

WALTER DE LA MARE

THE OTHERS

‘Friendly?’ ‘I think.’ ‘Or—neutral?’ ‘How to tell?’
 ‘Not hostile?’ ‘Well, who then would intercede?’
 ‘And do you rap? Or crystal gaze? Or set
 Traps in the dark?—glass, Ouija, or planchette?
 A Madame Medium pay? Book—candle—bell?’
 ‘Oh no; I sit and read?’
 ‘Or merely sit!’

‘Sometimes. Why not? The air,
 Wild Ariel’s air, must thrill with secrecies
 Beyond the tentacles of sense. *We* share
 Our thoughts and feelings only by surmise.
 You speak: I watch and listen. But faith alone
 Vows that the wellspring of your life’s my own.
 And when goodbye is said, and comes the night,
 What proof has each of either—out of sight?
 Yes, even now—to eyes of love how clear!—
 It is the ghost in you I hold most dear.
 When then you challenge me, in mockery or dismay,
 My evidence for *them*, I can but say,
 The deeper my small solitude may be
 The surer it of unseen company.
 It haunts with loveliness this silent night.
 “Evils?” They too may prowl. ’Gainst them we had best
 Guard unrelentingly both mind and breast.
 I cannot answer, *No*, then. Only pray
 Fortress of life and love the soul shall stay.
 And “good-night” come . . . Well, this shall be confessed:
 It grieves me to the heart when, blessing the Blest,
 I add, Alas!—what truth dare not betray—
 They are the happier when I am away.’

W. H. AUDEN

CRISIS

"Of my sowing such straw I reap. O human folk, why set the heart there
where exclusion of partnership is necessary?" Purgatorio XIV. 85-87.

Where do They come from, those whom we so much dread,
As on our dearest location falls the chill
Of their crooked wing and endangers
The melting friend, the aquaduct, the flower?

Terrible Presences that the ponds reflect
Back at the married, and when the blond boy
Bites eagerly into the shining
Apple, emerge in their shocking fury.

And we realise the woods are deaf and the sky
Nurses no one, and we are awake and these
Like farmers have purpose and knowledge,
And upon us their hate is directed.

We are the barren pastures to which they bring
The resentment of outcasts; on us they work
Out their despair; they wear our weeping
As the disgraceful badge of their exile.

O we conjured them here like a lying map:
Desiring the extravagant joy of life
We lured with a mirage of orchards
Fat in the lazy climate of refuge.

Our money sang like streams on the aloof peaks
Of our thinking that beckoned them on like girls;
Our culture like a West of wonder
Shone a solemn promise in their faces.