

**“Books! –” : *Pleasures and Speculations* in
Walter de la Mare’s Library - Anne Welsh, UCL**



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Books! –

for the heart to brood on; books for peace;

From the dull droning of the world release;

A music snared, a spring distilled from Spring;

At one spare board to feast on Everything! –

Plain, wholesome, racy, various and rare;

...

Books! – whose sweet witchery retrieves again

All that the heart of childhood may retain

...

Abiding joy is theirs ...

Pleasures and Speculations, pp. xv-xviii



“CURIOSITIES OF LITERATURE.”

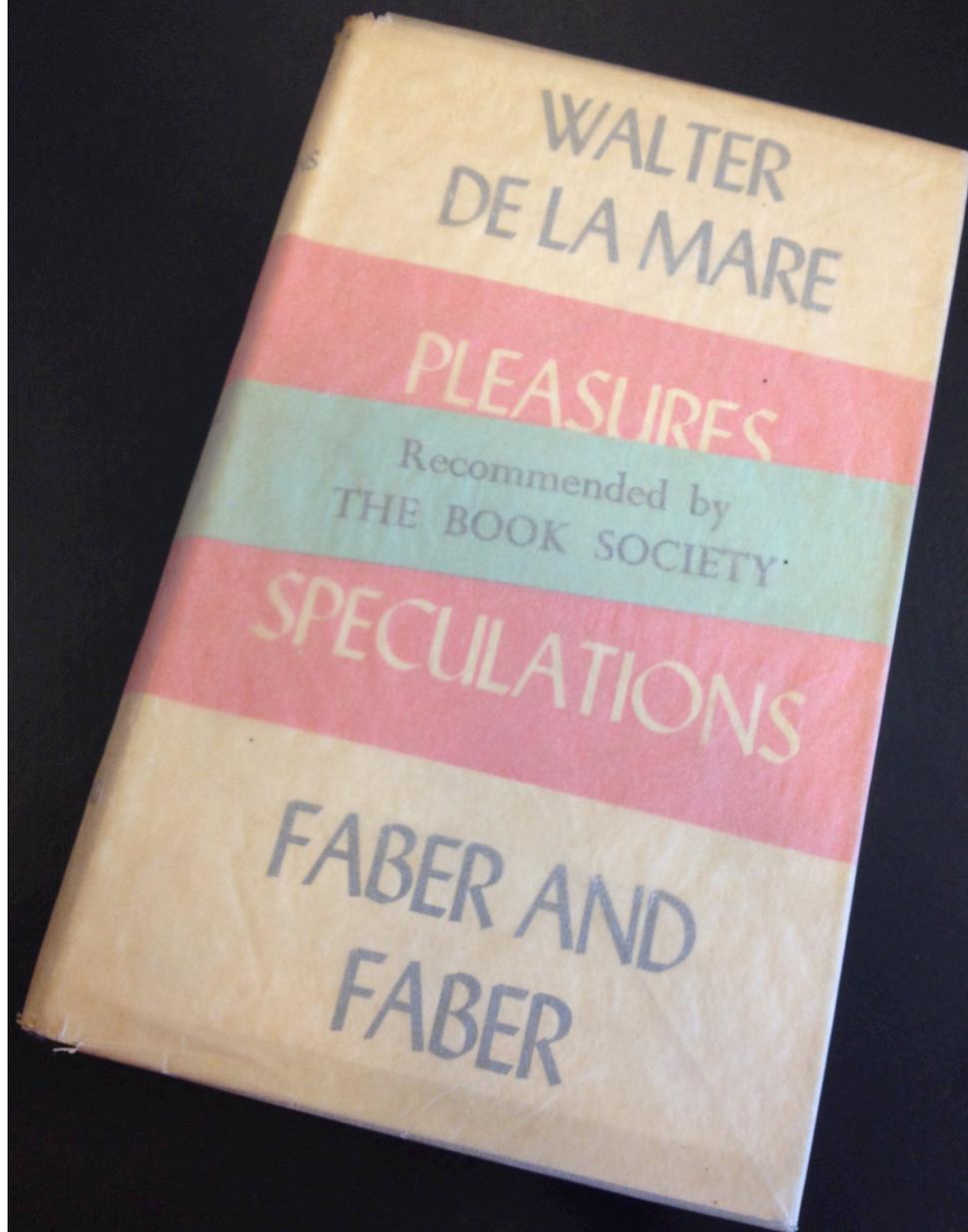
WALTER-SUPER-MARE (*with soft pedal*) GREET'S THE DAWN.

Punch, November 22nd, 1922. Image © Punch Ltd., used under license.



Among my early – though not my very earliest – recollections is that of a far-away Christmas morning ... I can very easily descry ... the small boy of six or seven I then was ... It is not, however, the orange or the apple or the threepenny bit that incarnadines the occasion, but a Book: a limp, broad picture-book, printed in bold type, with half a dozen or so full-page plates in the primary colours – Gulliver, pinned down by lank strands of his hair and being dragged along by a team of cart-horses, fifty strong, on a vast shallow dray with wheels like reels of cotton; Gulliver entertaining (and being richly entertained by) two sneezing Lilliputians in his gold snuff-box; Gulliver with desperate head just emerging from a Brobdingnagian bowl of cream.

Quoted in Reid's (1929) *Walter de la Mare*, pp. 11-12



These pages are concerned chiefly with the 'pleasures' to be found in books whatever their intrinsic value; from the supreme heights of poetry itself down to – almost anywhere. As a bibliophagist, too ... I have never succeeded in keeping 'life' out. Hence the 'speculations'.

Pleasures and Speculations, p. xii

*The good die first ... And they whose hearts are dry as
summer dust Burn to the socket. –Wordsworth*

Whom the gods love die young was said of yore. – Byron

Pleasures and Speculations, 1940

*For those whom the gods love (and poets beyond most men
seem destined to die young) a hundred years affords ample
time, not only for their life's achievement, but also for a lull, a
brief reflective silence in which posterity may hope to count
up its gains.*

Times Literary Supplement, 1909

Such is the fate of the vast majority of writers. And in fiction, if to be not forgotten and revivable is one's faint hope, it appears to be wiser to aim at the imaginatively real than at the realistically exact or over-earnest.

Pleasures and Speculations, 1940

In the midst of the battle maybe it is indiscreet to muse on the tranquil moonlit indifference of the night that will follow. Yet one cannot but be reminded of it as one grubs and burrow in these old novels – re-animating old heroines, not merely dead and buried (for no novelist has power to keep them so) but forgotten. It may be that many devotees still visit the derelict scene. If it is not so, may I be forgiven for disturbing its peace.

Granville-Barker (ed.). *The Eighteen-seventies: Essays by Fellows of the Royal Society of Literature, 1929*

In so many of the longer poems there are traces of that social prudery, and of the genteel, exemplified in the opening line of Sea Dreams: 'A city clerk, but gently born and bred.' His salary is referred to as 'gains.' And often when Tennyson mentions the merely ordinary it is with a rather wry effect. It shows in its context like a patch of wool in silk embroidery.

Pleasures and Speculations, p. 37

*A CITY clerk, but gently born and bred;
His wife, an unknown artist's orphan child –
One babe was theirs, a Margaret, three years old:
They, thinking that her clear germander eye
Droopt in the giant-factoried city-gloom
Came, with a month's leave given them, to the sea:
For which his gains were dock'd, however small:
Small were his gains and hard his work*

Tennyson (1936) *Poems, 1830-1870*, p. 720

Underlined in [WdIM] 404

720 *Cause a vague disquietude*

*He wont [sic] put the right word if it won't fit into the poem
quite rightly, as if the poem justifies the attention. But does it ?
more onthe [sic]*

*The nature bits are superficial like / fagots
of embroidery or too simple*

Transcription of back-of-book annotation in Walter de la Mare's
hand in [WdIM] 404

Excuse me!

27. iv. 38

Transcription of note in Walter de la Mare's hand at base of front
fly-leaf of [WdIM] 404

... For, it seemeth there are certaine motions in these vast bodies, some naturall, and other some febricitant, as well as in ours.

feverish

Montaigne (1897). *The essayes of Michael Lord of Montaigne: Book 1, volume 2*, p. 35. Underlined in [WdIM] 267. Word in bold written in margin in Walter de la Mare's hand.

... who neverthelesse to publish this little scantling, will undertake to write of all the Physickes ...

pittance

Montaigne (1897), p. 35. Underlined and glossed in [WdIM] 267.

... Scattering here one and there another word: Scantlings taken from their maine ground-work, disorderly dispersed, without any well-grounded design and promise ...

pittances

Montaigne (1897), p. 237. Underlined and glossed in [WdIM] 267.

... The fact remains
 that while there is a vast amount of verse that is not poetry, the
 majority of those whom the world regards as poets have written in **But compare**
verse, and at this point it is, therefore, clearly legitimate to return **with it their**
 to our original question, and to ask 'Why is poetry written in **more imaginative**
 verse?' **prose**

Hartog (1926) *On the relation of poetry to verse*, p. 7. Underlined in [WdIM] 126y.
 Words in bold written in the margin in Walter de la Mare's hand.

But is it the
music that does this; **x**
is it not rather *For myself, the music of these lines makes them difficult to under-*
the irrational *stand and not easy ...*
use of alliteration
assonance &
so forth?

Hartog (1926), p. 13. Underlined with marginal notes in [WdIM] 126y.

