

Paper 1: Poetry & Prose

Marrysong
By Dennis Scott

He never learned her, quite. Year after year
that territory, without seasons, shifted
under his eye. An hour he could be lost
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 brought him rain sometimes, tasting of sea –
and suddenly she would change the shape of shores
faultlessly calm. All, all was each day new;
the shadows of her love shortened or grew
like trees seen from an unexpected hill,
new country at each jaunty helpless journey.
So he accepted that geography, constantly strange.
Wondered. Stayed home increasingly to find
His way among the landscapes of her mind.

Q: To what extent is 'Marrysong' a poem about the complexity of relationships?

Example answer:

'Marrysong' by Dennis Scott is a poem about love, understanding and relationships. The poem has quite a reflective tone which shows that relationships can be very complex and changeable. Scott describes how a husband tries to understand the complexity of his wife's emotions over the course of their marriage. The poem is told in the 3rd person but from the husband's perspective so we are able to see how he views his relationship with his wife.

Scott shows how difficult it is for the husband to truly understand his wife's emotions. Scott describes how the husband **'could be lost / in the walled anger of her quarried hurt'**. The use of the metaphor 'walled hurt' shows how he cannot escape her emotions. Scott skilfully uses the metaphor of a wall to suggest that her anger can surround and control both of them. Walls can often be a symbol of safety and protection, however in this case the wall represents the restrictions placed upon the husband by her anger. This is further emphasised by the fact that he is 'lost' and cannot find his way through her emotions. In addition, the use of enjambment represents the idea that her emotions are continuous and flowing which further highlights the difficulty he has in trying to navigate them.

In addition to the difficulty the husband faces, we also see how complex the wife's emotions are as they shift and change. The husband experiences her emotions as **'cool water laughing where / the day before there were stones in her voice.'** The juxtaposition of 'laughing' and 'stones' shows how easily and quickly her emotions can change. Furthermore, the use of personification here brings to life her positive emotions as Scott describes the 'cool water laughing'. The choice of the word 'laughing' highlights her happy mood as the sound is euphonious. In addition, the use of personification suggests that, like water, her mood is difficult to contain and has the ability to dissolve or evaporate. This is further reinforced by the juxtaposition which reveals how quickly her mood has changed from 'stones' to 'water laughing'. The fact that she is described as having 'stones in her voice' shows just how hard and painful her words can be. By showing the shift in her emotions, Scott is highlighting how difficult it is for the husband to not only understand his relationship but also his wife.

However, Scott also shows that there is a positive aspect of this relationship and even though it is complex, the poem ends with the husband coming to understand and accept his wife. The poem ends with a rhyming couplet: **'Wondered. Stayed home increasingly to find / His way among the landscapes of her mind.'** Here we see that the husband's love is so strong that he comes to love his wife without fully understanding everything about her. The use of a couplet reminds us of love and emotion as they are often used in sonnets to give a resolution or draw attention to the meaning. The use of rhyme also makes these final lines even more powerful and leaves the reader with a sense of hope about their relationship. In addition, the use of 'find' and 'mind' to create the rhyme suggests that no matter what happens he will always see to 'find' a solution and a way of understanding or accepting her emotions and feelings.

In the poem 'Marrysong', Scott presents the reader with a complex relationship that initially seems fraught with obstacles and misunderstanding. However, he also shows that the relationship is strong and able to survive as the husband finally accepts that marriage is a struggle and he may never fully understand his wife, but it is worth the journey regardless.