Marrysong

SUMMARY

He never managed to fully understand her. As the years passed, her emotional landscape continued, without fail, to change as he observed her. He could lose himself for an entire hour inside the deep well of her anger, only to turn around to find her as happy and calm as a babbling stream—despite the fact that her voice had been hoarse with emotion just the day before. He'd figure her out, but then she'd become totally foreign and unknown to him all over again. The roads on the metaphorical maps he'd make of her would disappear, making those maps unreliable. Sometimes wind blew hard through her emotional landscape and brought rain that tasted like the sea—and then all of a sudden she would change the shape of her shores, which used to be perfectly still and calm. Everything changed every single day, her love casting smaller and then bigger shadows that appeared like trees you'd see from a hill that popped up out of nowhere. There was a new landscape to be encountered on each lively journey that he was forced to take in order to understand her. So he accepted her emotional landscape, which was always unexpected and unique. He thought curiously about it and found himself staying home so that he could explore the many nooks and crannies of her mind.

THEMES

THE COMPLEXITY OF LOVE AND MARRIAGE

"Marrysong" is a testament to the fact that love is often messy and confusing. As a husband attempts to better understand his wife and, in turn, their relationship, he is frequently mystified by the swift changes in their dynamic—the way that the "territory" of their marriage seems to "shift[] under his eye," moving swiftly from anger, to laughter, to coolness, to calm. The poem suggests that, even within the intimate confines of marriage, it's impossible to ever fully know one's partner.

At the same time, the poem implies that the husband learns to appreciate the dynamic that this creates, committing himself to their relationship not in spite of its unpredictability, but because of it. Love, the poem argues, is above all a kind of journey that must be continuously navigated in order to survive.

"He never learned her, quite," the speaker says in the poem's first line, making it clear that the husband can never completely grasp the inner workings of his wife's emotional life. In other words, being married to somebody doesn't automatically lead to an all-encompassing understanding of that person.

As such, the husband's attempts to "chart" his wife's emotions and actions are futile, since whenever he makes a metaphorical map of her emotional landscape, she throws him off by suddenly changing "the shape of shores"—an indication that her personality and way of moving through the world cannot be easily categorized. This, then, underscores the idea that marriage isn't easy, in part because each partner has different emotions and different ways of approaching life. And these differences, it seems, make it difficult to feel as if a marriage is steady and predictable.

Because of this element of unpredictability, the poem implies, the best thing lovers can do is accept the surprises and fluctuations that are inherently part of being in love. In this sense, a marriage ought to be approached as an ever-changing journey instead of a joyless struggle. In keeping with this, the speaker becomes a cartographer mapping his wife's emotional complexities, and though this means embracing seemingly erratic changes, there is at least one constant in their relationship: the love they share.

In the process of outlining the wife's complexity and unpredictability, the poem unfortunately draws upon sexist stereotypes about women. After all, the figure of an unpredictable woman who can't control her emotions is fraught with sexism, and though "Marrysong" isn't necessarily *overtly* sexist, it's hard to deny that the poem frames the wife as illogical in a way that nods to misogynistic ideas having to do with husbands learning to control or reign in their wives.

That said, though, the poem's primary goal is to illustrate the complex push and pull of marriage. Accordingly, the focus is on the husband's journey to accept his wife's idiosyncrasies, as the speaker notes that the husband "stayed home increasingly to find / his way among the landscapes of her mind"—meaning that the husband ends up finding himself drawn to the unsteadiness of his relationship with his wife, whose unpredictability actually encourages him to spend more time with her. It's therefore clear that he accepts his wife for who she is and, no longer trying to understand her in reductive ways, is able to love her more fully. As a result, the poem emphasizes the idea that love is something that constantly evolves and that accepting this evolution as a worthwhile journey can lead to richer, more meaningful relationships.

Where this theme appears in the poem:

- Lines 1-17

LINE-BY-LINE ANALYSIS

LINES 1-3

He never learned ...
... under his eye.

The poem's opening lines establish its two central characters: a man and his lover. Given the title of the poem and the fact that these lovers have been together "year after year," it's safe to assume that they are married.

The speaker's opening statement, "He never learned her, quite," suggests that he has never managed to fully comprehend his own wife. Right away, this challenges any preconceived notions readers might have about marriage or long-term romantic relationships, questioning the assumption that being romantically involved with somebody for a long time always leads to an easy or simple dynamic.

The speaker introduces a metaphor for the husband's conception of his wife that will ultimately run throughout the poem:

> [...] Year after year
> That territory, without seasons, shifted
> under his eye. [...]

In this context, the word "territory" metaphorically presents the wife's personality as a geographical feature, one that "shift[s]" right before the speaker's eyes. The idea of the wife as a moving piece of land implies that her fluctuations affect the speaker's ability to navigate their relationship—after all, it's pretty hard to become familiar with a landscape if it's constantly changing.

The phrase "without seasons" also plays into the metaphorical connection the poem makes between the wife and the natural world. Whereas seasons are predictable because they occur at the same time each year, the wife "shift[s]" in ways that seem, at least to the husband, random. In this way, the poem's opening lines establish the husband's sense of helplessness when it comes to understanding his wife.

The speaker uses diacope in the phrase "year after year," the repetition implying that the husband's inability to comprehend his wife is nothing new. She is, it seems, constantly changing. Ironically enough, then, one of the only constants in this marriage is the fact that it is always undergoing a transformation of some sort—a paradox that highlights the idea that romantic relationships unfold in unexpected ways and that this is one of the only predictable things about love.

These lines also establish the poem's loose adherence to iambic pentameter, a meter in which each line is made up of five iambs (metrical feet consisting of an unstressed syllable followed by a stressed syllable; da-DUM). The first line, for example, can be broken down like this:

> He nev- | er learned | her, quite. | Year af- | ter year

The fourth foot of this line can be read as a spondee, or a foot made up of two stressed syllables, or a trochee ("Year aft-"). Either way, when combined with the caesuras after "her" and "quite," this disrupts the iambic rhythm, squandering the sense of predictability that the meter might otherwise lend to the poem. This, in turn, is appropriate for a poem about an unpredictable, volatile romantic relationship.

LINES 3-6

An hour he ...
... in her voice.

After establishing the husband's inability to understand his wife and, in turn, the wife's tendency to change quite often, the speaker describes what it's like for the husband to navigate the wife's emotions. "An hour he could be lost / in the walled anger of quarried hurt," the speaker says in lines 3 and 4, conveying the husband's sense of helplessness by suggesting that he feels "lost" inside his wife's anger, which is like a pit that has been walled off to keep people away.

This metaphor of the husband getting lost inside the wife's anger implies that he sometimes feels overwhelmed and even consumed by her emotions. In keeping with the idea that she is constantly changing, though, this feeling doesn't last forever. Rather, the speaker says that when the husband turns another way (which is perhaps an abstract way of suggesting that time has passed), he suddenly sees "cool water laughing where / the day before there were stones in her voice."

This continues the extended metaphor of the wife as a geological landscape, but now she is presented as a free-flowing stream that represents happiness and ease. And though this is undoubtedly a welcome change, the sudden emotional reversal still confounds the husband, making it difficult for him to feel as if he truly knows and understands his wife.

These lines contain several prominent consonant sounds, like the /r/ sound in words like "hour," "anger," "quarried," "hurt," "turning," and "water," among others. There is also the /w/ sound, which alliterates over the course of lines 4 through 6 (including in the "kwa" of "quarried"):

> in the walled anger of her quarried hurt
> on turning, see cool water laughing where
> the day before there were stones in her voice.

This gives this section a forceful but somewhat wobbly sound, thereby capturing the dynamic range of the wife's emotions, which fluctuate between strong-willed passion and easygoing happiness. To that end, this range is also represented by the

juxtaposition between the cool running water of the wife's happiness and the gravelly stones that can be heard in her voice when she's angry.

LINES 7-11

He charted. She ...
... faultlessly calm.

This section focuses on the husband's unsuccessful attempts to understand his wife. "He charted," the speaker says, continuing the extended metaphor of the wife as a landscape and presenting the husband as an emotional cartographer—somebody who wants to organize the complex terrain of the wife's unpredictable emotions so that she is as easily readable as a map. This, in turn, calls attention to the husband's desire to categorize and simplify their relationship.

However, whenever the husband thinks he has successfully "charted" his wife's emotions, she makes "wilderness again"—a phrase that frames the wife as some kind of elemental force that cannot be tamed. "The map was never true," the speaker says, indicating that it's impossible for the husband to come up with a conception of the wife that fully captures her essence.

Elaborating on this point, the speaker once again uses naturalistic imagery to describe what it's like for the husband to interact with the wife. This time, however, the speaker's description of their interactions is somewhat abstract: "Wind brought him rain sometimes, tasting of sea [...] and suddenly she would change the shape of shores faultlessly calm." It's unclear what, exactly, the "wind" is in this metaphor, though it's rather clear that the idea of the wife "rain[ing]" on the husband represents her tendency to overwhelm him with her emotions.

But this onslaught of emotion is not necessarily always a bad thing. In fact, it's possible to read this as a moment of sexual innuendo. Under this interpretation, the "wind" that brings "rain" (which "taste[s] of sea") is a rush of lustful passion that overtakes both the wife and the husband. And after they have sex, the wife seems "faultlessly calm."

Of course, it's also possible that this is just yet another way for the speaker to describe the wife's ever-changing emotional state and her ability to overwhelm the speaker like a violent storm that comes rushing onto land from the sea. Either way, what remains clear is that the speaker is unable to predict the "shape of [her] shores," meaning that he can't quite make a metaphorical map of her internal world, which is constantly shifting.

These lines are very sibilant, including not just the traditionally sibilant /s/ sound, but also the /sh/ and /z/ sounds:

> He charted. She made wilderness again.
> Roads disappeared. The map was never true.
> Wind brought him rain sometimes, tasting of sea –
> and suddenly she would change the shape of shores
> faultlessly calm. [...]

This creates a flowing, hissing sound that snakes through the words. The language reflects the sound of a violent rainstorm slashing through and overwhelming an entire region. It also leads to a slippery, unstable sound that is reminiscent of the quick and sudden changes that take place in the husband and wife's relationship.

Similarly, the caesuras in these lines lead to a choppy rhythm that breaks up the predictability of the poem's meter. Consider, for example, the way line 7 is broken up:

> He charted. || She made wilderness again.

This line is in iambic pentameter, meaning that its made up of five iambs (five da-DUMs). However, there is a caesura in the middle of the second foot ("-ed. || She"). This divides the rhythm up in an unexpected way, making the otherwise consistent thump of iambic pentameter feel less dependable or predictable. The fractured sound of the poem aligns with the unpredictability of the husband and wife's relationship.

LINES 11-14

All, all was ...
... jaunty helpless journey.

Once more emphasizing the fact that the husband and wife's relationship is never steady or consistent, the speaker says, "All, all was each day new." By using epizeuxis at the beginning of this phrase, the speaker emphasizes the idea that *nothing* in the husband and wife's relationship is consistent. The repetition of "all" underlines this point, stressing the extent to which the wife's wide-ranging emotional life impacts the relationship.

In lines 12 and 13, the speaker uses a simile to describe the nature of the wife's love for the husband, saying, "the shadows of her love shortened or grew / like trees seen from an unexpected hill." This is a figuratively rich moment that is difficult to parse, especially since it begins with the mention of the "shadows" of the wife's love. What, exactly, this means is ambiguous, but it's possible that the speaker wants to portray the wife's love for the husband as something that can't be detected head-on; rather, one can only pick up on her love for him by looking at the "shadows" that this love casts. Alternatively, perhaps her love changes in size depending on the angle at which a person examines it—suggesting that exactly how much she seems to love the husband depends upon the husband's perspective.

But the speaker goes on to compare the wife's love to "trees seen from an unexpected hill." Again, this is ambiguous, especially since it's hard to say what an "unexpected hill" might be. However, this phrase fits into the extended metaphor of the wife as a geological landscape. In the same way that she constantly "change[s] the shape of shores," her love sometimes

juts up out of the earth like trees on an "unexpected hill" that has seemingly materialized out of nowhere. This imagery thus underscores the idea that the wife's emotions are unpredictable and that this includes her love for the husband.

"Marrysong" doesn't feature a set rhyme scheme, but it's worth noting that lines 11 and 12 include noticeable end rhymes:

> [...] All, all was each day **new**;
> the shadows of her love shortened or **grew**

This rhyme gives this section a feeling of cohesion and musicality, which leads to a subtle feeling of pleasure. In turn, the speaker's tone becomes somewhat lighthearted, as if the unpredictability in the husband and wife's relationship isn't all that bad.

This section is also fairly assonant, as lines 13 and 14 feature the /ee/ sound:

> like tr**ee**s s**ee**n from an unexpected hill,
> new countr**y** at **ea**ch jaunt**y** helpless journ**ey**.

This adds to the poem's feeling of pleasant unity, reinforcing the idea that the wife's unpredictability isn't always a bad thing. After all, her wide-ranging emotional tendencies also bring about "jaunty" (lively and cheerful) moods that are exciting and uplifting. As such, the sound of the language underhandedly encourages readers to view the volatility of this romantic relationship as something that is both challenging *and* rewarding.

LINES 15-17

> *So he accepted ...*
> *... of her mind.*

In the poem's final three lines, the husband learns to accept the wife's idiosyncrasies. Once again, the speaker builds upon the extended metaphor that has run throughout the poem, this time referring to the wife's emotional world as a "geography" that is "constantly strange." This landscape-based metaphor continues until the very end of the poem, as the speaker suggests that the husband actually finds himself drawn to the unexpected and ever-changing terrain of the wife's internal world.

To add to this, the speaker uses a pun at the beginning of line 16, saying that the husband "wondered." The literal meaning of this is that the husband accepts the wife's wide-ranging emotions but still finds himself wondering about what causes her to feel and act the way she does. However, the word "wondered" is also very close to the word "wandered," which fits into the framework of the speaker's extended metaphor comparing the wife to a vast landscape—a landscape that the speaker can wander through, exploring as he goes. In turn, the wife's unpredictability is framed in a more positive light, since it invites exploration and intrigue.

Because of this dynamic, the husband ends up staying home more often so that he can "find / his way among the landscapes of [the wife's] mind." In other words, he finds himself drawn to the very thing that he has seemingly struggled with in his romantic relationship—namely, the wife's unpredictability. Rather than seeing her idiosyncrasies as a bad thing, though, he has come to see them as attractive and rewarding. After all, the wife's internal world is unique, and this inspires the husband to spend more time trying to get to know her, even if he'll never be able to fully grasp everything about her.

Their relationship is framed as a journey that is always shifting, meaning that their love is something that the husband must continue to navigate. This, the poem implies, is what makes love so rewarding, offering people like the husband something special that is dynamic and complex.

Of course, there is irony built into the idea that the husband can only understand the wife by accepting the very fact that he'll never actually understand her. That this leads to a stronger relationship is somewhat unexpected, but it makes sense, since trying to sort people into simple categories ultimately reduces them and, thus, makes it harder to really get to know them. The husband accepts that he'll never completely comprehend his wife, and this ironically leads to a slightly better understanding of her, at least insofar as he finally grasps that her personality can't be flattened or simplified.

"Marrysong" can be viewed as a stretched sonnet, since it loosely follows the sonnet structure but deviates in certain ways. The most obvious deviation is that it contains 17 lines instead of the standard 14. Its adherence to iambic pentameter is also very loose.

Most sonnet lines contain five iambs, or metrical feet consisting of an unstressed syllable followed by a **stressed** syllable. However, line 15 varies from this rather significantly, with 7 feet instead of the standard 5:

> So **he** | ac**cep**- | ted **that** | ge**o**- | gra**phy**, | **con**stant- | ly **strange**

Interestingly, this line is in iambic pentameter until the caesura between "geography" and "constantly." This caesura marks a departure from iambic pentameter, at which point there are two extra feet: a trochee (**stressed**-unstressed) followed by yet another iamb.

It's almost as if this line is unique because it is the sonnet's "turn," which is a line in which the sonnet typically shifts in some manner. Although the turn is usually in line 9 or 13, in "Marrysong" it appears in line 15, highlighting not only the poem's deviation from the standard sonnet format, but also the husband's shift from bewilderment and confusion to acceptance and romantic contentment.

SYMBOLS

NATURE

The natural world in "Marrysong" represent the wife's constant state of change. In the same way that nature is susceptible to sudden and extreme transformations as a result of the weather or other geological events, the wife's internal world is subject to the same kind of drastic metamorphosis because of how intensely she experiences her own emotions.

Nowhere is this more apparent than in lines 9 through 11, when the speaker says:

> Wind brought him rain sometimes, tasting of sea —
> and suddenly she would change the shape of shores
> faultlessly calm [...].

The idea of wind bringing enough rain to completely change the contours of the wife's emotional landscape demonstrates just how severely she can fluctuate between tranquility and chaos. In turn, nature itself comes to symbolize the wife's emotional volatility and, moreover, the idea that she will always be changing—just like the earth itself.

Where this symbol appears in the poem:

- **Line 2:** "without seasons"
- **Lines 5-6:** "cool water laughing where / the day before there were stones in her voice"
- **Line 7:** "She made wilderness again."
- **Lines 9-11:** "Wind brought him rain sometimes, tasting of sea - / and suddenly she would change the shape of shores / faultlessly calm."
- **Lines 12-13:** "the shadows of her love shortened or grew / like trees seen from an unexpected hill,"
- **Line 17:** "the landscapes of her mind"

POETIC DEVICES

ALLITERATION

The alliteration in "Marrysong" makes the poem sound unified and harmonious. The most prominent alliterative sound in the poem is the /w/ sound, which the speaker stretches across a number of lines. Consider, for example, the way the /w/ sound appears in lines 4 through 9 (including in the "kwa" of "quarried"):

> in the walled anger of her quarried hurt
> on turning, see cool water laughing where
> the day before there were stones in her voice.
> He charted. She made wilderness again.
> Roads disappeared. The map was never true.
> Wind [...]

The alliterative /w/ sound appears at least once in all the above lines. And even though the /w/ doesn't always dominate the overall sound of a given line, the frequency with which it occurs in this section ensures that readers will pick up on its wobbly effect. In turn, these lines have a certain topsy-turvy quality, as the repeated /w/ creates a slight sense of motion and instability—an effect that captures the husband's inability to keep up with the wife's constant changes.

In other sections, the speaker uses alliteration to enhance the musicality of more isolated moments. For instance, the speaker alliterates the /j/ sound in line 14:

> new country at each jaunty helpless journey.

This is just a brief instance of alliteration, but because the /j/ sound is very noticeable, it goes a long way in making the line sound distinct and cohesive. Similarly, line 12 features the /sh/ sound in a quick, passing way that still defines the line's overall feel:

> the shadows of her love shortened or grew

The quick repetition of this alliterative /sh/ sound lends the line a swishing sensation that reflects the wife's sudden and unexpected emotional vacillations. In turn, alliteration helps the speaker not only bolster the poem's musicality, but also subtly imbue the language with a feeling of fluctuation and movement that mirrors the wife's emotional state, which is constantly in flux.

Where Alliteration appears in the poem:

- **Line 3:** "could"
- **Line 4:** "walled," "her," "quarried," "hurt"
- **Line 5:** "water," "where"
- **Line 6:** "were"
- **Line 7:** "wilderness"
- **Line 8:** "was"
- **Line 9:** "Wind," "sometimes," "sea"
- **Line 10:** "suddenly," "would," "shape," "shores"
- **Line 12:** "shadows," "shortened"
- **Line 14:** "jaunty," "journey"
- **Line 15:** "strange"
- **Line 16:** "Wondered," "Stayed"
- **Line 17:** "way"

REPETITION

The speaker uses diacope at the end of the first line, saying:

[...] Year after year
That territory, without seasons, shifted

This repetition emphasizes the passage of time, calling attention to the fact that, even though the husband and wife have been together for quite a while, the husband still hasn't managed to fully understand her.

Similarly, the speaker uses epizeuxis in line 11 to stress just how complete and all-encompassing the wife's changes can be:

All, all was each day new

By repeating the word "all" in quick succession without any intervening words, the speaker underscores the idea that everything in the husband and wife's life gets reinvented and undergoes change as a result of the wife's fluctuating emotional landscape. More importantly, this total transformation happens "each day," meaning that everything that might feel familiar to the husband ends up shifting drastically on a daily basis.

With this in mind, the two instances of repetition in "Marrysong" function in similar ways, since both the diacope in line 1 and the epizeuxis in line 11 act as intensifiers that place emphasis on what the speaker is saying. In this way, repetition helps make certain ideas stand out in the poem.

Where Repetition appears in the poem:

- **Line 1:** "Year after year"
- **Line 11:** "All, all"

EXTENDED METAPHOR

The poem uses an extended metaphor to compare the wife to various natural elements. The most prominent version of this metaphor presents the wife as a geological landscape that continues to shift and change. This is evident early in the poem, when the speaker refers to the wife's emotional world as a "territory" that transforms right before the husband's eyes. This, in turn, frames the wife as a person who is constantly in flux.

To add to this metaphor, the speaker notes that the husband tries to make a "map" of the wife's emotional landscape. Whenever he does this, though, she "ma[kes] wilderness again," suggesting that she cannot be categorized or reduced by simplistic understandings of her personality.

In keeping with this idea of the wife as a wild force that cannot be reigned in, the speaker builds upon the naturalistic metaphor in lines 10 and 11 by saying, "Wind brought him rain sometimes, tasting of sea — / and suddenly she would change the shape of shores." The image of rain gusting in off of the sea hints that strong emotions are capable of suddenly overtaking the wife and, in turn, the husband. And this ultimately reshapes the entire landscape of their relationship.

The husband eventually comes to embrace the "geography" of the wife's emotional landscape; instead of trying to understand her in a reductive way, he accepts her and all of her eccentricities. In this sense, the husband's acceptance of the wife ends up playing into the extended geological metaphor. The husband eventually finds himself drawn to the wife's complexity and, as a result, enjoys spending time trying to "find / his way among the landscapes of her mind." In other words, the husband becomes an explorer who approaches love as a journey, thereby rounding out the poem's central metaphor by becoming a wanderer in the "wilderness" of the wife's mind.

Where Extended Metaphor appears in the poem:

- Lines 1-3
- Lines 5-17

CAESURA

The use of caesuras in "Marrysong" leads to a choppy rhythm. This, in turn, often breaks up the iambic bounce (da-DUM da-DUM) that might otherwise define the poem's sound. The speaker's use of caesuras also simply slows down the pace of a given section, infusing certain moments with a measured, contemplative tone.

This can be seen in the very first line, which has two caesuras:

He never learned her, || quite. || Year after year

The second caesura in this line is very strong, since the speaker is in the middle of transitioning from one sentence to the next. In combination with the caesura that appears before the word "quite," this creates a short, clipped sound that prevents readers from rushing through the line too quickly. What's more, the two caesuras carve out the word "quite," emphasizing that the husband has never managed to fully understand the wife—implying that he has *almost* grasped her personality but always ends up falling short.

For another example of how a caesura can break up and slow down the rhythm of a line, consider the caesuras that appear in lines 7 and 8:

He charted. || She made wilderness again.
Roads disappeared. || The map was never true.

In both cases, the speaker comes to a full stop in the middle (or *near* the middle) of the line. This creates a terse, staccato rhythm that is further accentuated by the fact that both lines are end-stopped. As such, these two lines contain four discrete phrases, all of which are short and declarative. In turn, the speaker manages to slow readers down while also imbuing the poem with a feeling of gradual progression, since each phrase

builds upon the one before it even though they are all divided by caesuras.

In this regard, it becomes clear that the speaker doesn't just use caesuras to disrupt the flow of the poem, but also employs them as a way of enhancing the feeling that the words are marching forward—even if this means creating what initially seems like a choppy and uneven rhythm.

Where Caesura appears in the poem:

- **Line 1:** "her, quite. Year"
- **Line 2:** "territory, without"
- **Line 3:** "eye. An"
- **Line 5:** "turning, see"
- **Line 7:** "charted. She"
- **Line 8:** "disappeared. The"
- **Line 9:** "sometimes, tasting"
- **Line 11:** "calm. All, all"
- **Line 15:** "geography, constantly"
- **Line 16:** "Wondered. Stayed"

CONSONANCE

The poem is full of consonance. Often tangles of prominent consonance force readers to slow down as they work their way through chewy sounds like /r/ or /w/. A good example of this is the way the /r/ sound wends its way through lines 1 through 3:

> He never learned her, quite. Year after year
> That territory, without seasons, shifted
> under his eye. An hour [...]

This creates a purring or even growling sound that significantly affects the general tone of these opening lines. In this way, the poem's first words subtly suggest the pent-up frustration or confusion that the husband undoubtedly feels as a result of his inability to fully understand the wife.

There are other consonant sounds in these lines as well, such as the /th/ sound that appears in the words "that" and "without," along with the /t/ sound in "territory," "shifted," and "lost." Taken together, these sounds create a patchwork of consonance that is knotty and dense, making it necessary for readers to slowly comb through the lines to parse out these muscular sounds.

However, the speaker's use of consonance doesn't always create this feeling of density. To the contrary, the speaker uses sibilance in lines 9 through 11 to give the section a lighter, more fluid sound. This is achieved through the use of not just the standard sibilant /s/, but also the /sh/ sound:

> Wind brought him rain sometimes, tasting of sea —
> and suddenly she would change the shape of shores

This sibilance infuses these two lines with a hissing sound that mimics the noise of heavy rainfall. The combination of the /s/ and /sh/ sounds creates a soft, shushing effect that stands out in comparison to the harder consonant sounds that are found throughout the poem.

Where Consonance appears in the poem:

- **Line 1:** "never learned her," "Year after year"
- **Line 2:** "territory"
- **Line 3:** "under," "hour," "lost"
- **Line 4:** "walled anger," "her quarried hurt"
- **Line 5:** "turning," "cool water laughing where"
- **Line 6:** "before there were stones," "her voice"
- **Line 7:** "charted," "made wilderness"
- **Line 8:** "Roads disappeared"
- **Line 9:** "sometimes," "tasting," "sea"
- **Line 10:** "suddenly she," "shape," "shores"
- **Line 11:** "faultlessly calm. All, all"
- **Line 12:** "shadows," "shortened"
- **Line 13:** "unexpected"
- **Line 14:** "country," "jaunty helpless journey"
- **Line 15:** "accepted," "geography, constantly strange"
- **Line 16:** "Stayed," "increasingly," "find"
- **Line 17:** "landscapes," "mind"

ASSONANCE

Assonance adds a subtle sense of melody to the poem. For example, note the bright /ee/, /ay/, and /aw/ sounds in lines 9 through 11:

> Wind brought him rain sometimes, tasting of sea —
> and suddenly she would change the shape of shores
> faultlessly calm. All, all was each day new;

Combined with thick consonance and alliteration here—look at all those /l/ sounds in particular—this assonance creates music in the poem, making the language feel well-considered and carefully chosen. The assonance also adds to the poem's momentum, the build-up of sounds pushing the reader forward.

The /ee/ sound appears throughout the poem particularly often, returning, for example, in lines 13 through 15:

> like trees seen from an unexpected hill,
> new country at each jaunty helpless journey.
> So he accepted that geography, constantly strange.

These lines are packed with assonance, as the /ee/ sound appears multiple times in each. Again, the thick consonance and alliteration here works hand-in-hand with the assonance to create rich musicality. The sounds of the poem weave together their own thick landscape that the reader must traverse, just as the husband tries to journey through the mind of his wife.

Where Assonance appears in the poem:

- **Line 1:** "Year," "year"
- **Line 2:** "territory," "without," "seasons," "shifted"
- **Line 4:** "walled," "hurt"
- **Line 5:** "turning," "water," "where"
- **Line 6:** "there"
- **Line 9:** "rain," "tasting," "sea"
- **Line 10:** "suddenly," "she," "change," "shape"
- **Line 11:** "faultlessly," "All," "all," "each," "day"
- **Line 13:** "trees," "seen," "from," "unexpected"
- **Line 14:** "country," "each," "jaunty," "journey"
- **Line 15:** "he," "geography," "constantly," "strange"
- **Line 16:** "Stayed," "increasingly"
- **Line 17:** "way"

SIMILE

There is a simile in lines 12 and 13 that compares the wife's love for the husband to "trees seen from an unexpected hill." As mentioned in the line-by-line entry for this section of the poem, this is a very abstract simile, mostly because it's hard to imagine what an "unexpected hill" might be. Strange as this might seem, this simile plays into the poem's use of metaphor by likening the wife's love to yet another geological feature.

The simile follows on the heels of a metaphor comparing the wife's love to "shadows":

> the shadows of her love shortened or grew
> like trees seen from an unexpected hill

Shadows are dark and constantly shifting, suggesting that the wife's love, like a shadow, changes depending on one's perspective or the time of day. Sometimes shadows are long, other times they are short or disappear altogether. In those moments, perhaps the speaker cannot see his wife's love at all.

So what does this have to do with trees? It's ambiguous, and the following simile can be read in a few ways. Picture the husband climbing around the metaphorical landscape of his wife's emotions. All of a sudden, he butts up against a hill that he had not expected to be there (hence "unexpected hill").

This hill would seem to represent some sort of new impediment to the husband's understanding of his wife; he was making progress, things were going smoothly even, yet now must climb, put in more effort, to "reach" a new level of understanding. But maybe upon climbing or reaching the top of this hill, the husband sees trees that weren't visible from his previous vantage point on the ground. His perspective had to change in order to see these trees, just as the shadow of the wife's love changed with perspective.

Or, perhaps, the simile refers more explicitly to trees themselves growing and getting shorter—though, since trees don't grow shorter, this doesn't make a whole lot of sense.

What's important here is that the simile invites readers to think about nature once more and the idea of a landscape that cannot be relied upon to stay the same. In turn, this simile taps into the poem's presentation of the wife as unpredictable and in a constant state of transformation.

Where Simile appears in the poem:

- **Lines 12-13:** "the shadows of her love shortened or grew / like trees seen from an unexpected hill"

ENJAMBMENT

The speaker uses enjambment to stretch single phrases or clauses across line breaks, drawing readers through the poem and making the language feel like it has momentum. Certain moments of enjambment are especially noticeable, like the one that appears between lines 2 and 3:

> That territory, without seasons, shifted
> under his eye. [...]

The word "shifted" dangles on its own at the very end of line 2, creating a slight sense of instability that reflects the nature of the husband and wife's relationship. By dividing the phrase "shifted under his eye" with a line break, the speaker gives rise to a disjointed, unsteady rhythm that urges readers from one line to the next while also subtly mimicking the unpredictability inherent to this particular relationship.

In other moments, enjambment simply increases readers' interest by momentarily delaying the second half of a given phrase. This is the case at the end of the poem, when the speaker uses the final two lines to describe the husband's newfound past-time of exploring his wife's mind:

> Wondered. Stayed home increasingly to find
> his way among the landscapes of her mind.

Ending line 16 with the word "find" propels readers into the poem's final line so that they can discover what, exactly, the husband ends up trying to "find" when he stays home. It soon becomes clear in the last line that he finds "his way among the landscapes" of the wife's mind, an idea that emphasizes the poem's implication that love is a journey that must be constantly navigated. The speaker's use of enjambment not only affects the pacing of this section, but also piques readers' curiosity by splitting this important final phrase with a line break—perhaps giving readers the same sense of wonder and anticipation that the husband himself undoubtedly feels as he tries to "find / his way" through his unpredictable relationship.

Where Enjambment appears in the poem:

- **Lines 1-2:** "year / That"
- **Lines 2-3:** "shifted / under"
- **Lines 3-4:** "lost / in"
- **Lines 5-6:** "where / the"
- **Lines 10-11:** "shores / faultlessly"
- **Lines 16-17:** "find / his"

JUXTAPOSITION

Juxtaposition is built into the poem because of the discrepancy between the husband's desire to understand and categorize the wife's emotions and the wife's tendency to lean toward disorganization and emotional chaos. More simply, the speaker often uses juxtaposition to represent the wide-ranging spectrum of the wife's emotions, contrasting her calmer moods with her more intense moods.

For instance, consider the fact that the husband sometimes turns to the wife and finds "cool water laughing / where the day before there were stones in her voice." The juxtaposition between "cool water laughing" and the gravelly, emotional sound of stones in the wife's voice perfectly captures just how much her entire disposition can change over a short period of time.

The husband wants to "map" out the wife's emotions, and this effort to categorize or simplify her feelings stands in stark contrast to the entire spirit of the wife's personality—something defined by spontaneity and unpredictability. This dynamic is evident in line 7: "He charted. She made wilderness again." In this moment, a distinction arises between a map or chart and untamed "wilderness"—a distinction that speaks directly to the differences between the husband's desire for order and the wife's natural gravitation toward *dis*order.

There is another noticeable juxtaposition between the "faultlessly calm" shores of the wife's emotional landscape and the violent rainstorms that often sweep through and change the entire "shape" of these shores. Once again, this use of juxtaposition illustrates the vast range of emotion that the wife experiences.

Where Juxtaposition appears in the poem:

- **Lines 5-6:** "see cool water laughing where / the day before there were stones in her voice."
- **Lines 7-8:** "He charted. She made wilderness again. / Roads disappeared. The map was never true."
- **Lines 9-11:** "Wind brought him rain sometimes, tasting of sea - / and suddenly she would change the shape of shores / faultlessly calm."

PUN

The speaker's use of the word "wondered" in line 16 ("Wondered. Stayed [...] to find") is a subtle pun that plays off of the fact that "wondered" sounds very close to "wandered." This is especially clear when readers consider the surrounding context, which has to do with the husband's newfound desire to explore the wife's emotional landscape:

> So he accepted that geography, constantly strange.
> Wondered. Stayed home increasingly to find
> his way among the landscapes of her mind.

Given that the speaker is talking about how the husband comes to enjoy exploring the unexpected topography of the wife's personality, the fact that the word "wondered" is so close to the word "wandered" seems significant.

Of course, the speaker is *technically* saying that the husband finds himself thinking more and more about the wife's personality in a curious way, but the proximity of this word to "wandered" also subtly implies that this thinking is directly tied to his desire to explore and discover the wife's complexities. As such, the speaker manages to focus on the husband's thought process while also hinting at the delights that can come from journeying through the eccentricities of a lover's identity

Where Pun appears in the poem:

- **Line 16:** "Wondered"

IRONY

The great irony of "Marrysong" is that the husband, who craves stability and predictability, only manages to gain a sense of stability in his relationship with the wife once he accepts the fact that she is unpredictable.

Throughout the poem, it's clear that all he wants is to understand what makes his wife feel and act the way she does. Time and again, though, she eludes his understanding. When he tries to make a "map" of her emotional landscape, she suddenly turns his careful plotting into "wilderness." To that end, everything in their relationship feels completely new on a daily basis, making it all but impossible for the husband to feel a sense of consistency and stability.

Ironically enough, though, he finally learns to accept the "geography" of the wife's internal world, finding himself drawn to this world because he enjoys exploring "the landscapes of her mind." Of course, this doesn't necessarily mean that he ever manages to fully understands her, but he does finally understand perhaps the most important thing about their relationship—namely, that he will *never* be able to completely understand the wife. Unpredictability is ironically the only consistent thing in their relationship, so he accepts this unpredictability despite his apparent hesitancy to embrace chaos and disorder.

Where Irony appears in the poem:

- **Lines 15-17:** "So he accepted that geography, constantly strange. / Wondered. Stayed home increasingly to find / his way among the landscapes of her mind."

VOCABULARY

Territory (Line 2) - An area of land.

Quarried (Line 4) - A "quarry" is a pit from which objects like stones have been extracted. In the context of the poem, the speaker seems to be suggesting that the wife's emotional pain has been excavated from some deep place within her.

Charted (Line 7) - To "chart" a place is to make a map of it.

Faultlessly (Lines 10-11) - For something to be "faultless" means that it is completely free of any kind of mistake or error. However, the word "fault" also hints at a rupture or crack in the earth's surface that can often lead to an earthquake. As such, the phrase "faultlessly calm" describes something that is extremely peaceful and unlikely to erupt into chaos.

Jaunty (Line 14) - Cheerful or lively.

FORM, METER, & RHYME

FORM

That "Marrysong" is one long chunk of text is no accident: the poem is meant to feel a bit daunting, given its take on marriage as a kind of overwhelming wilderness.

There are some very interesting formal things happening within this block of text, however. Although "Marrysong" has 17 lines instead of 14, it can be considered a stretched sonnet. This means that it loosely adheres to the sonnet structure but has extra lines.

Calling this poem a sonnet might be confusing. After all, sonnets are supposed to have a clear rhyme scheme and follow iambic pentameter. This poem has no rhyme scheme, and its meter, though iambic in moments, is very loose. That said, many modern sonnets do away with these conventions of the form. But what about those extra three lines?

That's where "stretched" comes in. But first, some important background: sonnets are essentially two-part poems. The first part proposes some issue, question, or dilemma, to which the second part then responds in some way. The moment when the poem's tone shifts and begins to address or solve the initial problem is called the "turn" or "volta." In a normal Petrarcchan sonnet, the turn comes in line 9; in a Shakespearean sonnet, it comes in the poem's final rhyming couplet.

And this is why Marrysong is "stretched" sonnet: its turn—its moment of change—comes all the way in line 15, at the beginning of what can be considered a final tercet (three-line stanza):

> So he accepted that geography, constantly strange.

Here, the husband finally learns to accept his wife's idiosyncrasies—the same ones he was struggling against for the past 14 lines. The poem then ends with a straightforward rhyming couplet that succinctly responds to everything that came before it, just like a good old-fashioned Shakespearean sonnet would:

> Wondered. Stayed home increasingly to find
> his way among the landscapes of her mind.

In this way, this expanded version of the sonnet's structure *delays* the turn, giving the speaker more time to thoroughly establish the husband's struggle to understand the wife before pivoting in the last three lines to focus on the husband's newfound embrace of her wide-ranging emotional landscape.

METER

"Marrysong" is written in free verse, which helps keep things unpredictable for the reader—just as the wife's emotions are unpredictable to her husband.

That said, there are important gestures towards iambic pentameter in the poem. This is in keeping with the fact that the poem is a kind of expanded sonnet (and iambic pentameter is the defacto sonnet meter).

Iambic pentameter is a meter in which each line has five iambs, or feet consisting of an unstressed syllable followed by a stressed syllable. There are no lines in the poem that have a perfect iambic rhythm. There are a number of moments that *mostly* conform to iambic pentameter, however. For example, consider line 10:

> and sud- | denly she | would change | the shape | of shores

On the whole, this line follows the da-DUM da-DUM rhythm of iambic pentameter, as four of its five feet are iambs. The second foot is an anapest (da-da-DUM), and it's possible to read "would change" as a spondee ("would change"), but overall things are pretty steady here.

Most other lines, however, are harder to scan. Line 2, for example, is full of caesuras and multi-syllabic words that make it hard to sense an iambic rhythm. One possible way to scan it is as follows:

> That ter- | ritor- | y, with- | out sea- | sons, shifted

In this reading, the line is in iambic pentameter but contains a feminine ending, meaning that it has an extra unstressed syllable at the end of the final foot: "-sons shifted." In combination with the caesuras, this makes the line sound somewhat off-kilter. At the same time, though, the overall meter remains iambic, maintaining the general feeling of iambic pentameter even as the speaker deviates from the set rhythm from time to time.

The turn that comes in line 15 features includes two extra feet. It scans like this:

> So he | accept- | ed that | geo- | graphy, | constant- | ly strange

The first four feet of this line are iambs, and arguably the fifth one can be finagled into an iambic reading too ("-graphy"). This means that the line is in iambic pentameter until it reaches the caesura after the word "geography." But then the speaker adds a trochee ("constant-") followed by another iamb ("-ly strange"). This expands the line and calls attention to the shift that takes place in this moment of the poem, when the husband finally learns to accept his wife's unpredictability. In turn, the poem's loose utilization of iambic pentameter ends up spotlighting some of its most important moments.

RHYME SCHEME

The poem does not follow a set rhyme scheme, nor does it feature very many internal or slant rhymes. However, there are two prominent end rhymes that stand out and give the poem a musical sound. The first of these can be found in lines 11 and 12:

> faultlessly calm. All, all was each day new;
> the shadows of her love shortened or grew

Because the fest of the poem lacks a rhyme scheme, the rhyme that occurs between "new" and "grew" is especially noticeable, ultimately lending a satisfyingly cohesive quality to this section of the poem.

Similarly, the final two lines feature another end rhyme:

> Wondered. Stayed home increasingly to find
> his way among the landscapes of her mind.

In some ways, this resembles the rhyming couplet that concludes an English sonnet. This rhyme allows the speaker to wrap up the poem on a musical, pleasant note that reflects the husband's newfound joy in exploring the "landscapes" of the wife's mind.

SPEAKER

The speaker of "Marrysong" remains unidentified. This makes sense, since the poem focuses not on the speaker, but on two characters: a husband and a wife. The speaker describes the nature of their relationship, using limited third person to remain closest to the husband's perspective. The speaker focuses on how the husband is influenced by his wife's general unpredictability without outlining how the woman feels about their relationship. In this way, the poem almost feels like it's from the man's point of view, even if the words technically belong to the third-person speaker.

SETTING

It's unclear when or where "Marrysong" takes place. Rather than spotlighting a particular setting, the poem focuses on a romantic relationship that could seemingly belong to any time period or culture. In some ways, then, the marriage itself becomes the setting for the poem, especially since the speaker uses an extended metaphor to compare the emotional world of the couple's romance to an ever-changing geological landscape. In turn, the only relevant contextual information has to do with the nature and terrain of this romantic bond, which is portrayed as volatile and dynamic because of the woman's unpredictable personality. This unpredictability, in other words, serves as the backdrop for the entire poem.

CONTEXT

LITERARY CONTEXT

"Marrysong" belongs to a rich tradition of poetry about romance and marriage. "Marrysong" is specifically about the trials and tribulations of marriage, putting it in conversation with famous divorce poems such as "Modern Love" by George Meredith, "If You Forget Me" by Pablo Neruda, and "Man and Wife" by Robert Lowell. Like "Marrysong," these poems deal with the difficulty of maintaining volatile relationships.

However, "Marrysong" isn't about ending a marriage—it's about learning to adapt to the complexities that often come along with love. In this sense, it has more in common with some of Shakespeare's sonnets (such as "Sonnet 73" or "Sonnet 138"), which often tackle the nuanced and complicated difficulties that tend to creep into romantic bonds.

Although "Marrysong" is written in straightforward English, Dennis Scott is known for helping popularize the use of Jamaican vernacular—or "nation language"—in poetry. His poetry collection *Uncle Time*, which was published in 1973, drew upon nation language to great effect and won the Commonwealth Poetry Prize. As an influential poet from the

Caribbean, Scott is often read alongside Mervyn Morris, Derek Walcott, and Kamau Brathwaite, among others.

HISTORICAL CONTEXT

"Marrysong" was published in 1989, roughly 20 years after the beginning of the women's liberation movement of the late 1960s. This movement constituted a political and cultural effort to bring about gender equality and challenge patriarchal norms. In particular, one of the major impacts of the women's liberation movement was that it encouraged society to embrace the idea of female independence, ultimately fighting to unveil society's sexist expectation that women should defer to men.

Of course, "Marrysong" is not explicitly about gender dynamics and female independence, but the topic is worth keeping in mind because the poem is an apparent celebration of the wife's strong-willed personality. However, the poem unfortunately plays into certain stereotypes about women and the role they play in their relationships with men, even if "Marrysong" is technically trying to *praise* the wife's independent spirit.

To that end, comparisons of the wife to "wilderness" and the multiple mentions of her unpredictability end up playing into the sexist idea that women are normally expected to be well-behaved when it comes to how they interact with their husbands. With this in mind, the poem's exploration of the wife's intense and fluctuating emotions actually makes it seem more like the speaker faults her for being irrational and uncooperative instead of praising her individuality. As a result, what feels like an attempt to fit into the broader framework of the women's liberation movement actually runs the risk of reinforcing sexist expectations and stereotypes.

MORE RESOURCES

EXTERNAL RESOURCES

- More About Dennis Scott — Learn more about Dennis Scott, who was not only a poet, but also a dancer, playwright, and actor. (https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Dennis_Scott_(writer))
- Dennis Scott's Obituary — Read the poet's 1991 obituary in The New York Times. (https://timesmachine.nytimes.com/timesmachine/1991/02/23/issue.html)
- Nation Language — Although "Marrysong" is composed in traditional English, Dennis Scott was well known for his use of nation language. Read more here about the use of this vernacular and its impact on Caribbean literature. (https://www.encyclopedia.com/humanities/encyclopedias-almanacs-transcripts-and-maps/nation-language)
- The Sonnet Form — "Marrysong" is considered a stretched—or expanded—sonnet. Take a look at this glossary of sonnet forms and how they differ from one another. (https://www.poetryfoundation.org/learn/glossary-terms/sonnet)

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