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Original Paper

The Limits of Resonance: Auditory Narrative in James Joyce's "The Dead"

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Abstract

The sound elements in Joyce's "The Dead" have attracted academic attention. Still, related discussions have mostly focused on a single kind of sound, such as music, singing, or silence, and have not fully explored how sounds collectively organize the relationships between characters and perceptual experiences. This paper takes an auditory narrative perspective, combining concepts such as "soundscape", "auscultation", and silence to examine the narrative function of sound and auditory experience in the short story. The paper argues that while the story constructs a superficially shared auditory space through the annual dance soundscape, the ineffective responses and Gabriel's reliance on "being heard" expose the fragility of this "shared listening". "Distant music", silence, and the sound of snow propel the narrative from public noise to Gabriel's inward auscultation, causing the auditory shareability to diminish continuously. This paper thus points out that the auditory narrative in "The Dead" does not lead to perfect communication, but rather presents a heartfelt yet limited resonance between people through the transition between noise and silence, providing a new perspective for understanding characters' inner experience and the limitations of interpersonal relationships in Joyce's works.

Keywords

"The Dead", auditory narrative, soundscape, auscultation, limited resonance

1. Introduction

Gabriel stood still in the gloom of the hall and gazed up at his wife, who was standing on the stairs in the shadow and "listening to distant music", with grace and mystery in her attitude (Joyce, 2015). This scene, in Joyce's "The Dead", has long been read as a poetic turning point, with the singing triggering Gretta's memories and Gabriel's emotional turmoil. Yet, an expanded scope from the "distant music" to

the whole text leads to the discovery that the sounds in "The Dead" do not manifest solely at this particular moment. From the noise, laughter, and musical sounds of the annual dance to the "distant music" upstairs, and eventually to a more private, subdued sonic environment, sound helps shape both the changing relations among characters and the shifting focus of the narrative.

Existing scholarship on sound in "The Dead" falls broadly into two strands: the more established body of music-centered research, and the smaller but growing body of research on sound and auditory experience. In the first strand, early studies focused on the close connection between the songs, plot development, and the characters' emotions in "The Dead". Paul Barolsky pointed out that Bartell D'Arcy's singing not only reminds Gretta of Michael Furey but also deepens Gabriel's melancholy and contemplation (Barolsky, 1989). Later, Joseph S. O'Leary further advanced this line of research by arguing that the key to "The Dead" lies in Joyce's organization of the story as a "musical structure" (O'Leary, 1996), rather than in the symbolic meaning of isolated songs or musical passages.

Taken together, early literature on this topic emphasized intertextual and structural correspondence between music and the text, whereas later studies complicated this understanding or even challenged the harmony implied by such correspondences. For example, Julie Henigan proposed that what drives the emotional and narrative transition in "The Dead" is not merely the parallelism between the lyrics and the plots, but the "old Irish tonality" and the strong appeal of the traditional folk song *The Lass of Aughrim* (Henigan, 2007). By contrast, Benang Xuan argued that Joyce's "polyphonic narrative" is not simply a pursuit of harmony, but rather an evolution from musicalization to demusicalization (Xuan, 2022). Music-oriented research, then, has gradually moved from the matched musical structure to its inner conflicts and tensions.

In contrast to this relatively mature line of research, discussions on the broader sense of sound and the auditory subject in "The Dead" remain limited in number, although they have gradually expanded in scope. Earlier related studies, while not entirely detached from music, began to notice the similar organization of characters' inner voices and narrative voices. Vincent B. Sherry specially pointed out that Joyce composed a truly "thought-tormented music" with Gabriel's inner monologues (Sherry, 1984). In this account, sound is no longer merely external music, but begins to penetrate the characters' consciousness, and emotional progression increasingly relies on the flow of inner voices.

Following this path, other studies shifted their focus to the relationships between characters' voices and narrative. Bruce Avery examined details such as music, laughter, and the tone of voice to unravel the connection between the narrator's speech and characters' voices (Avery, 1991). Sound has gradually been viewed as possessing a narrative function beyond the realm of "music". Based on this, later research explored the "sound" in "The Dead" as the coexistence and conflicts between multiple social discourses and characters' stances. Mehmet Akif Balkaya argued that Joyce did not control the characters with the author's voice, but rather allowed characters to speak from their respective social, cultural, and ideological positions, and to continuously push Gabriel's understanding of himself and

others through discourse interaction (Balkaya, 2017).

Recently, with advances in sound research and auditory narrative, silence, as an important component of auditory experience, has also begun to attract scholars' attention. For instance, Sangam MacDuff put forward that the epiphanies in *Dubliners* do not rely on a single, straightforward revelation, but are built upon the joint effect of "silence" and "repetition" (MacDuff, 2020). A key insight of this article is that auditory experience in "The Dead" is not limited to clearly audible singing, laughter, or speech, but rather, silence, pauses, and faint sounds may also belong to the story's auditory field and narrative organization.

Overall, existing studies have offered substantial accounts of music and song in "The Dead", while later scholarship has broadened the field to include more diverse sound phenomena. Yet most discussions still focus on individual sound elements or isolated auditory moments, rather than considering how different sound forms relate to one another and change across the narrative. What remains underexplored is how these shifting sound forms reshape the characters' modes of listening and perceptual experience. Therefore, a question worth further exploration is: do these seemingly scattered sounds in "The Dead" collectively formulate a dynamically unfolding auditory narrative thread, and how does this thread expose the limits of resonance between characters?

To address this question, this paper draws on auditory narrative theory to reinterpret "The Dead" through the changing relations among sound, listening positions, and resonance. The "auditory narrative" discussed here does not primarily refer to narrative voice, but to the concrete sounds represented in the text and how they are treated by listening subjects. "Resonance" refers to both acoustic reverberation and the possibility of affective connection and shared understanding between characters. The argument unfolds in two strands: Part II examines the annual dance soundscape, focusing on the formation and instability of apparently shared listening; Part III turns to the later scenes, where auditory experience becomes increasingly private, inward, and difficult to share. In this process of diminishing auditory shareability, Gabriel's auditory position shifts from "being heard" to "auscultation (an attentive and interpretive mode of listening)", through which he comes to recognize that neither social relations nor imagined intimacy can guarantee emotional resonance with the others' inner experience. Through this analysis, this paper argues that sound in "The Dead" functions not merely as atmosphere or emotional trigger, but as an essential narrative mechanism that organizes character relations, perceptual experience, and the recognition of the limits of resonance.

2. The Annual Dance Soundscape: Apparent Shared Listening and the Position of "Being Heard"

Prior to analyzing the annual dance sequence, this article first defines its deployment of the "soundscape" concept. Rooted in R. Murray Schafer's soundscape framework, soundscape is defined not as a mere aggregate of sounds, but an auditory environment composed of sound, space, listeners, and their perceptual relationships (Schafer, 1994). In this sense, the annual dance in "The Dead",

beyond a social scene, is a social acoustic field consisting of all the characters and their laughter, conversations, music, and various other noises. This paper designates this field as the "annual dance soundscape" to highlight how these sounds and auditory experiences contribute to the construction of social order and auditory position among the characters.

The analysis of a soundscape begins with identifying its key features, specifically sounds that are significant due to their individuality, quantity, or domination. These sounds can be categorized as "keynote sounds", "signals", and "soundmarks". "Keynote sounds", as background sounds, are not necessarily consciously listened to, but they shape the listener's behavior and moods, while "signals" are foreground sounds that are consciously noticed at certain moments.

In the soundscape described in this story, the "keynote sounds" are not a single sound source, but a cacophony composed of various sounds such as conversations, music, and footsteps. Qiu Zongzhen, in discussing the writing of noise, points out that noise usually manifests as a sound cluster with multiple sound sources and high volume. However, noise in literary works cannot be understood solely from an acoustic classification perspective, and it requires analysis in relation to the sound itself, the auditory subject, and the auditory space (Qiu, 2024). Based on this, the Morkan sisters' annual dance also has a basic auditory background of multi-source noise: the laughter and movement upstairs, the music and continuous conversations in the dance, all create a social atmosphere of "everyone is present" and temporarily place the characters into the same auditory space.

Meanwhile, a few sounds stand out from this background noise, serving as "signals" that mark scene transitions and organize characters' actions. For example, in the opening paragraph, "the wheezy hall-door bell clanged again", not only indicates the protagonist Gabriel's arrival, but also marks the start of the annual dance soundscape. Correspondingly, the departure, "the cab rattled off along the quay amid a chorus of laughter and adieus", announces the end of this soundscape with the sounds of the carriage, laughter, and farewells. Therefore, the soundscape is not a static scene description, but a dynamic auditory structure maintained by continuous keynote sounds and activated and terminated by signals, bringing a seeming sense of "shared listening".

Within this structure, the soundscape further integrates scattered characters, spaces, and actions into a larger auditory field through sound. Instead of commencing with a panoramic view of the ball, the story anchors the Morkan sisters' home through sounds like doorbells, laughter, and shouts from upstairs: the maid Lily bustles downstairs to greet guests, while the two hostesses, Kate and Julia, are "gossiping, laughing, and fussing" upstairs. These sounds transform the entire house into a unified auditory space. As the ball unfolds, this soundscape gradually develops into a more defined state of "shared listening". After Julia's performance, the protagonist Gabriel "applauded loudly with all the others", and applause from "the invisible supper table" is also heard. Here, the applause serves both as feedback for the musical performance and a common auditory etiquette. Similarly, when the group begins to have dinner, "There was a great deal of confusion and laughter and noise, the noise of orders and counter-orders, of

knives and forks, of corks and glass-stoppers". The various sounds interweave, extending the soundscape into the dining space. Thus, the sounds at the dance not only create a lively atmosphere but also constantly influence the characters' social behaviors. The characters seem to share the same audible and responsive auditory world amidst the music, applause, laughter, and table noise, thereby giving the annual dance soundscape a collectivity and harmony.

However, the shared listening experience created by the soundscape actually possesses a deceptive stability. The passage about Mary Jane's piano performance exemplifies this limited sharing. When the performance begins, conversation ceases, and the drawing room seems to enter a state of shared listening. But the narrator quickly dismantles this sacred moment. Gabriel, though present, "could not listen" to Mary Jane's piece and doubts whether the other listeners truly understood the melody. The text also states that only the pianist and Aunt Kate seem genuinely immersed in the music. Ironically, the loudest applause comes from four young men at the door who had gone to the refreshment room when the music began and only returned after the piano stopped. This complete detail undermines the reliability of the applause as evidence of "shared listening": it may suggest social politeness rather than genuine appreciation. Thus, the annual dance soundscape creates a superficial commonality through music and applause, but this "shared listening" turns out to be a form of social order rather than true resonance. Within this soundscape, negative judgments, detachment, and rifts have begun to emerge.

What is behind the apparent "shared listening" in the annual dance soundscape is a more hidden one-way auditory activity, namely, a lack of effective communication. Listening should be a two-way interactive process, but in some narrative situations, the voices fail to resonate with each other, there is no listening subject, or there is even a self-circulation of the speaker, ultimately resulting in ineffective communication (Liu, 2025). In "The Dead", similar one-dimensional auditory activities recur: the characters often talk, joke, and ask questions, and the sounds do enter the public space, but they do not receive genuine reception, understanding, or response. This failure appears in three representative forms.

The first type of one-way auditory activity lacks a listening subject. In this relationship, although the sound is heard, it is refused to develop into a conversation. In the back room, Mr. Browne attempts to attract the attention of several young ladies through jokes and accent imitation. He deliberately lowers his voice, using a "very low Dublin accent", while his body "leaned forward a little too confidentially", an overly intimate posture that makes him clearly cross boundaries. Therefore, the young ladies, "with one instinct, received his speech in silence". This silence here is not a lack of communication ability, but rather a collective and active rejection: they hear his voice, but are unwilling to engage in the flirtatious relationship he desired. Mr. Browne then realizes he has been ignored and turns to two young men beside him who seem to appreciate him more. This detail illustrates that his speech has a strong performative purpose, requiring the audience's approval to achieve his intentions. However, when the young lady refuses to be the recipient of such offensive performances, his voice remains a one-way

output. This shows that some voices in this soundscape do not naturally form a communication, due to their gendered, offensive, or self-performative tendencies, exposing the inequality in auditory relationships.

The second type of one-dimensional auditory activity manifests as a lack of resonance between sounds. In this relationship, there is a superficial exchange of sound, and each party operates on a different "sonic frequency". A guest, Freddy Malins, is repeating the story he just told Gabriel to Mr. Browne, and is nearing the climax of his narrative. However, Mr. Browne does not take his story seriously, interrupting according to his own social habits, first offering to pour him a lemonade, then reminding him to straighten his clothes. Freddy ultimately fails to finish his story, being disturbed by external distractions and his own loud laughter. Although this scene is filled with words, actions, and laughter, neither party's voice responds to the other's narration, and no genuine listening is formed. Their exchange becomes a formality: two parallel expressions without genuine communication.

The third type of one-dimensional auditory activity appears as a self-circulating sound. In this relationship, a potentially disruptive voice may be swallowed up by collective silence or dissolved by a change of topic. When people at the dinner table are talking about an opera company, Malins mentions a Black singer with "one of the finest tenor voices" and hopes that tenor Bartell D'Arcy will comment on his voice. At the same time, D'Arcy answers "no" carelessly, without any intention of listening or engaging in conversation. Subsequently, Freddy follows up, "And why couldn't he have a voice too? ... Is it because he's only a Black?" Here, "voice" primarily refers to singing ability, but because his question directly touches on racial identity, it is quite sensitive and complex. Therefore, this question does not spark a real discussion, and the text immediately states, "Nobody answered this question and Mary Jane led the table back to the legitimate opera". This is a collective, tacit avoidance. The dominant social order quickly suppressed any voices that might disrupt the apparent harmony by remaining silent and changing the subject. Thus, in this annual dance soundscape, Malins' voice received no definite response, failing to establish a complete auditory chain. The sound ultimately returned to the speaker.

Overall, the one-directional auditory activity is not a random interruption of communication, but a crucial force that continues to operate within the soundscape. All these examples demonstrate that although sound constantly enters the public space, it fails to truly establish a relationship of mutual listening. As Liu pointed out, the one-dimensionality of hearing becomes a force that hinders interpersonal listening. Sound subtly alters the relationships between people: it no longer connects them naturally, but exposes the distance created by silence, misalignment, and avoidance. Therefore, the "shared listening" in the annual dance soundscape has an incomplete commonality. It maintains more of the decency and etiquette of the social occasion than genuine understanding and resonance.

Gabriel's auditory position is particularly noteworthy within the annual dance soundscape. Although the dance forms a collective soundscape, many of its sounds, auditory responses, and social

relationships in the narrative revolve around him. He is both the primary perceiving subject within the soundscape and the vocal center of the subsequent dinner speech. Analyzing Gabriel's auditory position helps to understand how this soundscape organizes the relationship between the individual and others, as well as the individual and the self.

Gabriel is both the receiver of sound and, more prominently, the producer of sound. For most of the narrative, he occupies the position of "being heard", which is not equivalent to "speaking", but points to the relation between speaker and audience. Throughout the text, his position as "being heard" is determined by both his ineffective listening and his relatively assertive vocalization.

Gabriel's position of "being heard" rests partly on his inadequate listening. As a receiver of sound, he often passively hears, rarely willing to actively understand others' voices. As seen in Mary Jane's piano performance, Gabriel "could not listen", while his attention quickly shifts from the music to memories of his mother. This auditory distraction is not accidental. A similar absence recurs when he speaks with others. When Mrs. Malins describes the Scottish landscape to him, Gabriel "hardly heard what she said" because he is reminded of his own speech. Even when he consciously captures sound, this listening does not always lead to understanding or recognition, but often serves to confirm his own identity. When he hears the "indelicate clacking" of guests' heels and the "shuffling" of their soles outside the living room door, he immediately interprets the sound as "their grade of culture differed from his". This shows that Gabriel does not lack opportunities to listen but fails to become an inclusive listener. Instead of understanding others' experiences, he tends to return to himself through the sounds, confirming his own cultural position and psychological distance.

Gabriel's manner of speaking further reveals his dependence on the "being heard" position. When he speaks, it often carries an unconscious didactic tone. Facing the maid Lily, he first asks if she is still in school, then guesses that she will soon marry a "young man". This seemingly lighthearted greeting actually presupposes Lily's life direction and carries a condescending, superior tone. When Lily retorts with "great bitterness", Gabriel does not truly respond to her dissatisfaction with her gender experience and social situation, but awkwardly ends the conversation with a coin. Similarly, when discussing galoshes, he tells his wife that "everyone wears them on the continent", attempting to justify his choices with a higher cultural rationale based on continental European experience. When this explanation does not receive the expected approval and is instead ridiculed by relatives, he becomes slightly angered. These details suggest that Gabriel wants his words to be understood as more insightful and discerning, and it is in this expectation that he gradually occupies a position of "being heard".

Gabriel fully assumes the position of "being heard" during his formal speech at the dinner, which also marks the climax of the banquet part. In fact, ever since the ball began, he has been preoccupied with his speech. He worries that quoting Browning might be "above the heads of his hearers", and even imagines in advance that he will "fail with them". This reveals Gabriel's intense anxiety regarding whether his voice would be understood and acknowledged. When the time comes for his formal speech,

he leads all the guests to raise their glasses and stand. At that moment, the previously scattered voices at the banquet are temporarily organized under his own, and the dynamic of one speaking while many listened places him in a uniquely central position. Fu Xiuyan points out that "hearing" and "being heard" are not merely forms of communication but also involve power relations (Fu, 2021). As the guests yield the position of "being heard", Gabriel becomes the dominant speaking subject. At the same time, "voice is the existence of consciousness that approaches the self in a universal form", so "being heard" not only means making others listen but also implies that the speaker affirms his own existence when the voice returns to him. Hence, Gabriel's speech is more than a simple expression of gratitude. It becomes a means through which he confirms his cultural refinement, social identity, and subjectivity through the act of "speaking—being heard".

Gabriel's auditory position of "being heard" should not be understood simply as a reflection of his personality. It is also produced through the structural interplay of auditory relationships within the annual dance soundscape. For the soundscape as a whole, Gabriel's presence gathers scattered sounds around a sonic center. In his relationships with others, "being heard" temporarily grants him an active role in the soundscape, yet it also subtly creates a distance between him and the others in mutual listening. For Gabriel himself, "being heard" is both a way to become the social center and a means of maintaining his self-identity. Thus, while the annual dance soundscape creates the appearance of "shared listening", in Gabriel's case, this shared listening ultimately transforms into a self-centered auditory structure.

3. Diminishing Auditory Shareability: The Position of Auscultation and Limited Resonance

Beneath the bustling annual dance soundscape, the "shared listening" remains constrained by a one-directional auditory relationship and Gabriel's "being heard" position. As the ball and dinner come to an end, this social soundscape dissolves: the original public clamor gradually fades, the narrative shifts to staircases, streets, and a hotel room, and the sounds become more private, quiet, and soft, thus gradually reducing auditory shareability. Simultaneously, Gabriel's mode of listening transforms: first, on the staircase, he attempts to imitate Gretta's listening but is unable to truly enter her auditory experience; subsequently, in the private conversation, he tries to reinterpret and possess her emotional experience; finally, amidst silence and faint sounds, he gradually turns to auscultation and realizes that emotional resonance between people is always finite.

As the annual dance soundscape fades, the sounds in the text shift from public noise to a more individualized auditory experience, with "distant music" as the starting point. The scene first presents Gabriel's imitation of Gretta's listening behavior. At this moment, Gretta stands in the shadow of the stairs "listening to something", and Gabriel, seeing her still posture, "strained his ear to listen also". This gesture suggests that, by imitating Gretta's physical stance, he attempts to enter the specific auditory state she is currently experiencing. However, he can hear little, catching only "the noise of

laughter and dispute on the front steps, a few chords struck on the piano and a few notes of a man's voice singing". This reveals that although the two share the same physical space and are exposed to the same sonic source, they fail to forge a shared auditory experience. For Gretta, the "distant music" evokes private memories, and for Gabriel, it remains merely a sound devoid of discernible meaning. Their auditory experiences are therefore asymmetrical: Gabriel imitates Gretta's listening, but cannot hear the meaning that she hears.

Gabriel then concludes that his wife is listening to "distant music". From an acoustic perspective, the music does indeed come from afar, and thus appears to Gabriel as a vague, fragmented, and indistinct sound. From a perceptual standpoint, this "distant" manifests more as his inability to access Gretta's auditory experience. The music is connected with a deeply buried emotional memory for Gretta, while for Gabriel, it is merely an incomprehensible auditory trigger at that moment. In other words, the further the music leads Gretta into her private memories, the more Gabriel is excluded from that experience. The "distance" in "distant music" is thus simultaneously acoustic, perceptual, and emotional. It begins to expose the inner distance between two people who appear intimate.

Unable to perceive Gretta's auditory experience, Gabriel instead visualizes her listening behavior. Gazing at his wife on the stairs, he feels her posture possesses "grace and mystery", and almost immediately thinks that if he were a painter, he would paint this posture and title it *Distant Music*. This imagining is not merely aesthetic admiration or a fleeting whim, but rather unveils his subconscious impulse to grasp this unfamiliar auditory experience. Compared with the clear outlines and stable objects provided by vision, auditory experiences are often more fluid, fleeting, and difficult to pinpoint accurately. Sound disrupts visual stability and draws the listener into a more uncertain perceptual space. It is precisely in the face of this uncertainty that Gabriel loses his ability to grasp the object, choosing instead to compensate for the non-shareability of this auditory experience with the certainty of vision. Gretta's auditory experience, originally fluid, vibrant, and private, is transformed in his imagination into an image that can be viewed, named, and fixed. In other words, Gabriel does not truly understand Gretta's listening. Instead, he substitutes visual framing for auditory comprehension.

"Distant music" thus marks a further reduction in auditory shareability: sound no longer organizes public social relationships as before, but becomes a private gateway to individual memories. Gabriel can only stand outside this experience, processing the sounds he cannot share through the act of observing. This failure of shared listening does not end on the staircase, and it continues into the hotel room.

When entering the hotel room, Gabriel and Gretta's private conversation becomes an essential scene where auditory shareability continues to diminish. Although sound now shifts from "distant music" to direct verbal exchange, the privacy of the space does not lead to genuine mutual listening. Instead, it further exposes the mismatch in their emotional experiences.

At the start of the conversation, the two are actually in completely different emotional rhythms. Gabriel is immersed in fantasies of a sweet, intimate world for two, attempting to initiate conversation by using Malins as a conversation starter, yet what he truly expects is that Gretta can actively understand and respond to his emotions and physical desires. He imagines himself to "call her softly" and he longs to "cry to her from his soul, to crush her body against his, to overmaster her". Both "call" and "cry to her from his soul" transform desire into a vocal impulse, continuing Gabriel's tendency to seek response through sound. However, Gretta is still trapped in her memories, her face looking "so serious and worried", seemingly abstract and completely out of sync with his emotions. Therefore, their initial conversation, though taking place in a private space, remains confined to a superficial and uninspiring level of exchange.

As Gabriel directly asks Gretta, "What about the song?" The conversation begins to touch upon Gretta's inner experiences, but the disparity in their tones further reveals the hidden asymmetry in their relationship. Gabriel thinks he knows "what is the matter", but his wife suddenly breaks down in tears, saying she is still thinking about that song. He has to ask about the hidden story behind the song. Initially, his tone is kinder than he had intended, but when Gretta mentions "a person long ago", he becomes angry, and his subsequent tones turn mostly sarcastic and cold. Voice is not a tool of neutral expression, but pitch, intonation, and tone all contribute to character development and can even show psychology and relational positions. In this dialogue scene, there is no equal exchange. Gabriel's tone carries an almost interrogative pressure. The text directly states, "He tried to keep up his tone of cold interrogation". In contrast, Gretta's voice remains "veiled and sad". Thereby, Gretta's reply is not a willing confession but rather her painful expression under the weight of memories.

This imbalance in tone further exhibits the possessive nature of Gabriel's listening. Effective dialogue should be unbiased and strive for openness, which means not completely incorporating the other person into one's own position but respecting their experience and voice as an independent individual. However, Gabriel is not listening to Gretta with an open attitude at this moment. He wants to know why she is crying, but he is even more eager to reintegrate the experience behind it into the marital relationship that he can understand and control. When Gretta says Michael Furey "used to sing that song, *The Lass of Aughrim*", Gabriel realizes that what he is hearing is not just a story from the past, but the echo of another man's voice left deep within Gretta's inner heart. A voice belongs to someone, marking that person's identity and imprinting their characteristics. Although Michael Furey's singing voice has long been gone, it still occupies Gretta's heart, which makes Gabriel feel angry and frustrated, realizing that her emotional experience does not entirely belong to him.

Therefore, the private conversation does not restore the auditory shareability between the two. Although Gabriel hears Gretta's story, his questioning in the conversation remains an attempt to grasp the past that the song has evoked in her. However, as Gretta's voice becomes more and more prominent, the echo of Michael Furey's voice also sounds clearer. Gabriel seems to be listening in vain, across the

past, to everything that is heartbreaking happening again. He sees himself acting as "a nervous, well-meaning sentimentalist" and realizes that he has been nothing more than idealizing his own desires. Thus, Gabriel's possessive listening suffers a fundamental defeat.

With the decline of auditory shareability, the final part of "The Dead" further transitions into silence. However, this silence does not equal the complete disappearance of sound, but a form of "relative soundlessness" that includes both the silence of the speaking subject and the stillness of the external environment, allowing subtle sounds to be highlighted in the narrative. Therefore, silence is not a stagnation of the narrative, but an auditory mechanism that regulates the narrative process: it shifts the text from verbal communication between characters to the perception of faint sounds of an individual, and also propels Gabriel's auditory position from "possessive listening" to "auscultation". The "auscultation" discussed in this paper is not in the medical sense, but rather an attentive and interpretative mode of listening in auditory narrative research, parallel to "focalization" in the visual sense. Therefore, Gabriel's final transformation is not simply learning to listen, but rather, in the subtle sounds of silence, gradually realizing the complexity of Gretta as an independent emotional subject, and further recognizing the limits of resonance between people.

This auditory shift first appears on the stairs before the two enter their hotel room. However, Gabriel is still dominated by intense physical desire and has not yet completed his transition to "auscultation". He watches Gretta walk ahead and even feels he could "flung his arms about her hips and held her still", but he barely manages to suppress the urge. Notably, when the porter stops to settle the candles, the narrative suddenly enters a period of silence, "In the silence Gabriel could hear the falling of the molten wax into the tray and the thumping of his own heart against his ribs". This detail illustrates that the silence functions as an auditory condition that makes the faint sound perceptible. The noise of the public dance has vanished, and all that can be heard is the sound of wax dripping and Gabriel's own heartbeat. The former comes from external space and is quite faint, while the latter comes from within the body and is almost impossible to share with others. This sound description presents Gabriel's hidden desires, tensions, and self-repression as tangible bodily sounds, revealing a more uneasy and vulnerable inner state. Thus, silence begins to alter the auditory texture of the narrative: sound no longer organizes social relationships or serves Gabriel's self-affirmation, but instead shifts to a more personal and physical perception, preparing the ground for the true auscultation that follows.

Silence continues to shape the narrative once the two enter the room and begin their conversation. Initially, Gabriel tries to frame the conversation as a sequential dialogue of questions and responses. However, Gretta's narration does not follow this rhythm. Her pauses and silences disrupt Gabriel's questioning pace, shifting the dialogue from superficial verbal exchange to a deeper emotional blockage. Silence can break the conventional linear narrative sequence, altering the story's rhythm, and pauses in dialogue often reveal the fluctuations in a character's inner psychology and emotions. In this sense, Gretta's recounting of Michael Furey not only explains the reason for her grief but also gradually

loosens Gabriel's control through the broken rhythm of her voice. When she finally utters the brief phrase, "I think he died for me", the verbal communication is almost unsustainable. Gabriel's previous ironic and interrogative tone becomes ineffective. He can no longer take the dominating role through questioning. Hence, the focus of the dialogue gradually shifts from Gabriel's questioning to Gretta's nearly spontaneous narration. Unconsciously, Gretta takes control of the conversation and even sobs due to excessive emotion, which forces the dialogue to stop. Thus, silence seeps into the narrative from within the dialogue, breaking Gabriel's dominant linguistic control and gradually shifting Gabriel to a position of listening.

Gabriel's auditory position shifts more clearly toward auscultation after Gretta sobs and falls asleep. At that moment, the conversation ceases entirely, and the enclosed room is quiet. Gabriel gazes "unresentfully" at his sleeping wife, "listening to her deep-drawn breath". Though these breaths carry no explicit message, they present Gretta's authentic existence as a living being within the silence. Gabriel is no longer as angry as before, and he auscultizes in silence to the sounds from her body. He feels almost no pain, but rather attempts to discern Gretta's past and understand the emotions she once felt. He wonders, "how she who lay beside him had locked in her heart for so many years", learning to sense the inner turmoil hidden behind his wife's ordinary gestures. It is precisely in these subtle breaths that he begins to realize Gretta is not merely an object of his desire, nor an accessory in his marital fantasy, but a subject with an independent past and complex emotions. He thinks, "Perhaps she hadn't told him the whole story". Gabriel has not fully let go, but he acknowledges the existence of this past and is moved by it. Though his wife's breathing is mere inches away, in his restrained auscultation, he turns humble, realizing that her inner world would not open up completely to him simply because of the apparent intimacy.

The sound of snow at the end extends Gabriel's auscultation from the interior of the room to the broader expanse of life. "A few light taps" on the pane makes him turn toward the window, and this faint sound remains an auditory experience rooted in reality. In contrast, he hears "the snow falling faintly through the universe", which is no longer merely an auditory perception of an actual sound, but rather an inner auscultation born of silence. Auscultation emphasizes the enrichment of visual imagery through auditory imagination, filling certain unforgettable moments with reasonable imagination. It is precisely within this imaginative hearing that Gabriel's perception expands from Gretta's breathing to Aunt Julia's aging, Michael Furey's grave, and ultimately "all the living and the dead". The snow falls faintly, as if upon everyone, bringing the living and the dead, the past and the present, the self and others into the same space of silence. However, this shared space does not imply full emotional resonance. Just as life and death may not be so far apart, there is always a sliver of distance. People may be moved by their shared human condition, yet they cannot fully enter one another's inner experience. What the sound of snow ultimately reveals is not the elimination of distance, but the precious and limited connection that exists within that distance. Gabriel is finally able to auscultize to

the depths of others' emotions in the silence, while simultaneously realizing that the resonance between people is always limited.

4. Conclusion

The above analysis of James Joyce's "The Dead" shows that the sounds in the story are not merely details enriching the story or catalysts for Gabriel's epiphany, but rather constitute a dynamic narrative mechanism that organizes character relationships, perceptual experiences, and cognitive changes. While previous discussions often focus on the relationship between music and Gabriel's final epiphany, this paper approaches sound more broadly as a continuous thread of auditory narrative. By bringing together noise, music, and silence, it shows how Joyce's scattered auditory details move from a shared social soundscape to inward auscultation, manifesting the limitations of listening through the diminishing auditory shareability.

Gabriel's changing auditory position condenses this auditory narrative. At first, he occupies the position of "being heard", more concerned with confirming his social identity than with truly listening to others. Later, when Gretta is drawn back to personal memory by an old song, he is forced to confront an auditory experience beyond his control. The private conversation does not immediately help him understand his wife, but it makes him realize that neither language nor intimacy can guarantee access to another person's inner life. Only when silence and faint sounds gradually replace clear words does he move from "being heard" toward "auscultation". This auscultation is not about fully understanding others, but about attempting to perceive the complexity of their lives even when the sounds become faint and the meaning remains uncertain.

In conclusion, "The Dead" ultimately does not present a story about successful communication, but rather a story about the limits of resonance. The sound of falling snow in silence cannot eliminate the distance between people, nor can it reunite the living and the dead, or merge the self with the other. It makes Gabriel realize, for the first time, with greater clarity, that everyone lives in experiences that are adjacent yet cannot fully overlap. Therefore, "resonance" at the story's end is not a perfect state, but rather a humbler possibility of human connection. One cannot fully inhabit another person's experience, but can still be touched by their memories, pain, and life trajectories. In the limited yet heartfelt emotional experience, Joyce, through both sound and silence, reveals the profound intimacy and distance in interpersonal relationships. In doing so, the auditory narrative of "The Dead" also registers a keen modernist sensitivity to an individual's inner world and the limits of interpersonal understanding.

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