

"The Listeners" is a single-stanza poem of thirty-six lines, rhyming abcb. Evidently to keep some promise, perhaps to those who are no longer alive, since he is "the one man left awake" (line 32). Something, though, has caused him to come to this lonely and isolated place in the middle of the night and compelled him to cry out repeatedly to a deserted house, without entering to see for himself who or what might be there. De la Mare builds on the paradoxes and ironies inherent in the situation, opposing the "lonely" traveler to the "lone" house, and his standing "still" because he is perplexed and wondering to the "phantom listeners" who are "still" in the sense of being quiet (and perhaps dead). The place in the forest where the traveler finds himself is deserted and overgrown with brambles; the sense of isolation and strangeness causes the lonely human visitor first to knock on the door of the turreted house, then to smite it, and finally to smite it even louder, as his cries receive no response. One soon discovers, however, that it is only he who is perplexed and lonely in this nighttime scene; nature ignores the phantoms, as is seen by his horse contentedly champing the grasses and by the bird in the house's turret being disturbed, not by anything eerie or frightening in the natural scene, but by his voice and loud knocking. The poem begins in medias res, with the traveler knocking on a moonlit door in an unknown place.