



THE FARMER'S BRIDE KNOWLEDGE ORGANISER



Context – *The Farmer's Bride* was written by Charlotte Mew and published in 1916.

Charlotte Mew – Charlotte Mew (1869-1928) was an English poet, whose work spanned the Victorian and modernist eras. Her life was tragic from beginning to end – she was one of seven children, however her father died young without leaving adequate provision for the family. Furthermore, three of her siblings died in childhood, and two were deemed insane and committed to institutions. After these tragic events, Charlotte and her remaining sister, Anne, made a pact never to marry for fear of passing on insanity to their children. (Many observers have noted that Charlotte was in fact a repressed lesbian, which was socially unacceptable at the time). When her sister died of cancer in 1927, Charlotte descended into a deep depression, and committed suicide by drinking Lysol. Some of her poems discuss mental illness, and many are in the form of dramatic monologues, including *The Farmer's Bride*, which is a part of her first collection of poetry, bearing the same name.



Mental Illness – Mental illness in Mew's era was not nearly as widely understood as in the present day. A wide range of mental illnesses were yet to be diagnosed or comprehended – as a result most with mental illnesses were simply labelled as 'mad' or 'lunatics.' Furthermore, attitudes to those with mental illnesses were dismissive – they were considered to be 'inconvenient' people to society and were normally locked away in asylums, as was the case with some of Mew's siblings.



Patriarchal Society – Although many laws governing patriarchy had been removed, in Mew's time, in reality, women were still dominated by men. Marriages were not arranged in the strictest sense, but parental approval and inheritance opportunities still played a large role – this was particularly the case in farming communities. Once married, many women were still considered to be under the 'ownership' of their husbands.



Language/Structural Devices

Simplistic/ Colloquial Language – Simplistic and colloquial language is used to create the persona of the farmer, the speaker throughout this dramatic monologue. Some of examples of his speech-like language are 'when us was wed' and 'she runned away.' This language depicts both his rural dialect and his lack of formal education, and his absence of sophistication in wooing his wife. The demands of working life clearly come above all considerations to him, as is clear in the line 'but more's to do.' Although he may desire her romantically, he does not show her this.

Quote: "Too young maybe—but more's to do...
...When us was wed she turned afraid."

Punctuation/ Enjambment/ Caesura – Each of these techniques are used for emphasis in different places across the poem. For example, the last line of the first stanza contains two commas, showing the disturbance created when the wife ran away. Likewise, the enjambment at the end of line 43 emphasises the distance between the farmer and his wife.

Quote: "Alone, poor maid. 'Tis but a stair
Betwixt us. Oh! my God! the down,"

Form – The poem is a dramatic monologue containing six stanzas, which considerably vary in length, reflecting the unsettled relationship. One of the shortest stanzas (stanza 4) gives details about her, which is a deliberate attempt to show how little he actually knows about her. There is a strong rhyme scheme that runs throughout the poem, demonstrating the rigidity/confines of their marriage.

Quote: "Look round like children at her call.
I've hardly heard her speak at all."

Similes – Mew employs a number of similes across the poem in order to compare the farmer's bride to frightened prey. For example, in line 15, she is described as 'flying like a hare', in line 21 she is presented as completing her work 'like a mouse', and in line 30 she is portrayed as being 'shy as a leveret.' These frequent similes throughout the poem make the farmer's bride seem poor, weak, and defenceless against the merciless pursuit made by both the farmer and the expectations of society. At the end of the poem she cuts a dejected figure – worn down and resigned to her role.

Quote: "Shy as a leveret, swift as he,
Straight and slight as a young larch tree"

Sibilance – The short fourth stanza is distinct in that the farmer provides an admiring description of this wife. He employs sibilance to emphasise her features, and offer a sense of the farmer's whispered appreciation of her attributes. The sibilance creates a soft tone throughout these lines, offering some contrast to the remainder of the poem.

Quote: "Straight and slight as a young larch tree,
Sweet as the first wild violets, she,"

Narrative Structure – The opening stanza gives the reader background information about the farmer's marriage. In stanza 2, she runs away and is caught. Stanza 3 explains the jobs that they each do, yet are not passionate with one another, even though he reveals that he would like them to in stanza 4. Stanza 5 emphasises the passing of time, and stanza 6 highlights the distance between them.

Quote: "Three summers since I chose a maid,
Too young maybe—but more's to do"

Line-by-Line Analysis

STANZA	LINE	POEM	ANALYSIS
1	1	Three summers since I chose a maid,	Opening with 'three summers since', the speaker shows that he is a man <u>concerned with the seasons</u> –thinking of the farm. The farmer was the one to make a <u>choice</u> of bride ('I chose'). The farmer makes reference to the idea that she was <u>sexually immature</u> , but the <u>dash</u> signifies him quickly changing the topic. It becomes clear that she is <u>scared/ disinterested</u> of him. Regional dialect ('us was wed') shows his lack of sophistication. The <u>simile</u> in line 6 compares her to the frigidity of winter. She rejected him & ran away.
	2	Too young maybe—but more's to do	
	3	At harvest-time than bide and woo.	
	4	When us was wed she turned afraid	
	5	Of love and me and all things human;	
	6	Like the shut of a winter's day	
	7	Her smile went out, and 'twadn't a woman—	
	8	More like a little frightened fay.	
	9	One night, in the Fall, she runned away.	
2	10	"Out 'mong the sheep, her be," they said,	It is clear that the wife feels <u>comfortable amongst the animals</u> – the comparison with sheep shows that she is viewed as being unintelligent and owned by the farmer. Her 'wide brown stare' shows her preoccupation with her fears. The long line 14, and <u>enjambment into 15</u> , shows how far they pursue her – she really wants to get away. The <u>simile</u> used to compare her to a hare show that she has become prey. The farmer's reference to 'Church Town' reminds the reader that both religion and society would be on his side against his wife. When <u>caught</u> (like an animal), there appears to be no attempt to comfort her.
	11	'Should properly have been abed;	
	12	But sure enough she wadn't there	
	13	Lying awake with her wide brown stare.	
	14	So over seven-acre field and up-along across the down	
	15	We chased her, flying like a hare	
	16	Before out lanterns. To Church-Town	
	17	All in a shiver and a scare	
	18	We caught her, fetched her home at last	
19	And turned the key upon her, fast.		
3	20	She does the work about the house	The wife's domestic roles in the house are resumed – it is <u>assumed</u> that the woman in the relationship would do the cooking and cleaning. Once more, <u>a simile</u> is used to compare her to an animal (like a mouse), suggesting that she is now timid, quiet, and powerless. It continues the idea of her <u>being prey</u> , and the farmer and his friends being predators. The farmer is confused as to why she speaks with animals, but it is clear that these threaten her less than men (who <u>sexually desire</u> her). The <u>assonance</u> of the 'e' sound in line 25 shows her fear. The farmer identifies as a man ('one of us') rather than as her husband. He sees her as <u>outcast</u> .
	21	As well as most, but like a mouse:	
	22	Happy enough to chat and play	
	23	With birds and rabbits and such as they,	
	24	So long as men-folk keep away.	
	25	"Not near, not near!" her eyes beseech	
	26	When one of us comes within reach.	
	27	The women say that beasts in stall	
	28	Look round like children at her call.	
29	I've hardly heard her speak at all.		
4	30	Shy as a leveret, swift as he,	Another <u>simile</u> compares her to prey – a leveret is a hare less than a year old. The <u>similes</u> used in lines 31 and 32 show why he is <u>sexually attracted</u> to her, which he details longingly, as he is clearly repressed. The <u>rhetorical question</u> 'but what to me?' shows his confusion as to why he cannot have her. The simple <u>rhyme scheme</u> mirrors his simplicity.
	31	Straight and slight as a young larch tree,	
	32	Sweet as the first wild violets, she,	
	33	To her wild self. But what to me?	
5	34	The short days shorten and the oaks are brown,	The farmer once again details the seasons, showing his preoccupation with <u>nature and the seasons</u> (as you might expect from a farmer). The colours described (brown/blue) are <u>cold</u> – setting a mood of depression. The solitary leaf could be seen as a <u>metaphor for the isolation</u> that the farmer and his wife both feel. The <u>magpie</u> is seen as an ill-omen in many western cultures. The mention of the berries reddening up is a <u>metaphor</u> for the seeds of new life. However, the farmer is disappointed that Christmas time brings no children – his life with his wife is still sterile.
	35	The blue smoke rises to the low grey sky,	
	36	One leaf in the still air falls slowly down,	
	37	A magpie's spotted feathers lie	
	38	On the black earth spread white with rime,	
	39	The berries redden up to Christmas-time.	
	40	What's Christmas-time without there be	
41	Some other in the house than we!		
6	42	She sleeps up in the attic there	Their separation is confirmed - The caesura in line 43 emphasises this. The farmer laments that there is only a staircase between them physically, and yet a void between them emotionally. His exclamations: 'my God' and 'her hair!' exemplifies his grief. The farmer imagines her soft skin, her eyes, and her long brown hair. These precise descriptions of her demonstrate his longing to be intimate. The final line once more relates her to an animal, thus summarising the problem: he wants to love her, but also wants to trap her.
	43	Alone, poor maid. 'Tis but a stair	
	44	Betwixt us. Oh! my God! the down,	
	45	The soft young down of her, the brown,	
	46	The brown of her—her eyes, her hair, her hair!	

Themes – A theme is an idea or message that runs throughout a text.

Romantic Love – Romantic Love is a theme throughout the poem in terms of both its presence and its absence. For example, there was an absence of romantic love in how the marriage came about (the farmer 'chose' her), and she appears to lack any sort of desire for him. Even his romantic feelings towards her (he precisely details her physical attributes) are confused with his apparent preoccupation with 'possessing' her.



Mental Illness – Mental illness is alluded to throughout several sections of the poem. For example the suggestion that she is 'lying awake' with a 'wide stare' when she should 'be abed' implies that her anxieties over the marriage have led her to become an insomniac. Also, it is suggested that she only talks to animals and has depression.



Poems for Comparison

Poems for Comparison		Critique of the Poem
Sonnet 29: 'I think of thee'	<i>The Farmer's Bride</i> can be contrasted with this poem in relation to the theme of <u>Mental Illness</u>	"Throughout her poetry, Mew has an unsettling facility for inhabiting the minds and voices of others. She speaks through the mouths of the disappointed, the deranged and the desolate. It is no mistake that she wrote so many dramatic monologues: the form is the perfect vehicle for such a lonely cast of souls, in that the addressee never replies to the speaker (dramatic monologues are always addressed to a silent other). In Mew's poems, that addressee is often absent in any case: a vanished sweetheart, a buried loved one, a distant, unreachable God." www.newstatesman.com
Porphyria's Lover	<i>The Farmer's Bride</i> can be contrasted with this poem in relation to the theme of <u>Mental Illness</u>	

