



Between Two Worlds: The Impossibility of Connection in 'The Listeners'

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Abstract

The Listeners by Walter de la Mare (1912) is a chilling account of the ultimate impossibility of inter-relationship between two distinct worlds of existence. This paper explores how this poem creates an insurmountable barrier between the living and the spectral, the mortal and the immortal, by means of its main experience between the Traveller and the phantom listeners. Though the Traveller discharges his duty on earth by coming and delivering his word, his listeners are still in their supernatural space where they can only watch him without making a sound. This paper presents an argument that de la Mare employs the failed encounter to symbolize more generalized and universal human experiences of isolation, lack of fulfilled communication and the deep-seated loneliness created when presence cannot be transformed into authentic connection by way of close observation of the imagery, structure, and purposeful ambiguities of the poem.

The three main dimensions of this impossibility explored in the paper include the physical dimension (the closed door), the ontological distance between the world of the living and the world of the listeners and the emotional distance caused by one-sided communication. De La Mare does not give explanatory context or resolution, compelling the reader to deal with the fact of discomfort that certain divides cannot be crossed, certain messages cannot be received and certain promises can never be fulfilled no matter how faithful a speaker is. As the analysis will show, The Listeners supports a rather basic storyline moment and turns it into a reflection on the boundaries of human contact and the continuation of solitude despite an audience.

Paper Info

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1. Introduction

"Is there anybody there?" The first line of the Walter de la Mares poem The listeners rings throughout the history of literature history as one of the most chilling questions in English poetry. Written in 1912, the poem depicts a very simple situation to the readers: a lonely

traveller comes to an empty house, in the middle of the forest, under the moon, knocks on the door, calls two times, and, not receiving any human response, delivers his message and leaves. But even in this short story, there is a deep contemplation of one of the most basic fears of the human species, which is that what we are trying to do in order to connect, communicate, and fulfill our duties, might end up being met by silence, that the distance between our self and the other, between intention and receipt, may be insurmountable.

What the poem does not describe is the secret of its long lasting power. De la Mare notoriously did not give any version of the work whatsoever, claiming that the poem in itself was its own interpretation. This intentional vagueness has spawned more than a hundred years of critical speculation, Who is the Traveller? What promise did he make? Who were the listeners in life and why are they haunted by their presence? But these are the questions that cannot be answered. The poem embodies a universal break of communication, a time in which two worlds (the mortal and the supernatural) (the spoken and the unspoken), (the living and the dead) are close together but fail to solve the gap between them.

This paper believes that *The Listeners* builds its meaning by developing failed connection in systematic manner. What is happening in the scene at the forest house is not merely failure of devout rendezvous but an ontological impossibility--a clash of radically irreconcilable modes of existence. The Traveller is acting in the realm of promises, travelling and human duty; the listeners are living in the sphere of unchangeable stasis, silent spectators and ghostly depersonalisation by earthly matters. The tragedy of the poem is not in the misconception or inopportune moment but in the understanding that there are certain divides that cannot be crossed no matter how well one attempts it without feeling regret about it or whether one is able to fulfill his part of the bargain in full.

Through the review of the physical, ontological and emotional aspect of this impossibility, this paper will illustrate how de la Mare is turning a Gothic situation into a larger statement regarding the isolation of human beings. The door that was not opened becomes greater than an element of the story, it is the border between the worlds which can not be crossed. The silence of the listeners is not the refusal but the inability or incapability - they are in a condition which excludes the answer. The departure of the Traveller is, rather, acceptance of an unheroic distance. At an age of modernism when the human audience has grown more worried about fragmentation, alienation, and the breakdown of traditional structures of meaning, *The Listeners* seizes something fundamental about human condition: the manner in which loneliness remains ever-in-spite of audience, and the extent of solitude that follows any effort to make oneself heard through the void.

2. Literature Review

The critical analysis of Walter de la Mare "*The Listeners*" has developed over time since the poem was originally published in 1912, as the critical analysis of early twentieth-century poetry and the supernatural in literature shifted. Although the poem has continued to hold a central place in the anthologies and discussions of de la Mare, the critical interpretations of the poem have been both biographical and structural, psychological and analyses of its place in the literary traditions.

Early Critical Reception and Georgian Poetry Context

Initial criticism of *The Listeners* placed the poem in the Georgian poetry movement, with its music, romantic imagery and non-Victorianism. The poem does not have much in the way of thematic intricacies, as critics of this period used to dwell on the atmospheric air and technical skill of the poem. De la Mare himself was often put in the same category with other Georgian poets who focused on rural settings, folk forms and familiar language. This categorization, however, has since been found to be restrictive, as critical opinion has increasingly acknowledged how *The Listeners* is the poem that is subtly challenging the pastoral optimism of Georgian verse, and, instead, offers a more disturbing, even disturbing, picture of modernist issues of fragmentation and alienation.

Supernatural and Gothic Interpretations

A significant amount of criticism has been produced to analyze the supernatural and Gothic literature in *The Listeners*. These readings underline the fact that the poem is related to the ghost stories and that it uses the traditional Gothic themes such as the lonely house, the moonlit background, and the ghostly appearances. Theorists in this school have examined the way de la Mare applies Gothic tropes to poetic structure to form what could be called a kind of Gothic lyric that shrinks the narrative breadth of Gothic prose into condensed poetic visuals. The phantom listeners themselves have had several interpretations as ghosts or as the reflection of the psychological condition of the Traveller and as an allegory of the power of the past and its constant grip on the present.

Ambiguity and Interpretive Openness

One of the unrelenting negative issues perhaps has been the conscious vagueness of the poem and refusal to be definitively interpreted. Even de la Mare himself has been quoted in the scholarly literature that the poem is his own denial of explanation as an invitation and as a challenge to the reader(s). This openness has been heralded by some as an identifying characteristic of the aesthetic success of the poem whereby the unanswered questions are claimed to be the primary meaning of the work. Others have tried to make conjectures about what story could have gotten the Traveller to his place, his pledge, and his audience using folklore, biblical references and biographical information about de la Mare himself. These interpretive attempts, although differing, all tend to take cognizance of the fact that the strength of the poem lies at least in part in what it does not tell.

Symbolism and Metaphorical Readings

Metaphorical and symbolic readings have multiplied, and there are different allegorical systems suggested by scholars on how the poem can be understood. The Traveller has been interpreted as a quest of meaning on the part of man, the artist to find his audience, the faithful person to face divine silence or the living person to face mortality. The listeners have been understood to symbolize the dead, people who have been lost, forgotten responsibilities or the insensitive universe. The home as such has been interpreted to refer to memory, the past, the unconscious mind or the border between the life and the next world. Although the particular claims made in these readings vary, they all have an assumption that the poem is working on

various levels in the same time, which encourages readers to go beyond literal interpretation to wider existential and philosophical issues.

Communication and Isolation

More recent criticism has shifted the focus to the topic of the breakdown in communication and existential isolation in the poem. These readings tend to place *The Listeners* in the context of larger modernist concerns regarding the disintegration of the sign world and the inability to hold genuine contact within the ever more fragmented world. The theme that critics in this line have explored has been the dramatization of the divide between the intention and its reception, the insufficiency of language to span the most basic divides, and the impossibility of connection even at the times when contact is sought. This strategy shifts off the efforts to figure out the mysteries of the poem and instead the subject and meaning of the poem becomes the failed encounter itself.

Liminal Spaces and Threshold Experiences

Based on anthropological and phenomenological paradigms, others have discussed the poem *The Listeners* as a threshold poem and liminality. These readings address the way the poem frames its main encounter around different borders: forest and dwelling, exterior and interior, day and night, living and dead, sound and silence. These interpretations make the door especially important as the literal and metaphorical point that cannot be crossed, the impossibility to undergo the transition between radically different states of existence. Such critical treatment has been particularly fruitful in trying to see how the spatial forms in the poem express its thematic interests in separation and the distance that cannot be bridged.

Psychological and Phenomenological Approaches

The poem has been discussed in terms of psychological criticism which focuses on Freudian interpretations, which are based on the unconscious drives and suppressed memories, and phenomenological interpretations, which are about the subjective experience and perception of the Traveller. These readings tend to be very particular to the sensory aspects of the poem, the sounds of the hooves, the silence, the moonlight, the voice which echoes, all of them as indicators of consciousness in relation to otherness. The debate as to whether the listeners are perhaps the projections of mind of the Traveller or whether they are real people has preoccupied critics in this tradition, although a growing number of other scholars have suggested that such dichotomy could be a false dichotomy in which the poem explores the more nuanced aspects of possibilities of presence and absence, reality and fantasy to coexist simultaneously.

Gaps in Existing Scholarship

The gaps in scholarship of the work concerning *The Listeners* are still important, despite this rich critical history. Most of the studies have mentioned that the poem was concerned with the

issue of failed communication, but few studies have comprehensively addressed the various dimensions into which this impossibility falls as well as the interaction of physical, ontological and emotional barriers to produce the effect of the poem. Also, although ambiguity has been identified as a feature of the poem by its critics, little concern has been raised regarding the fact that the ambiguity in itself is a formal device of depicting irreconcilable distance. There is further analysis to be had on the interplay between the withholding of information in the poem and its thematic interest in the problem of failed connection.

This paper correlates with the already existing literature and fills these gaps by offering a detailed analysis of how the impossibility as the central theme is built in *The Listeners*. Instead of trying to make out the ambiguities of the poem, or trying to come up with another allegorical interpretation, this paper explores the processes by which the poem embodies and enacts the impossibility of connection, and explores how form and content combine to produce a meditation upon the impossibility of communication and the continued existence of isolation in human life.

3. Analysis and Discussion

3.1 The Physical Barrier: The Unopened Door.

The most obvious and immediate expression of impossibility in the sense of the term in *The Listeners* is that of the physical barrier of the door which stays closed during the confrontation. This door has several levels in the poem, namely: it is a realistic, it is a symbolic threshold, and it is a principle that the whole narrative is structured on. The Traveller knocks twice, but the door is never opened. This mere fact creates the dynamic principle of the poem: work without acknowledgment, action without the response, face without entry.

The meaning of the door comes out in its repeated shutting down. In contrast to Gothic stories where doors open and the horrors are inside, or fairy-tales where the correct words might provide one with access to the magic wonders, this door strictly keeps its borders. The physical behavior of the Traveller, his knocking, his calling out, should be expected to result in an opening door as a natural cause and effect reaction but the cause and effect connection fails completely. The door turns out to be a place where common sense cannot work, where human will cannot yield its desired result.

The most heartrending aspect of this hindrance is the fact that it seems to have been overcome. No great seal, no express ban, no sword that does not permit entrance. It is merely a door that is not opened by anybody inside. This brings about a curious form of impossibility nothing dramatic like locked gates, impassable walls, but the silent impossibility of absence, of the absence of someone to carry out the most basic human act of opening a door to a visitor. The obstacle is not sustained by the power of its own, but by its absence, or rather, by some presence which is unable or unwilling to become action.

The metaphysics of the poem is structured by the spatial arrangement on the part of the closed door structures. The Traveller is still out, in the moonlit world, the world of forest, horse, world of nature, of travel, of mortality. The audience

members are left indoors, on a stair, in the darkness, the world of nothingness, inhabitation, and ghostly life. These worlds are separated by an indicator which is the door, which establishes a boundary or separates the two worlds by exclusion. Nor does either of the sides overstep this line; they both remain on their own side. It is the space organization of the poem which therefore literalizes its thematic interest with unbridgeable distance.

Besides, the open door leaves an acoustical anomaly that builds the distinction. The voice of the Traveller has to go through the door, through wood, into the inner darkness, to reach the listeners. His words are introduced to their world and he is not allowed to follow. This results into an imbalance where the communication runs in a single direction which is the outside to the inside and cannot be returned. The audience listens and cannot be heard, receives, but cannot give, in their turn. The physical barrier therefore creates a communicative barrier which transforms the spatial separation into a relational impossibility.

3.2The Ontological Divide: Non-Being and Being.

Not just in the physical door, but somewhere deeper, is the ontological divide between the alive Traveller and the spectral listeners. This is not that of a difference of place but of a difference of kind, of mode of existence. The poem is a close way to create the situation when the Traveller and the listeners are in various orders of reality, and this is the only way that real communication between them is impossible no matter how close and willing they are.

The Traveller is in the real world of the mortal. He goes, he does, he talks, he leaves. He possesses a horse, which is stamping and still. He possesses a voice that produces echoes. He is bound and time conscious--he has come because he has promised to come. All of this implies that he is a part of the world of transformation, movement, and time flow. He is defined with his ability to act and his incorporation into a web of human commitments and anticipations.

The audience on the other hand are all in a state that is suspended. Listening, they are at the stair. This is all they do, this is all that characterizes them. They do not move, do not speak, do not open doors and do not meet their duties. They are just, in a state of existence which does not appear to allow becoming. The poem tells them that they are a phantom, which automatically points to their non-existence in the real world of physical matter. But they are not altogether absent,

they are there, they are there, they are listening. Their ontological position is therefore contradictory: it is an existence of absence, a being characterized by the inability to do all the things that would verify their existence to the living world.

This ontological distinction is the reason as to why the encounter should not work. The Traveller wants answer, recognition, reciprocation, everything that involves being involved in the temporal world of causes and effects. The listeners, in their spectral state are unable to give what he desires. They are incapable of opening doors, of speaking, of making themselves known to him in ways he needs. The nature of their existence prohibits even the types of interactions that would have formed an effective communication. They are not declining to answer, and they cannot answer in any way the living world can acknowledge.

This incompatibility is highlighted in the poem as sound is treated. The voice of the Traveller causes reverberations in the deserted hall, giving a kind of reply to the physical world--but none to the hearers. Sound is an element of the real, the quantifiable, the sensual. This realm is above or below that territory, to which the listeners are in a state where they do not respond in the physical sense that sound can cause to them. They listen, yet they are not able to make themselves heard. This is not a failure of will but it is their state of being.

Moreover, the poem gives an indication that this gap cannot be overcome. The ritual that could bring the listeners into sight does not exist, nor is there any magic that could enable the Traveller to enter their world. The two orders of existence are just parallel to each other and only have overlaps but they do not merge. The Traveller is conscious of their presence-- he was conscious in his heart of their strangeness--but this consciousness cannot be made to communicate. Being made to feel their strangeness, only drives the ontological gap between them by validating rather than sealing the gap.

3.3 The Emotional Chasm: The loneliness of the Traveller.

The spatial and existential divides lead to the emotional fact: the severe isolation of the Traveller. Although, in a way, he is present among witnesses, although he is able to convey his message successfully, although he fulfills his promise, the Traveller is alone in his core. This is the human condition of being lonely due to the absence of being able to connect, and this is what the poem has its emotional impact and its existential meaning.

The isolation of the Traveller is shown in the form of confusion and uncertainty. Not only is his question, repetition of it,----Is there anybody there?--not merely a question but a need. He needs to be assured, to be noticed, to know somehow that he is there and what he is saying is being heard. This is a failure to respond

and this leaves him in doubt. He is feeling something--he felt in his heart that they were not like him, his horse in the quiet trotting on the grasses--but feeling is not knowing, and is certainly not relating. He is deprived of knowledge without knowing, being without communion.

This emotional condition is aggravated as the poem moves on. The Traveller passes out of interrogating to stating: Tell them I came and no one replied, that I was true to my word. There is a lot of emotional depth to this statement. On the one hand, it is mere stating of the fact. In another, it is a statement of loyalty amidst seemingly miscarried love. He meant what he said; they (whoever they were) did not mean what they said by being there to take him. The statement therefore mixes integrity claim with the failure acknowledgement with the disappointment of self-justification.

However, the tragedy becomes all the more prominent when we are notified of the fact that even this message is not recognized. The Traveller addresses his article to the silence, and passes away. He does not get any confirmation that his message was received, no pardon, no reconciliation. Even his last sign of communication, the very reason he has come to visit, is met by the same silence that answered his knocking the first time. He walks away with having technically served his duty but having failed to do anything of substance in the experience. This is fulfilled in letter and not in spirit; there is no mutual awareness of the fulfillment.

The horse turns into a sad point in this context of isolation. It is its sole companion, the sole creature that partakes of his rank of being. The only answers that the Traveller gets are the actions of the horse, as he chews on grass, and stands motionless. This reinforces how he is alone in his own kind; even at a simple level of companionship, he has no one to converse with, at least not a fellow being that can comprehend his meaning or be disappointed with him. The horse is also indifferent and the listeners remain silent, and the Traveller is enclosed by the non-response.

Besides, the solitude of the Traveller, as he enters the forest, is also an effective image. He rides away, and the hooves of his horse are heard at length to be silent. The poem concludes not with a resolution but with a dissolution, the Traveller going back to the darkness he was born into him bringing his unsatisfied desire to be connected to the lonely night. The circular shape, which breaks out of the darkness, is momentarily lightened in the moonlit clearing, and goes back to the darkness, indicates that his isolation is not a transient state but his permanent state. The aborted meeting is no exception but a validation of the irredeemable distance that characterizes his life.

This isolation is further enhanced by the fact that his errand is emotional in nature. He arrived to fulfill an obligation, an activity, which has the connotation of relationship, trust, mutual obligation. Promises are part of relationships of human interdependence; they presuppose a reciprocity and understanding. But in

his effort to venerate this most essentially relational of human action there is an utter failure of relation Aboriginal failure. The act itself intended to affirm association can only expose aloofness. This turns his faithfulness into some sort of tragedy himself--he has held faith to those who are not able to recognize his holding faith, and the very holding faith is a lonely and ultimately futile thing in the eyes of communion.

3.4 Narrative Structure and the Enactment of Impossibility

Every line shape leans into what cannot be reached. Though built on silence, the way de la Mare arranges events lets doubt grow slowly - like breath fogging glass. Questions rise without answers because shifts in sight refuse clarity. Instead of telling, the rhythm lives out absence, step by step. Distance isn't named; it settles between words, felt more than seen.

Out of nowhere, the tale drops us straight into motion - no warnings. Who the Traveller might be slips past unnoticed. His origins? A blank. The promise he carries hangs loose, unattached to any name. Straight away, things feel off-kilter. Just like him, we land mid-stride into something already moving. Missing pieces scatter beneath our feet: nothing fits yet. Something stays unclear as the poem places its audience where the Traveller stands - aware but not sure. Hints come through instead of facts, much like how he feels out the listeners without seeing them. Not knowing lands both in the same quiet space. Certainty slips away, leaving only feeling.

Floating through the entire piece, uncertainty shapes each line. A single clear image still leaves things hanging. Who the Traveller really is stays out of reach. How those listening connect to him - never explained. Something about the promise stays hidden. Why the house sits empty - never said. Missing pieces like these feel on purpose, not by mistake. Information gets left out, again and again, so you can't piece together what came before. Instead, you're stuck right here, now, facing only what's in front of you, with nothing familiar to hold onto.

This way of structuring mirrors what the story is about. Because the Traveller never sees inside the minds of those listening, readers also stay outside the true heart of the tale. Since entry stays blocked for the Traveller, some parts of meaning stay out of reach for us too. Uncertainty becomes part of how it's built, so reading feels like facing distances you can't cross. Left standing - aware but not knowing everything - you mirror that figure at the threshold.

Looking through the poem's eyes adds layers. From outside, it watches - mostly riding along beside the Traveller. His steps mark time: arriving, rapping, shouting, feeling something off, then turning away. Still, we see beyond him somehow. Whispers name unseen crowds inside - the silent watchers who stay put, hearing every word. That gap opens wide - one man lost, others aware - making his blind walk ache more than he ever could. Something watches from nearby - he feels it, though proof slips away. We see what he does not, yet our awareness stays

locked inside us. This shift in sight splits us from him, just like the others who never reach one another in these lines. Distance grows, not by choice, more gaps piling where words should be.

Whispers rise where meaning slips away. Sibilance hums through lines like breath caught mid-air, never quite landing. Pauses interrupt - uneven beats mimic steps unsure of ground beneath. Sound loops within itself: “stood listening,” then “silence surged,” again “lonely Traveller.” These echoes do not build - they circle, stall, refuse departure. Rhythm refuses march; it lingers instead, caught in its own net. Music here does not climb - it hovers, repeats, folds inward. Stopped motion lives inside each line’s pulse.

Funny how the poem just walks away at the end. No answers given. Off goes the Traveller, yet everything stays unsettled. His future? Unknown. Does he rest easy now duty's done? Not said. Any response from those silent ones when he leaves? Left hanging. Story cuts out mid-breath. Everyone frozen where they stood - man by trees, figures on shadowed steps. A lingering uncertainty settles here, mirroring how the Traveller fails to reach understanding with those who hear - so too does the poem fall short with us. Our position echoes theirs, suspended without completion. The absence of answers becomes its own message.

3.5 Greater Implications: The Human Condition.

Although listeners involves a defined supernatural situation, the use of impossibility in the story connects with the wider levels of human experience. The poem applies its Gothic machinery to discuss some of the most basic questions in existence, communication, mortality, and the boundaries of human connection. The unsuccessful experience in the forest house turns into the prism according to which it is possible to analyze the different versions of the unbridgeable distance in which human life is placed.

A distance is one of them, a temporal distance. The poem may be interpreted as a form of existence of the connection between the past and the present between living and the dead. When the listeners are interpreted as being the people who have already died, the unsuccessful effort of the Traveller to communicate with them dramatizes the basic obstacle that death places. However accurately we memorize, no matter how earnestly we make an effort to pay tribute to the dead we cannot converse with them in the ways we wish. They exist in the memory, maybe, but not in reality. There is, however, no keeping in action of the promise to the dead which cannot be confirmed in recognition--they cannot tell us that they know, cannot forgive us, cannot answer our signs. This reading turns the poem into a meditation on grief and one-sidedness of continuing relationship with people we have lost.

Existential isolation that defines individual consciousness is also enlightened in the poem. Every human being is alone in one way or another, within his or her subjectivity. We are capable of addressing other people, of being physically

present to people, of even knowing them and feeling their strangeness, but we never get complete access to their inside world nor do they get complete access to ours. Half-way is communication, it is always mediated, and it leaves a residue of incommunicable experience. The condition of conscious beings trying to connect through the insurmountable divide of individual selfhood can be seen in the situation of the Traveller which is both present and remote, both speaking and unspeaking, aware and solitary.

In addition, the poem touches upon intention vs. reception that bothers all the communication. The Traveller aims at saying something, and in a way he does it, he utters the words. But communication does not only presuppose a transmission but also a reception, not only speaking but hearing oneself. They can perceive his voice as sound waves to the listeners, but will they get his point? Have they any understanding of his faithfulness, of his promise burden? The poem indicates that the message and the meaning may get lost, that the meaning of what is being said by the words may not get to the recipient. This disjunction stalks all human communication, and makes it a possibility that we are always talking to each other at a distance which we cannot bridge, whose words are heard but not understood.

The poem also addresses religious and metaphysical issues regarding the connection of humanity and the transcendent or divine. The call made by the Traveller, unanswered, as it comprises the question: Is there anybody there? may be interpreted as a prayer that has received no answer and that has sought the divine in vain, or in incomprehensible perfection. The Traveller does not get any answer, no unambiguous sign like many people who pray or need something once they turn to the non-material world. It is that he has to read silence, must forge a meaning out of nothingness. This reading puts the poem in a larger literary tradition that struggles with the godly invisibility, an apparent silence of transcendence in the face of human demand to have confirmation and relation.

The historical context of the poem gives a new meaning to the poem. Written in the year 1912, shortly before the World War I and long before modernization was sweeping over the world, it is possible to interpret that the theme of the Listeners was a reaction to a wider social perception of alienation and disintegration. Old patterns of meaning and community were disintegrating; individuals were growing more distant in the city setting; the evils of the industrial war would soon display the insufficiency of the old certainties. Here the unsuccessful experience of the Traveller may symbolize a more universal contemporary dilemma: of uttering something into emptiness, of attempting to communicate across the distance technology and social transformation has actually increased, despite the fact that it has purportedly simplified communication among people.

But despite that darker suggestion the poem does not altogether discourage hopelessness. The Traveller fulfils his threat. He meets his duty with no

recognition. He behaves uprightly even at the time when no one appreciates the same. This implies a sort of moral position: that we may prefer doing the right thing, doing what we promise, trying to connect, even when we are aware that these efforts may not attain the desired results. The fact that complete connection is impossible does not remove the value of the attempt. Even when there is no reciprocity, the Traveller's faithfulness has a sense, and there is even a possibility that human dignity is precisely in the act of still trying to bridge the impossible distances, in still speaking even when we are met with silence, in still fulfilling our commitments even when we are not made aware that we are honoring.

4. Theoretical and Practical Frameworks

4.1 Theoretical Framework

This work looks at stories through inner experience and mind states, focusing on loneliness, quiet moments, also how talk falls apart. In Walter de la Mare's "The Listeners," one man arrives alone - called the Traveller - knocks into unseen beings, a moment thick with meaning when seen through ideas about existence. A hush fills the space where words should be, showing what it feels like to reach out and find nothing there. The poem holds stillness like a weight, making emptiness speak louder than sound ever could.

Out there, a lone figure moves through quiet space, searching for someone to see them. Because life offers no clear directions, people keep reaching out anyway. Not far away, shadows stand still - never speaking back. Maybe they're too far gone to answer. Or maybe nothing ever really listens at all. Each step forward feels heavy with effort, met only by silence. Even so, voices rise into empty air, hoping somehow to connect. After all, wanting to be heard doesn't stop just because no reply comes.

Silence spreads through the poem, not empty but thick with possibility. When lines vanish or words pull back, attention shifts to gaps where understanding stirs. Wolfgang Iser saw reading as motion - minds reaching toward meaning each time clarity slips away. Instead of answers handed down, uncertainty invites involvement. What stays unspoken pushes thought forward more than fixed statements ever could. Meaning grows in those quiet spots because readers step in to fill them. Not everything gets explained; some things unfold only when someone leans close.

Nowhere is this clearer than in the idea of being on the edge. The Traveller stays in a place that isn't quite here or there - hovering between what can be touched and what cannot, what feels known and what does not. Because of this movement without arrival, real contact slips away; people from either side find themselves unable to close the distance, try as they might.

4.2 Practical Framework

Looking at "The Listeners" up close, the work unpacks pictures made with words alongside how things sound, taking time to peel each part apart. Symbolism comes into view first, then

rhythm, after that form - each piece studied on its own. Meaning grows not fast, but step by step, shaped by what's noticed. Weight gathers quietly, carried by details that stay out of sight. Looking again shows small changes in the way things unfold. What a word does holds more weight than its surface message. Spotting connections takes time, often missed at first glance. The real point slips through silence, never spoken outright.

There it sits, swallowed by silence. Trees press close, forming a ring of black shapes near the empty house. A knock cuts in - fast, loud - filling gaps where voices should be. Distance stays wide between visitor and unseen ones inside. What's felt bends meaning beyond speech.

Quiet takes shape when the Traveller yells without reply. Each echo fading makes a difference. The silence after doesn't sit empty - it weighs heavy. Like standing outside a door that won't open, facing a presence too large to notice. Speech slips away, gone before it lands, replaced by tightness in the chest.

A figure stands not merely as a name but as something heavier - the Wanderer mirrors our need to find purpose, always moving toward. Elsewhere, quiet ones might hold last breaths, fragments of past voices frozen mid-sentence, perhaps unspoken ideas buried deep. That stillness between figures? Far from blank. It stretches like a rift between realms that brush close yet never meet.

5. Conclusion

The Listeners by Walter de la Mare gains its permanence by the use of a multifaceted approach to the subject of impossibility. Through the analysis of the physical barrier of the closed door, the ontological separation between the living and the spectral life and the emotional isolation of the Traveller, this discussion has shown how the poem creates cohesion as something inherently inaccessible across some of these boundaries.

The genius of the poem is that it does not allow settling these impossibilities. The door is still closed, the audience is still dumb, the Traveller is left to his own. This thematic content is reflected in this formal devotion to irresolution producing a text that does what it says.

But the vision suggested by the poem is not all that bad. The faithfulness of the Traveller is the witness of the ability of man to keep to promises without looking at the consequences. The inability to connect does not negate the usefulness of making an attempt to connect. This gesture in itself has a meaning even in cases where it does not succeed to produce the intended outcome.

The relevance of the poem lies in the fact that it addresses experiences, which are still at the core of human life. With new technological levels of interrelation, the loneliness contradiction of being even more connected has never been more pronounced. The Traveller by de la Mare, in front of a closed door and addressing a vacuum is a strong representation to the modern isolation.

The Listeners therefore rises above its time to touch on something essential about the human condition. The poem recognizes the sad aspects of life, yet gives the idea that it is dignified to keep knocking on the doors that might not open, to keep talking and uttering words that might not be heard. Connection between two worlds may be impossible between any two worlds, but the effort to accomplish it is irreducibly human.

This paper has addressed the impossibility as the main organizing principle in The Listeners, yet further research may have a fruitful influence by addressing other similar aspects of the poem. The contribution made by the non-human world and nature, the gendered nature of the Gothic tradition and the lack thereof in the work of de la Mare, the interrelation of the poem

with other works in his oeuvre, and comparative work to other poets working with the subject of liminality and threshold experience are all promising areas of future research. Along with this, reception studies that explore the different ways the reader has thought of the ambiguities of the poem and reacted to it at various times that it was being written, may shed some light to the varied cultural backgrounds under which impossibility is encountered and experienced.

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Abstract in Arabic

المخلص :

تعدّ قصيدة "The Listeners" للشاعر (1912) Walter de la Mare تصويرًا مهيبًا لاستحالة إقامة علاقة تواصل حقيقية بين عالمين متميزين من الوجود. يستكشف هذا البحث كيف تُنشئ القصيدة حاجزًا لا يمكن تجاوزه بين عالم الأحياء والعالم الطيفي، بين الفاني والخالد، من خلال التجربة المركزية التي تجمع بين "المسافر" والمستمعين الأشباح. فعلى الرغم من أن المسافر يؤدي واجبه في العالم المادي بالحضور وإيصال رسالته، إلا أن مستمعيه يظلون في فضائهم فوق الطبيعي، حيث يكتفون بمراقبته دون أن يصدر عنهم أي رد. وي طرح البحث أن دي لا مير يوظف هذا اللقاء الفاشل بوصفه رمزًا لتجارب إنسانية أكثر عمومية وشمولًا، تتمثل في العزلة، وتعذر تحقق التواصل، والوحدة العميقة التي تنشأ حين يعجز الحضور عن التحول إلى اتصال حقيقي. ويعتمد ذلك على قراءة دقيقة لصور القصيدة وبنيتها وغموضها المقصود. ويركز البحث على ثلاثة أبعاد رئيسة لهذه الاستحالة: البعد المادي (الباب المغلق)، والبعد الوجودي المتمثل في المسافة الأنطولوجية بين عالم الأحياء وعالم المستمعين، والبعد العاطفي الناتج عن التواصل أحادي الجانب. ولا يقدم دي لا مير سياقًا تفسيريًا أو حلًا نهائيًا، مما يدفع القارئ إلى مواجهة حقيقة مقلقة مفادها أن بعض الفواصل لا يمكن عبورها، وبعض الرسائل لا يمكن تلقيها، وبعض الوعود لا يمكن الوفاء بها مهما بلغ إخلاص قائلها. وكما سيبيّن التحليل، فإن قصيدة "The Listeners" تحوّل لحظة سردية بسيطة إلى تأمل عميق في حدود التواصل الإنساني واستمرار العزلة رغم وجود "متلقٍ" ظاهري.