

“The Listeners” (Walter De La Mare)

The poem “The Listeners” is written by the well known modern poet, Walter De La Mare. His literary fame mainly revolves around this poem and works for children. Supernaturalism is a predominant element found in his writings and has written many ghost stories, the most famous being ‘The Eight Tales’.

“The Listeners” is a brilliant piece of literature through which ‘Walter De La Mare’ is endeavoring to narrate an incident of a promise that was kept but was not reciprocated. It is a poem which compels the readers to derive interpretations for this poem. The atmosphere created in this poem is diabolic, and haunted, and it is solely upto the reader to bring this poem to life.

The poet is talking about a weary horse rider who eventually reaches his destination in the darkest hour of the night. The moonlight shining bright and bathing a particular house in its glory. Dismounting from the horse, the rider wastes no time in knocking at the mysterious door. The horse relieved of its burden eats the grass to its heart’s content. The forest floor covered with plants. In this atmosphere of absolute stillness, the sounds that are heard are that of the horses

chewing the grass and a bird scarring out of the tower of the mansion. It seemed that the bird was awakened by the arrival of the traveller and the supernatural phenomena within the house. Baffled and perplexed by no response from the depth of the house, the traveler knocked the door for the second time. In spite of the second attempt no one moved downward from the mansion towards the traveler, nor did a keen welcoming voice call out from the border of the window, laced with leaves. Neither did anybody bent out of the window to know who the caller might be at the unearthly hour. The traveler expected at least someone to open the ground floor window, peep and stare into the dull and worried eyes of the traveler. The traveler stood transfixed and flustered and sound of silence became his patient listener. But, it seemed that whoever lived in that moonlit solitary house could only acknowledge the presence of the traveler by a deeper shade of silence. The world of the immortals within the house was moved by the only mortal sound around. The only witness to this sight were his horse and the stream of moonlight that unoccupied hall and ascended up those uncanny stairs. It is not that the traveler was not received by anyone but it so happened that they has become the inhabitants of the next world. The spirits within the house heard each word of the caller and were disturbed in their stark silence as the

words he spoke penetrated their soul. The supernatural aspect of the house casts a shadow on the traveler who now stands frozen with confusion and fright. The absence of any kind of sound or movement sends a chill up his spine. While the meeting between the mortals and the immortals was progressing, his horse continued eating grass under the shield of the stars and the trees unmoved by the events of the night. Baffled and frustrated, the weary traveler knocks a third time. He screams to the inhabitants of the house to tell them that he was present and he did not fail to keep his promise. The listeners did not respond in any way and the silence kept growing graver, unable to meet the requirements of the traveler and bound by unforeseen circumstances, the listeners heard him departing as he mounted his horse and the sound of the horse was heard on the cobbled ground . With his departure the sounds of silence moved forward and upward, without failing to notice the unsteady movement and the uncontrollable steps of the horse and its rider.

The poet through this poem basically talks about keeping one's promises and he also reflects of the inability of the mortals to communicate with the immortals who died before fulfilling their promises.

Poetic Techniques

“The Listeners”

1. **Alliteration:** The repetition of consonant sounds within close proximity, usually in consecutive words within the same sentence or line e.g., ‘she sells sea shells on the sea shore’, ‘And the furrow followed free’.

Examples of Alliteration in the poem “The Listener” are ‘Forest’s ferny floor’, ‘Stood perplexed and still’, ‘stirred and shaken’, ‘suddenly smote the door’, ‘louder and lifted’, ‘Silence surged softly backward’.

2. **Onomatopoeia:** When sounds are spelled out as words, or when words describing sounds actually sound like the sounds they describe, e.g. ‘Over the cobbles he clattered and clashed’, ‘the hissing of the snake and the buzzing of the bee disturbed me’.

Onomatopoeia words in the poem are: ‘Chomped’, ‘Smote’, ‘Echoing’, ‘plunging’

3. **Binary Image:** when the poet makes use of two contrasting things or ideas, it is known as binary technique. It is used to give more poetic weightage to the lines that have been written e.g.

'Hot and Cold', 'new and old', 'thick and thin', summer and winter'.

The use of two binary images has been done in the poem.

'Perplexed and still', 'leaned over and looked into'.

- 4. Metaphor:** A host of phantomine listeners and the voice of worlds of men

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