



Visiting Hour

By Norman MacCaig

Stanza 5

- **Summary-** He arrives at the ward where his relative 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.

“Ward 7.” – A caesura is a pause that breaks up a line of verse. The **abruptness of this non sentence jolts the reader**, just as we can imagine it affected MacCaig. This is the turning point of the poem, as he has now reached his relative and must face his emotions.

“A withered hand/ trembles on its stalk” –

metaphor - Use of the pronoun diminishes the humanity of the woman, suggesting the poet does not feel the relative is truly alive as she once was. She was a **flower in bloom** but now her body is merely an empty shell and she is effectively dead.

- The bed on which the patient lies, screened off by a white curtain, is compared to a “**white cave of forgetfulness**” (**metaphor**) because she is drifting in and out of consciousness, unable to sustain memory or coherent thought.

- The metaphor **is appropriate** as it shows her to be cut off from the rest of the ward as if she were in a cave, far away in her mind from all around her. The fact that the curtains are well above the level of her head adds to the impression of her physical and mental isolation. Because of her state, she and the poet cannot communicate effectively.

- “not guzzling but giving” – **word-choice**, the horror of the “glass fang” image is continued in the word “guzzling”, but is reversed by the positive word, “giving”. The use of the guttural “g” sound in the **alliteration an onomatopoeia** conveys the harshness of the poet’s interpretation; he clearly sees the process as intrusive and pointless.

- **“And...can cross”** – **metaphor** for the distance of pain. As he comes closer to her, he realises that he can never cross the pain barrier that separates them.

Stanza 6

- **Summary-** 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.

- “black figure in her white cave” – **contrast/ change of perspective**
- “clumsily ... dizzily” – shows the poet is overcome by his emotions, leaving him confused and dazed
- “round swimming waves of a bell” – **metaphor** for his tears

- “**fainter**” – showing the woman’s vision is blurred; she can see him getting fainter with distance. Also a **pun**, since the poet may be so upset he is starting to feel faint.

- “books that will not be read/ and fruitless fruits” – Enjambment and paradox summarises the poet’s despair at the hopelessness of his situation, and the isolation both he and his relative have suffered.

- **“fruitless fruits”** – the final words are an **oxymoron**: how can a fruit be fruitless? This captures the poet’s despair at the pointlessness of the woman’s death being prolonged and “fruitless” - as he is unable to help –bringing fruit has been “fruitless”, ie pointless.

- The most **serious** point that this poem makes is the idea that we do not spend enough time with the people we love until it is too late. We are left with emptiness and regret about all the things that we should have done. The reader feels particularly moved by this realisation.