On the surface The Visitor by Gibbons Ruark is a poem about a blind piano tuner: likely the visitor the title is referring to. The poem is also about music and music’s power in the sense that it is able to excite people, resurface memories, and evoke emotions. The persona of the poem is initially detached and distant from the events he is detailing but begins to show a true connection the events and music later on in the poem. The constant juxtaposition of aural and visual imagery, along with Ruark’s use of other sensory imagery, makes the events that the poem is detailing more realistic and vivid. But at the same time, the same imagery blurs the senses together and combined with her use of enjambment and rhyme scheme serve to make the poem seem more dream-like and whimsical.

Them poem introduces the piano tuner as a blind man “holding the arm of his helper.” The image immediately presents the piano tuner as a weak and helpless man and the use of the word “helper” as opposed to say “assistant” or similar is deliberate as the word allows readers to imagine the piano tuners need for help. The consonance of the h sound in the first few lines (“holding” “helper” “he” “hesistant”) seems to add to the feeling of helplessness.

This frail piano tuner then undergoes a clear shift in personality when the piano is introduced. “His hands glide” across the piano, a stark contrast to the motionless hesitant man we are first shown. The juxtaposition of aural and visual imagery, “ringing changes finer than the eye can see” emphasizes the sharpness of the piano tuner’s hearing and reminds readers of his visual impairment. Despite his blindness, the piano tuner is able to “see” finer things than those who have sight. Ruark also relates the piano tuner with an archer with the simile “quiver like bowstrings”. Archers have an amazing sense of sight and associating the blind man with an archer adds to the strength of his sense of hearing. We also see that his sense of touch and taste are much finer than most peoples as he is able to draw conclusions just by touching and tasting the dry rust. This perhaps adds an air of mystery and supernatural to the piano tuner whose other senses seem to have been enhanced by his lack of sight. This mysterious and supernatural aura is later compounded by the fact that the piano tuner “saved” the piano, which associates the piano tuner with a savior or hero and that he also magically “disappears into the blaze of new October”. The piano and music have a clear effect on the blind piano tuner. Aside from giving him “pure bliss” the music transforms him from a frail helpless man with a disability to a powerful hero with supernormal senses.

The music also has an effect on the persona of the poem. After his wife “plays Stardust”, the persona begins to pause more frequently which is evidenced by the use of ellipses in the second half of the poem. Personally, I feel that the music has overwhelmed the persona and he is unable to speak coherently because of this. He mentions that his “afternoon blurs in a haze of music.” The music speeds up an entire afternoon into a single line. Again there is a juxtaposition of visual imagery (the haze) and aural imagery (the music). The blurring of the two, make the poem almost dream-like and this is further emphasized by the constant use of enjambment, which makes the lines flow smoothly and harmoniously, and the rhyme scheme which starts of as ABAB but then becomes inconsistent (but there is still an obvious rhyme between lines) as the persona begins to become overwhelmed by the music and as we go deeper into a dream-like state. The listing of music titles from various genre not only overwhelms readers with a plethora of different sounding pieces (overwhelming them with music in the same way the persona is) but also ensures that there is at least one piece that the reader is familiar with and that familiarity allows the music title to immediately play the music in the reader’s mind. The persona says that the music is both “familiar” and “unfamiliar” and the oxymoronic nature of the phrase gives the impression that the music is from the persona’s past but has long since been neglected. This perhaps indicated that the persona is rediscovering the music for the first time, an idea that is given possibility by the fact that the piano has long since been left to rot but has recently been retuned.

The last few lines of the poem are particularly striking in the sense that Ruark masterfully manipulates our senses. The reference to the car’s beams and ticking is perhaps a nod to the discordant sounds and blinding light of city life. Ruark says that the beams of the car are “doused” as if the beams were a blinding fire that is now put out. Through this line, Ruark creates a sense of darkness and builds upon this darkness with absolute silence once the “ticking” has “stopped.” There is also a connotation that time itself has stopped because of the association of the ticking of a clock. There is no light and no sound. And this absence of sensory emotion forces readers to focus on the single solitary cat as it moves “in the darkness”. The same lack of light and sound allows the note of the single “key” to resonate through our minds, the sound of which is almost deafening in the absolute silence. I think this is a particularly strong ending which allows us to perhaps understand the last line as the persona crying a single tear drop after he is overwhelmed with emotion.