

A Martian Sends a Postcard Home

Caxtons are mechanical birds with many wings
and some are treasured for their markings –

they cause the eyes to melt
or the body to shriek without pain.

I have never seen one fly, but
sometimes they perch on the hand.

Mist is when the sky is tired of flight
and rests its soft machine on ground:

then the world is dim and bookish
like engravings under tissue paper.

Rain is when the earth is television.
It has the property of making colours darker.

Model T is a room with the lock inside –
a key is turned to free the world

for movement, so quick there is a film
to watch for anything missed.

But time is tied to the wrist
or kept in a box, ticking with impatience.

In homes, a haunted apparatus sleeps,
that snores when you pick it up.

If the ghost cries, they carry it
to their lips and soothe it to sleep

with sounds. And yet, they wake it up
deliberately, by tickling with a finger.

Only the young are allowed to suffer
openly. Adults go to a punishment room

with water but nothing to eat.
They lock the door and suffer the noises

alone. No one is exempt
and everyone's pain has a different smell.

At night, when all the colours die,
they hide in pairs

and read about themselves –
in colour, with their eyelids shut.

- Craig Raine

Cheatsheet

You can use this information to explain what the objects or ideas the poem alludes to are. I've omitted those that the poem explains itself, such as rain. I'd recommend inviting people to guess what each section refers to before telling them as this can encourage great ideas and conversation too!

**Caxtons are mechanical birds with many wings
and some are treasured for their markings –**

**they cause the eyes to melt
or the body to shriek without pain.**

**I have never seen one fly, but
sometimes they perch on the hand.**

- These are books! Consider how books are treasured for their markings (words), how they make us cry and feel strong emotions (eyes to melt or the body to shriek without pain) and which we hold in the hand when reading. The Caxton is referencing William Caxton, who invented printing. Think about how if you were to flick a book open from the middle, the pages might appear wing-like!

**Model T is a room with the lock inside –
a key is turned to free the world**

**for movement, so quick there is a film
to watch for anything missed.**

- This is a car! Model T refers to the classic Ford car, while a room with a lock inside describes the interior of a car. I also love the fact that the rearview mirror is described as a film to watch for anything missed!

**But time is tied to the wrist
or kept in a box, ticking with impatience.**

- A watch or a clock!

**In homes, a haunted apparatus sleeps,
that snores when you pick it up.**

**If the ghost cries, they carry it
to their lips and soothe it to sleep**

**with sounds. And yet, they wake it up
deliberately, by tickling with a finger.**

- This is a phone! This one is a little trickier to decipher but consider how it is haunted by voices and rings (snores) when it needs to be picked up and how it needs to be soothed by conversation and sounds by the receiver. The waking it up deliberately should also be fairly

familiar to any of us with a smart device!

**Only the young are allowed to suffer
openly. Adults go to a punishment room**

**with water but nothing to eat.
They lock the door and suffer the noises**

**alone. No one is exempt
and everyone's pain has a different smell.**

- The punishment room in question here is a toilet! This is a great one to discuss with a group and consider line by line!

**At night, when all the colours die,
they hide in pairs**

**and read about themselves –
in colour, with their eyelids shut.**

- This is dreaming, and a wonderful place to end the poem!