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Explication 2

The sonnet “What the Thrush said” by poet John Keats is about understanding the advice the speaker is giving to the listener. Through the reading of the text it can be inferred that the Thrush is the speaker while the listener is anonymous and subjective to the readers and their interpretations. Additionally the argument is given in the form of an advice about how not to long for wisdom and that waiting for knowledge is rewarded. It also continually suggests that it is okay for the listener to be passive, different and not be constantly looking for acquirement of ideas. The main figurative idea in the sonnet is to understand what the thrush is saying to the listener about how they have to wait, and not be actively trying to grasp as the meanings of its words as indicated in line 9 “O fret not after knowledge—I have none,”.

The initial eight lines of the poems setup the argument by the speaker. In the start of the poem the speaker uses the term “Thou” which we currently as readers don’t know the reference to. The speaker then suggests that this person he is referring to has lived in the winter season and has felt the cold of a winter ‘wind. This is the first figurative illustration by the speaker which can be interpreted as a lack of heat or fire where the heat or fire are symbolism for knowledge suggesting that the person the speaker is referring to is lacking special knowledge about something. Then the poem refers to the same person by saying that if this person has seen huge clouds in mist and other imagery usually seen in the winter this listener is in the middle of misunderstanding and confusion. Then the speaker begins the sentence by specifically referring to the listener as “Thee” and how for this listener the spring will be a good time and will bring a good harvest which can be a symbol or understanding or a satisfaction of hunger which the listener had due to living in the ignorance. In the second stanza the poet starts with “Thou” again making this the first repetition of the poem. This stanza has a similar theme as the first stanza. It talks about how the listener who has gone through similar events like being in the darkness and without enlightenment will be rewarded the same way when the spring arrives. The last line of the second stanza also uses “Thee” making this the second repetition. Both the repetition are used to show and indicate that the listener need to be able to conceive what the speaker argues and how its argument is trying to establish a relation between the listeners going from ignorance to understanding.

After the two four line stanzas we see the Volta or the turn as the language of the poem becomes more direct and loses the argument and goes on to give the reason for the argument. In the first line after the Volta we see that the speaker says that he does not have the knowledge that the listener is trying to acquire, but that does not mean that there is no knowledge in the words of the speaker. In the next line we are finally able to interpret that the speaker is a Thrush. As it says that the song that the speaker sings is accompanied with warmth. Figuratively this warmth can be associated with knowledge or the advice that comes with the words of a Thrush. After this we see a repeat of the 9th line making this the first and only rhyme in the poem. This adds meaning and importance to this line as it needed to be said twice by the speaker to show that its words are without knowledge. Yet after saying that the words spoken by the speaker lack knowledge it suggests that people still listen to the thrush in a thirst for knowledge. Finally at the end of the sonnet we see that the readers are left with the idea that a person who becomes sad at the thought of being idle will not be idle suggesting that the person who keeps trying to procure knowledge extensively will not be able to find it. While if a person thinks that they are asleep figuratively lacking knowledge they are awake or they are knowledgeable to understand the lack of knowledge.

The sonnet presents the idea of personification of thrush as a learned being who is imparting knowledge through its songs. The sonnet uses repetition in the first two stanza to setup the argument about the thrush’s claims that there will be prosperity after winter when the spring comes. The sonnet is in the English form where the Volta comes after the 8th line. However, Keats makes this sonnet a blank verse which adds to the meaning a lot as it makes this sonnet different and further adds to the argument of being okay with passiveness and uniqueness. This idea that Keats presents suggests that if a person is able to wait and understand they can be more knowledgeable and proficient in something than when they are trying to acquire knowledge forcefully or hastily. The Keats establishes an irony in this sonnet by using the Thrush as a medium and suggesting that the listener is trying to interpret the thrush’s song while showing that the Thrush is self-aware that its song is without wisdom.