

VISITING HOUR
By NORMAN MACCAIG

IDEAS

The poet encounters the hospital smell and attempts to take his mind off what it means to him.

However, he is immediately confronted by what hospitals are potentially about – death.

He forces himself to keep his emotions under control.

He tries to occupy his mind by watching the nurses –

But this, too, only turns his mind to what their job involves – suffering and death.

He arrives at the ward where his wife lies. He is shocked by what he sees – in a white environment, doped up with morphine and on a drip. He has difficulty making this fit with the woman he knows.

He comes closer to her, but realises that he can never cross the pain barrier that separates them.

He sees himself from her perspective – an intruder who does not fit, is not coping with the situation, and leaves (when the bell rings) feeling useless having brought books and fruit which are useless to her.

TECHNIQUES

“smell combs my nostrils” – meta
“bobbing along” – wd ch/ humour
“green and yellow corridors” – wd ch

“seems a corpse” – sentence str
“trundled” – wd ch
“vanishes heaven ward” – meta/wd ch

“I will...have to” – repetition (I, not, feel)/ enjambment (not, until)

“nurses...and there” – repetition (-ly, and)/ unusual sentence structure and order of words
“slender waists miraculously” – wd ch

“burden of ...farewells” meta/
repetition (so many)

“Ward 7” – minor sentence.
“white cave of forgetfulness” – meta
“withered hand...stalk” – meta/ wd ch
“wasted of colour” – wd ch
“glass fang” – meta
“not guzzling but giving” – wd ch/ allit

“And...can cross” – sentence str (and, her and me/she nor I)/ paradox/ meta (distance of pain)

“black figure in her white cave” – contrast/ change of perspective
“clumsily rises” – inversion/ wd ch
“round swimming waves of a bell” – meta
“dizzily goes off” – double meaning
“growing fainter not smaller” – paradox
“books that will not be read” – detail
“fruitless fruits” – double meaning/ paradox/ metaphor.