

Paul Durcan



The Difficulty that is Marriage

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“Hardly a day goes
by that I don't think
about our marriage.”



*Paul Durcan, in an interview with Ciara Dwyer, Irish
Independent 10/09/2009*



The Title

- ❖ The words ‘marriage’ and ‘difficulty’ in the title alert us to the challenges posed by the relationship.



‘We disagree to disagree’

- ❖ Twist on the more usual ‘We agree to disagree’
- ❖ Friction and tension but also acceptance of the reality of a marriage that seems to work
- ❖ Words ‘divide’ and ‘differ’ are more usually associated with separation than unity

- ❖ Harsh, alliterative 'd' sounds reflect a couple jarring on one another's nerves
- ❖ Despite the difficulties, there is also a hint of closeness in the opening line: the couple are 'we' and the poet addresses his wife directly, creating a sense of intimacy
- ❖ It is as if we, the readers, are eavesdropping on a private conversation

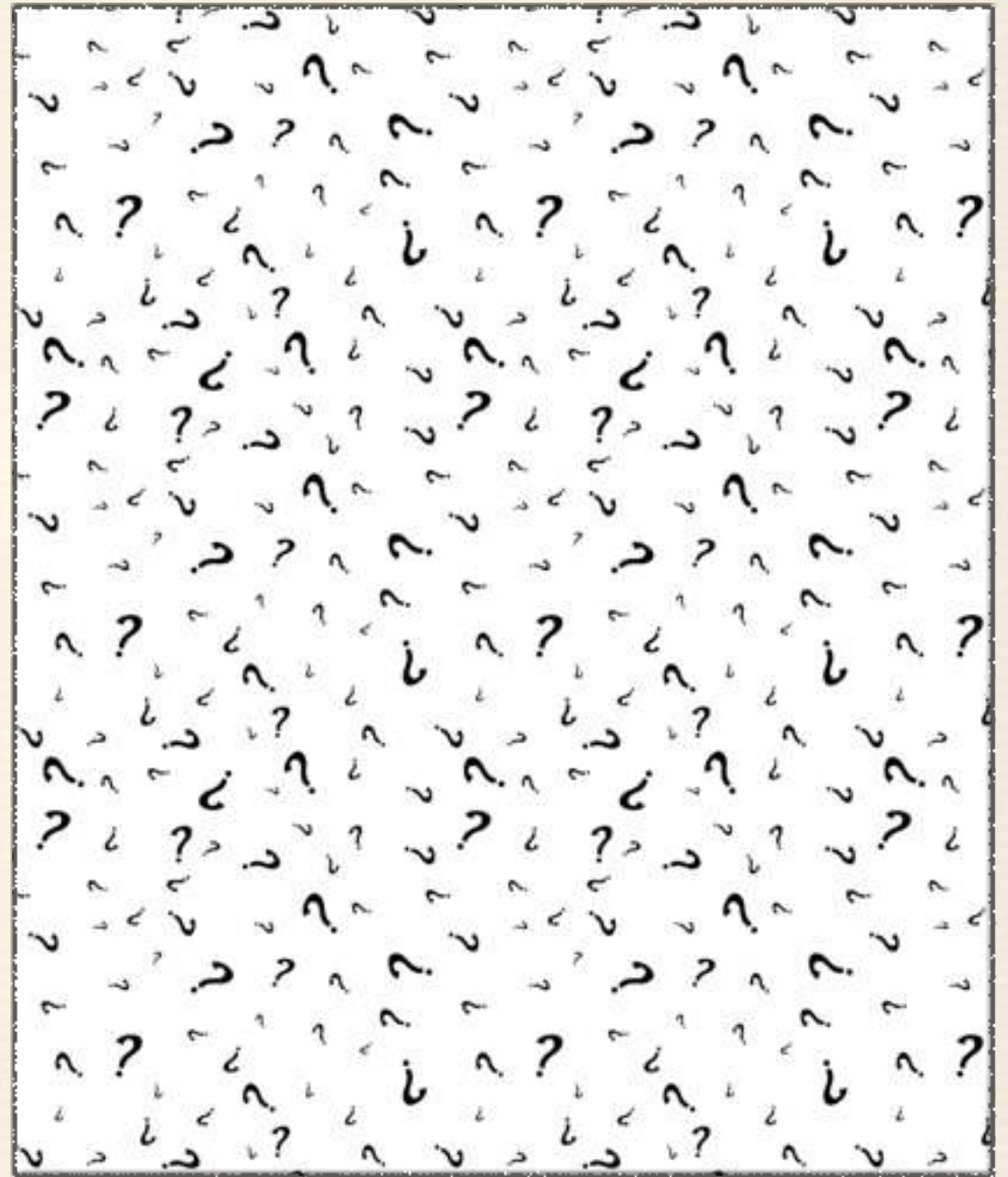
Yet...

- ❖ This word tells us all may not be as it seems
- ❖ The poet loves his wife dearly and marvels that she is with him at all
- ❖ They are physically close as they lie in bed yet are worlds apart: she is asleep while he is awake



A note of beauty

- ❖ The poet creates a mental mosaic of question marks on the ceiling
- ❖ Question remains unanswered: love is not easily pinned down or analysed



- ❖ Durcan is not brave enough to reject the idea of an afterlife
- ❖ Note of humility here - the pagan is not foolish but is brave and the poet cannot emulate him
- ❖ Cannot face the fact that this life is all we have

Yet...

- ❖ The word 'Yet' appears again and marks a turn in this rather informal sonnet (a form usually associated with love)
- ❖ He would swap the comforting constancy of immortality in heaven for the inconstant, 'changeling earth'
- ❖ Troubles would be worthwhile if he could be with his wife



- ❖ Says he does not believe his wife is perfect but immediately contradicts this
- ❖ If she does have faults, he cannot see them
- ❖ Final line sets the seal on the poet's love
- ❖ Every word bar the last is monosyllabic - adds emphasis and drives home the message
- ❖ Poem ends on a positive note