, beauty, sadness directly confronts the certainty of decay.

This is the undeniable universal predicament of human-beings in this world. At the same time De La Mare shows that this child figure is the only noumenal factor of life (the

essence of anything) in the phenomenal world. This child figure is the only refuge of human-being and can save one's soul from impending peril. So he writes in the poem "Long Ago", "O place of peace, would, would that I could be -/A child at heart, and turn on happy feet/To you - most dear - to thee."

A quest for a place where the reign of complete peace is total, has been haunting the human mind for ages. He knows that he is banished from that "Eden", but to secure the reentry a person must be "a child at heart". Human being cannot find peace here in this world which is nothing but a dream, a world of shadows. Any beautiful scene or object awakes in his mind the desire for that place wherein he lived before being born in this world. This aching sense that a man is ensiled in the estranging sea of time drives a man to take shelter like a snail in his mind, his "innermost-self". This "innermost-self" is a "life-long recluse" of an isolated man. But life is not all melancholy, as man can live in the imagination. The imagination is to De La Mare, a creative force in human life. Life is not all strife and agony, beauty and love are still there. These act like a catalyst in the strife-ridden life of a man.

A child is completely attuned to beauty and love and therefore to the whole universe. De La Mare shows that love

is that power through which a man can truly live. Love here means "a mutual perception of reality through the power of imagination" ²⁶ and perhaps in E.M. Forster's term "the ability to connect." ²⁷ The reason behind a child's delightful world is nothing but "love". A child is not haunted by the aching sense of a "lost world". Its full faith in everything, its keen sense of beauty, its power of love transforms this world into a place where there is no dearth of wonder and joy for it. It has its own personal, intimate way of magic and humour to meet nature. .

A child's feeling for life is immense and a priceless gift to it by nature. De La Mare goes on showing this in his poetry. His aim is to get something elemental, to find some hope for life which can act as panacea for all malaises of the twentieth century. People of this disturbed present-day world need some peace, some strong footholds to retain their values and belief in life. His is not the aim of focusing on these troubled-torn days and miseries of mankind. He is in search of some remedy for these miseries. He appears in this stormy scene with a great assurance that all is not lost. We can yet cast a last glance on all loveliness.

His child-figure is the torch bearer of that loveliness and the messiah of faith, hope and love in this gloomy world.

De La Mare reminds us again and again that this child which he has portrayed in his poems, is not merely a physical, mortal child, but the essence of human life, the replica of what we can call "Pure-Soul". The analytical and intellectual mind of a man can conceive that childhood is that "Eden" which he has lost for ever. The people who really search for reality and peace yearn to return to the state of childhood in its pristine purity.

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CHAPTER - FIVE

CONCLUSION

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.

[The Mulla-Mulgars' Journey Song]

Human life, in De La Mare's view, is a great journey towards "Reality", its destined goal. Until this journey is done "no fear, or care, or black despair" will be allowed to come in the way. This simple, but meaningful journey song of the Mulla-Mulgar illustrates this view.

Entering the poetic world of De La Mare, one becomes conscious of the delicately shaded moods and music of the poems and also of a strange magical peace that surrounds his whole poetic world. To a keen surveyor De La Mare's poems in unison are nothing but one epic poem of the human soul. This "human soul" he symbolises through a child figure and there is hardly a poem where he has not used the word "child" It is rather the key-word, the pivotal point, round which his whole poetic world rotates. His different volumes of verse are nothing but separate cantos of an epic poem.

This epic poem begins with Songs of Childhood (1902) and more or less comes to the conclusion with a long poem "The Traveller" (1945). Poems published later specially "Winged Chariot" (1951) may be described as an epilogue to this epic poem.

The human soul starts its journey in this world with an adventurer's spirit where an over-brimming innocent joy is its constant companion at this stage. Besides this, faith, love, belief and wonder also keep its company. To add charm to this band of mirthful companions, fear and eerie feelings are also present there. Songs of Childhood is the tale of this delightful soul. The presence of ogre, witch, phantom, faeries is there to say that this visible natural world is not the ultimate boundary of this vast universe. Beyond one's gamut of knowledge there is also an invisible supernatural world peopled by these above mentioned supernatural elements. To grown-ups this is a forbidden world but to a child it is much-sought after and quite as real as its own world and these supernatural beings to it are as real as other natural phenomena. The world with all its natural and supernatural beings is a place of great wonder and every waking moment brings a great thrill to a child. It is now the possessor of a tremendous life-force and whatever comes in close contact with it, receives life. So, to a child an inanimate object is also a living thing and is nothing difficult

for a child to set a close relationship with that object. Both animate and inanimate objects come close to it by the immense power of love.

On time's "winged chariot" the traveller-soul starts its journey to this world. Its role, in the beginning, is completely passive. But a dynamic force that is hidden in its passivity has not escaped the poet's sight. This inspires great awe and wonder in the poet. He minutely studies the tiny features of a child in the poem "A Child Asleep" and as a master of the art of expression envies the epigrammatic power of its creator: "That says so much, so flawlessly,/And in how small a space!"

This soul's purity, beauty and tenderness may not be able to withstand the harsh reality of this world. The poet discloses this fear of his mind in the poem "Cecil".

... little elves,

Call to her magically sweet,
Lest of her very tenderness
She do forsake this rough brown earth
And return to us no more.

The poem presents the child as an epitome of all loveliness

and tenderness and hence there is every possibility of attracting the evil eye which in turn might be the cause of its doom. This overwhelming fear of the mind urges the poet to seek the help of the elves for its protection.

This passive vulnerable soul has set on its earth-bound journey. But no one knows in what opportune moment it will shake off its passivity and burst out in full activity. In Songs of Childhood De La Mare arranges for this new soul a world full of songs and dances, joy and laughter - a world that encourages the passive vulnerable soul to be strong and active. Like a newly-sprouted seed here this soul basks in delight and happiness. Gradually there comes a great change over it; no more is it passive, vulnerable soul, but a soul bursting with all sorts of activity.

Songs of Childhood is a record in detail of that soul which knows no boundaries and, Time also bows its head before it. This soul only encounters pure, innocent joy. "Beneath a sprig of mistletoe" it dances on and on and nature also joins it in this dance.

The world that De La Mare reserves for this soul is a world drenched with dew and dream; it is set between dawn and dusk, the soft wee hour of the day. Both natural and super-

natural are the composite elements of this world. Fairies, elves are there, as well as ogre, witches and dwarfs. "These fairies live 'where the blue bells and wind are' and 'where the primrose and dew are'. They dance in the early morning or under green willows."¹ "The starlight shook as if with sound, / As if with echoing" and "the prince of sleep walks with them at evening". There the bushes in "bright scarlet bud" sometimes appear as the witches or "three crows upon a bough" are nothing but witches in disguise. Here one can find a dwarf that lives in "Barberry Wood", three others on the "Isle of Lone" whose beds "were made of holly-wood" and also an ogre who prowls on Trebarwith Sands. At one stage it was going to devour two sleeping children but the name of Jesus uttered by their mother in the lullaby foiled its attempt to devour them and saved them. The gay soul meets all these menaces on its way. The presence of these supernatural beings reminds all that the happiness of life would be less sweet without the existence of the sorrows, the menaces of life.

This active new soul over-brimmed with tremendous life-force gushes out towards its journey and at the same time engulfing all objects round it with this new force. Sorrow or grief is only a momentary affair for it. Songs of Childhood are the songs of gaiety and freshness of a gay soul. These songs like Blake's Songs of Innocence are happy and carefree

and are meant for an innocent soul who embarks on a wondrous journey in a wonderful world.

In Poems (1906) a change is marked over this delightful soul. The soul has become more courageous and strong. In the face of impending peril children of "Stare" go on laughing, "their laughter rings like timbrels/'Neath evening ominous". Immense life-force has bestowed upon them that courage that power to defy evil and annihilation. The negative aspect of life has not yet out-witted the positive, the brighter aspect of life. In the poem "Keep Innocency" the child finds in a battle only sweet chivalry; the piercing terror, the darker side of battle is not yet known to it.

The miracle of motion in the world of nature and the presence of life everywhere and in every object now awake a great wonder in this soul. Numerous questions come crowding in its mind. The surprised soul questions in "The Miracle":

Who beckons the green ivy up
 Its solitary tower of stone?
 What spirit lures the bindweed's cup
 Unfaltering on;
 Calls even the starry lichen to climb
 By agelong inches endless Time?

Who bids the hollyhock uplift
 Her rod of fast-sealed buds on high;
 Fling wide her petals - silent, swift,
 Lovely to the sky?

Naively "the innocent soul" goes on asking these high philosophical questions, the answers of which are still uncertain and unknown. Nature, the non-human part of the world is nearer to it than the human part of the world. "...Out of nought" a child builds up "a universe of thought,/And out of silence fashion Heaven" ("Where Is Thy Victory?") and this is how it remains absorbed in its own make-shift world.

Poems appear with new songs of the young soul, no doubt lovelier than the early songs but the touch of sadness and deep notes differentiate these from the previous lively songs of the gay soul. A great change can be discerned in the world and atmosphere of Poems. There are no more fairies, witches, wolves and dwarfs, gnomies and ogres, though the houses, woods and rivers of Poems still seem to be haunted. There is however a difference as the haunters are invisible and this adds a distinction to the world of Poems. An air of uncertainty prevails, its atmosphere creates a sense of disquietness. In the volume The Veil this note of uncertainty is repeated which at times turns into despair. "What voice is that I hear/Crying across the pool?" ("Sorcery"). This voice is the mysterious voice of uncertainty. It is different from the voice of "Sleepyhead" in Songs of Childhood. These songs of innocence will become songs of experience.

In The Listeners (1912) and in Peacock Pie (1913) De La Mare portrays a "soul" that is mature, more thoughtful. Joy and delight of the soul is still there but the shade is different. In both these books the soul is a brooding soul. Much of the substance of The Listeners is "composed of 'the lonely dreams of a child'"² But in Peacock Pie the prevalent mood of the soul is lighter and gayer. In The Listeners one observes that the soul is quite lonely and lost in reverie and a shade of regret is intermittent in that reverie. Deep reverie at times turns towards an extraordinary tenderness. The poem "Rachel" illustrates this tenderness beautifully:

Rachel sings sweet -
 Oh, yes, at night,
 Her pale face bent
 In the candle-light,
 Her slim hands touch
 The answering keys,
 And she sings of hope
 And of memories:
 Sings to the little
 Boy that stands
 Watching those slim,
 Light, heedful hands.
 He looks in her face;
 Her dark eyes seem
 Dark with a beautiful
 Distant dream;
 And still she plays,
 Sings tenderly
 To him of hope,
 And of memory.

Rachel symbolizes "the experienced soul" who is bringing through her music the message of hope and memory to a small boy who represents the coming new generation. The night is dark but a candle sheds light all around which signifies that all is not yet lost for the world and its people. Music almost of a supernatural kind brings a distant dream, a dream which according to De La Mare is the vital sustenance of human life.

The colour of The Listeners is "rich and sombre" .³ Awareness of mortality which is latent in writing comes now to the fore; nothing remains, nothing lasts in this world. "Beauty vanishes; beauty passes; / However rare - rare it be." ("At Epitaph") Death crumbles everything. The riddle is that, in its terror there is some strange fascination whose magnetic attraction cannot be denied even by a child. In the poem "The keys of Morning" De La Mare shows how a little girl Louisa is attracted by the presence of "Death". Pre-Raphaelite details in the poem makes the whole thing i.e. the portrayal of "Death" and its allurements concrete and authentic. Death to De La Mare is not annihilation but perfection of life, "all life's troubled bubble broken." It helps the soul to merge into eternity, the true abode of the soul. The human soul comes here to keep some tryst like the traveller in the poem "The Listeners" and on the due date it will leave for that unknown destination from where nobody returns.

Uncertainty and indefiniteness are the dominant note of The Listeners. It seems that soul enters a strange world where everything is but an echo from the unknown. The baffled soul merely asks question : "Who calls?". Nobody cares to give an answer. Human beings are confronted with all such questions: "Who are we?" "Where do we come from?", "Why", "Where will we go?" and "Whence?". Human life is nothing but a series of "quests" to find definite answers to those questions which are too difficult to get. This indefiniteness and this uncertainty is the real trait of the twentieth century and like "the presence of a ghost in the noonday-walk" its presence can be felt in his verse.

In Peacock Pie we come to a soul who still retains in it a gay, light spirit amidst this grim, gloomy situation. With a glint of mirth in its eyes "this soul" casts its glance on this crazy world. It can now find some sense in the series of nonsense, some consistency in the midst of sheer inconsistent happenings of the world. "Magic is not all stolen away" from this world, it wants to convey this hope to all. The world of Peacock Pie may be viewed as an extension of the childhood world of the previous books though the pattern and presentation of this world has undergone a great change. "It is a world which, full of fantasy and fun, is yet drenched in moonlight - romantic, brooding, questioning." ⁴ But the terrain of Peacock

Pie is not easy to pace as that of Songs of Childhood. The solo-song of a child is replaced by a quartette which is sung by a group of children where "all we four boys piped out loud, just like one boy". The gay soul is now viewing the world and life in a different light. The expression of its experience is still light-hearted but by the odd variation of tone it reveals the seriousness and the deeper meaning of its findings. Even now life seems to this soul to be rhythmic but the note of rhythm is completely different from that of Songs of Childhood. Under the implicit avowal of serious intention this soul is proceeding to more serious land of Motely (1918) and The Veil (1921).

From the land of The Veil when the wanderer soul looks back, it is surprised to see what a long journey, rich in beauty and discovery, it has taken in one early morning from the land of the Songs of Childhood. Its aim was to explore a new world and a band of mirthful companion were then with it. In the first phase of its journey it was surrounded by all joyful sights and sounds which was replaced by sombre scenes. Slowly Autumn has now crept in, Spring's festivity, the bright gay companions of the soul have also left the place. The gay companions sang their last gay songs in Peacock Pie. Even in the world of Motley and The Veil, the dream-element and the element of fantasy play a notable part and the old magic

can be traced there in a changed manner. Eventually contemplation and interpretation have occupied much time and place in this world.

A deep yearning for paradise now haunts the soul. Its sole craving actually is to go beyond this world - this world where "sin and beauty, whisper of Home" - to a world of absolute beauty. "Any fragments of earth's beauty - the dew on the grass, a bird's song, a ray of light in the evening sky - is sufficient to set his imagination winging there." ⁵ Burdened with a sense of loneliness this soul is always on a secret quest and it is not sure the light that leads it on is really its guiding light or the creation of "sweet desire" and hence the confused soul says:

Take comfort, listen!
 Once we twain were free;
 There was a country -
 Lost the memory ...
 Lay thy cold brow on hand,
 And dream with me.

[The Monologue]

Time flows on; and with it goes on the murmuring of the anguished soul as it has not yet received any answer from the "Lovely One".

Long hours there are,
 When mutely tapping - well,
 Is it to Vacancy
 I these tidings tell?
 Knock these numb fingers against
 An empty cell?

Nay, answer not,
 Let still mere longing make
 Thy presence sure to me,
 While in doubt I shake:
 Be but my Faith in thee,
 For sanity's sake.

[The Monologue]

But the journey is still on. In "The Traveller" (1945) a long poem, a new facet of the soul's journey is introduced and here terminates the magnificent journey of the traveller soul. The whole round earth is taken into account in this journey. Like the "eye" of a storm, the earth has also "an eye" a centre point - the most peaceful but the most dangerous spot. The lone traveller has arrived there in "Eye of Earth". The scene is panoramic and defies any sort of description. Under the outward surface stillness and calmness, a tremendous force in gathering its speed and activity here. The traveller-soul who has "... faced life's long duress,/Its pangs and horrors, anguish, hardship, woes," aims at: "Not to achieve

a merely temporal goal, / Not for bright glory, praise, or greed
of gain, / But in that secret craving of the soul / For what
no name has."

This "worn, out-wearied" soul at last is able to reach
its goal and is over-joyed. No one is there to share this
great experience or hear its prayer. Only "A self there is
that listens in the heart / To what is past the range of human
speech, / Which yet has urgent tidings to impart - / The all-but-
uttered, and yet out of reach".

Here in the centre of "the eye", the lonely soul is,
at last, blessed with a great realization that it is mere
nothing, not "a mere castaway of flesh and bone" but "A son
of God - no sport of Time or Fate". After this rapturous
experience the traveller soul dies. It has got, at last, "Life's
kiss of rapture at life's journey's end." On time's "winged
chariot" death has arrived and leads it to eternity - the
perfection of the soul.

It enters this world as a child with qualities that
are no less than divinity. Its illustrious journey in the
world makes it forgetful of its proud possession of divine
qualities. In course of time it realizes that those divine
qualities are the only sesame to the world of peace and

happiness. To get access to this paradise it takes a long journey which spans its whole life. At long last this wearied soul as "a child of God" has got its Elysium.

Throughout his poems and in a very undemonstrative way, De La Mare discloses that a human being is nothing but the epitome of the whole universe - its mind is the microcosm of that macrocosm.

The experience of common day events makes us oblivious of that great truth. But a child never thinks of itself dissociated from nature, from the universe. Introducing the child figure and its world in his poetry, De La Mare wants to make his readers aware of that great legacy. The ultimate dictum of Walter De La Mare is that human beings are children of God, not "a sport of Fate or Time" and childhood is the lost paradise of the human heart. His poems are a great homage to "a child and its world."

END NOTES:

1. Leonard Clark, Walter De La Mare, The Bodley Head, London, 1968, p.135.
2. Forrest Reid, Walter De La Mare : A Critical Study, Faber and Faber Ltd., London, 1929, p.150.
3. Ibid, p.152.

4. Leonard Clark, Walter De La Mare, The Bodley Head, London, 1968, p.138.
5. Forrest Reid, Walter De La Mare : A Critical Study, Faber and Faber Ltd., London, 1929, p.167.

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