Charlotte Mew: An Introduction

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CHARLOTTE MEW: AN INTRODUCTION

A Thesis
Presented to
the Faculty of the Department of English
Western Kentucky University
Bowling Green, Kentucky

In Partial Fulfillment
of the Requirements for the Degree
Master of Arts

by
Sandra Carol Joiner
August 1989
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Charlotte Mew (1869-1928) published short stories, essays, and poetry between 1894 and the time of her death. She published a slim volume of poems in 1916, a few of which place her as one of the great English poets. Indeed, both Thomas Hardy and Virginia Woolf thought her one of the greatest living female poets. Mew is particularly interesting as a poet who was born in the Victorian period, published during the "decadent decade" of the nineties, throughout Edward's reign, and well into the reign of George V. Although few of Mew's poems are dated, there is a gradual yet continual change from her early work to her latest.

In her work, Mew questions her relationship with God, nature, and humanity. She asked the questions asked by Emily Bronte, George Meredith, and Thomas Hardy. Like them, she was knowledgeable in the new science and believed in its results. She was a seeker for a workable philosophy on which to base her life, which she never fully found. It is both painful and fruitful to join her in her search through her works as she tries to come to terms with these issues.
Beginnings

Charlotte Mew was born in 1869 into an England which was in a transitional state. Mass education had been instituted; government and the professions were undergoing change. In religion God seemed to have disappeared and in society the role of women and women's relations to men underwent modification. Charlotte Mew was affected greatly by these changes and suffered a sense of confusion over what she saw as an absent God and her position as a woman. Darwin's *Origin of Species* had been published in 1859, just ten years before Mew's birth. Two years after her birth, *The Descent of Man* caused even more of a furor than the earlier work and kept England embroiled in a continuing debate on biblical scholarship and religion in general for decades. Like other writers of the period, Mew found the absence of God intolerable; she searched for some happy compromise between the physical and the spiritual.

Mew also found intolerable the expectations society held for women. England was dominated by a Queen, yet other women, and many men, found it necessary to struggle for women's rights. The "Woman Question" was addressed in poetry and fiction as well as in the intellectual prose of the day. Ruskin gave his lecture, "Of Queen's Gardens,"
which presented the conservative side of the issue, to "a mixed audience of middle-class men and women" in 1864 (Vicinus 123). Five years later, in the year of Charlotte Mew's birth, Mill's *The Subjection of Women* was published; while shocking to the majority, this book served as a catalyst to the growing movement for women's emancipation.

In addition to the transitional nature of the country when Mew was born, her parents were in a transitional state of their own. Mew's father was from a prosperous family of farmers and tavern owners on the Isle of Wight, who were, nevertheless, not in the same class as the architects whom they wanted their promising son to join. Like Thomas Hardy, Fred Mew was expected to rise through architecture. Unlike Hardy, however, who was articled to a Dorchester architect (Millgate 54), Fred Mew was sent to an uncle who was "a partner in a London architect's firm" (Fitzgerald 10). By the time Hardy went to London, Fred Mew already had his name on the drawing for the New School of Design at Sheffield. Mew soon left the firm of Manning and Mew to join his future wife's father, H. E. Kendall, Junior, of Spring Gardens, Trafalgar Square (Fitzgerald 10). This firm was responsible for buildings of renown, both public and private. Fitzgerald points out that much of Fred Mew's success was owing to Kendall's need for "a hard-working young man who for a salary of fifteen shillings a week would make the working drawings and collect the details and
'appropriate ornament' which were the hackwork of the conscientious Victorian architect" (13).

Whatever the reasons for his success, Mew was a junior partner in only three years. Two years later, in 1862, the thirty-year-old junior partner married Anna Maria Marden Kendall, "a tiny, pretty, silly young woman" (Fitzgerald 13), his employer's daughter. According to Fitzgerald, Mew was asked not to list his father's profession as inn-keeper, but gave his title as "Esquire" (14). This was only the first of many incidents in which Fred Mew was made to feel that his family was not quite what it might have been for the husband of someone of Anna Maria's background. Again like Thomas Hardy, Fred Mew had married "above himself." Unlike Thomas Hardy, however, Fred Mew did not rise. He not only was intellectually inferior to his senior partner but did not fit in socially:

His idea of an evening out was a smoking concert, or Jolly.... All his friends were architects.... Sometimes he crossed the street to the Foundlings' Home in Coram's Fields to talk to the orphans, and see them eat their dinners. (Fitzgerald 16)

Unfortunately for his family, Fred Mew did not have the talent of a Thomas Hardy to compensate for his social shortcomings.

These shortcomings, added to his background, were a source of friction between Mew and his wife, Anna Maria. One result of this friction was disagreements over the
names to be given their children. Anna Maria wanted at least her sons to be given Kendall names. One of these arguments was so bitter that one son's name was changed from Daniel Kendall to Christopher Barnes when the boy was a few months old. When the boy died shortly after his name change, the blame was placed on "'anger and grief' in the nursing mother" (Fitzgerald 17). Charlotte Mary was born after the first two sons. Although the Mew family lived very close to the Kendall family, and the children spent their summers on the Isle of Wight with the Mews, most of the children's time was spent with their nurse, Elizabeth Goodman.

Elizabeth Goodman came to Fred Mew's house with his new bride. She was:

a 'treasure,' with all the value and inconvenience of treasures, an old-fashioned servant who asked for nothing beyond service and due reward, but whose prejudices could never be shifted, not by an inch.... She was to make life tolerable for her young mistress, who had married beneath her. (Fitzgerald 14-5).

Elizabeth Goodman was more than a nurse to the children. She ran the house, as well as training country girls for a "position." She was a Christian who believed in retribution for one's sins. The children were expected not only to ask forgiveness for their sins, but to name each sin; not only sins, but "every moment of happiness" must be paid for. As pointed out by Fitzgerald, "Guilt of this
nature can never be eradicated, a lifetime is not long enough. Unfortunately it will survive long after the belief in forgiveness is gone" (24). One of Mew's essays was based on Goodman. "An Old Servant," published in 1913 in New Statesman, gives a vivid picture both of Elizabeth Goodman and of the relationship she enjoyed with the various members of the Mew household.

By 1877, when Charlotte Mew was eight years old, three of her brothers had been buried. There were left one brother, who was the first-born - Henry Herne Mew - and two sisters, both younger than Charlotte - Caroline Frances Anne, born in 1872, and Fleda Kendall, born in 1879. Mew described her childhood, according to Fitzgerald, "as a time of intense, but lost, happiness" (17). Mew loved the time she spent with her paternal relatives in the summer. The cousin closest to her in age, who later became a nun, described her "as a child 'full of the joy of life,' and 'hard to manage'" (Fitzgerald 23). One has only to read Mew's nature poetry to imagine how she must have looked forward to her summers outdoors. In two of Mew's poems the persona desires heaven to be like earth; both these personas live on farms. God is asked, in "In the Fields," "Can I believe there is a heavenlier world than this?" if so, "Will the strange heart of any everlasting thing / Bring me these dreams that take my breath away?" The old shepherd in "Old Shepherd's Prayer" has even stronger
feelings:

Heavenly Master, I wud like to wake to they same
green places
Where I be know'd for breakin' dogs and follerin'
sheep.
And if I may not walk in th' old ways and look on
th' old faces
I wud sooner sleep.

As Val Warner notes when she discusses these two poems in
her introduction to Collected Poems and Prose, Mew's
"ambivalent attitude towards Christianity is striking."
Warner goes on to say that "an unbeliever would celebrate
this world in the assurance that it is all we have" (xvi),
yet as Miller has pointed out, that is only the humanist's
reaction to such a loss (12). A void can also replace God,
and it is this void in Mew's writing that Crisp has based
her dissertation on.

When Charlotte was ten years old, she escaped the
stern and watchful eye of Elizabeth Goodman for at least
part of each day when she became a student at the Gower
Street School. It was here that she came under the
influence of Lucy Harrison, the teacher beloved by so many
of her students. According to Fitzgerald, who has
extensively covered the early life of Mew, Lucy Harrison
had a masculine attractiveness. She was brought up in a
Quaker family, but had been "educated in France and Germany

1 All references to Mew's work will be from Collected
Poems and Prose unless stated otherwise.
and at the liberal and unsectarian Bedford College.... History and poetry were her passion" (30). She was a suffragist, and her work for achieving the vote for women was only one of the many activities she became involved in. She taught the girls under her that "'You need not call anything a luxury that you can share'" (31). What a drastic change from Elizabeth Goodman's "certainty of God's retribution," where "Not only every sin ... but every moment of happiness has been given its fixed price in advance ... and must be paid for" (24). But sin and retribution were not in Charlotte's thoughts when she was in school. There was a whole world of joy and new thoughts and new ideas. Certainly Mew had not known such stimulation before. The girls read and were read to by Miss Harrison from "Shakespeare, Dante, Blake, and Wordsworth," as well as from Miss Harrison's own favorites, including Christina Rossetti, the Brownings, Coventry Patmore, and Alice Meynell. Perhaps Mew's own favorite was established in this time, as Emily Bronte was also one of the writers preferred by Miss Harrison (Fitzgerald 31). Other writers Mew became familiar with at the school were Francis Thompson and the Indian Tagore. The girls were taught to model themselves after Carlyle's "hero," who for many of the girls was Miss Harrison herself, and for none more than Charlotte Mew. Mew wore her hair short like her teacher's, and in later years would copy her dress.
When Charlotte was thirteen, Miss Harrison had health problems, and gave up her position, temporarily, for a quieter one. Charlotte, although remaining in the Gower Street School during the day, was one of the few girls allowed to board with her and get the benefits of her teaching in the evenings. Although Fitzgerald thinks of this time as harmful, the necessary three-mile walk twice a day could only have improved Mew's physical condition, while the separation from her brother and sisters was certainly no different from the experience of any boy who went away to school. It may have greatly encouraged the independence which she possessed in such abundance in later life. According to Davidow, by the time Mew was in her twenties, she "was, by her nature, set apart from the herd; ... she was independent in spirit, and, in the large sense, emancipated. Possessed of a fine intellect, she sought to live life as she deemed fit" (Diss. 4). These attributes must have originated to some extent with Mew's exposure at an early age to Lucy Harrison.

Within two years of her departure from the Gower street school, Miss Harrison abandoned herself to a love for Amy Greener, "the teacher who had taken over the Gower Street School" (Fitzgerald 35), and they moved to Harrison's native Yorkshire, where they spent the rest of their lives together. Lucy Harrison's departure coincided with the end of Charlotte Mew's schooling. Her education,
however, was not finished. At this time, the adolescent Charlotte was going through more than the ordinary amount of change. She spent her time listening to violent music and suffering extremes of emotion (Fitzgerald 37). With Anne and Freda still in school, "Charlotte was now the daughter at home" (Fitzgerald 38).

It is not easy now to piece together this period of Charlotte Mew's life. During this time, the last Kendall in the architectural firm died, only ten years after his father's death. They had both lived so extravagantly that the younger Kendall left an estate of less than a thousand pounds. His wife and unmarried daughter moved permanently to their summer home. Anna Maria now felt that, with the big house of her parents no longer available, she must have a larger one of her own, and her husband acquiesced. The consequence was misfortune. From Kendall's death in 1885 to Fred Mew's own in 1898, the family lived largely on capital, without the knowledge of any member of the family other than Fred Mew himself. It was during this period that Henry, the family's only boy, and Freda, the favorite of both parents, became hopelessly insane and went into hospitals to spend the remainder of their lives. Only after Fred Mew's death would Charlotte, when she had to take over the duties as head of the household, become aware of the enormous expense of keeping her brother and sister in these hospitals.
In the new decade of the 1890's, however, the worst of these events hadn't occurred. Charlotte entered the decade as an adult, celebrating her twenty-first birthday in November of that year. She now wrote in earnest. Whether Elizabeth Goodman ever quit thinking that writing was something one shouldn't do, that poetry "was 'injurious to the brain'" (Fitzgerald 27), is not known, but Mew sold her first piece of writing, the short story "Passed," the year after Goodman's death. It would be five years more, the year after her father's death, before the second short story would be published.

The 1890's was a period of cultural upheaval. Amy Cruse begins her study After the Victorians in 1877, even though it would be many years before Victoria's death in 1901. Cruse believes that the decline from Victorianism had already begun (11). Although it has been said that Mew was "very much a spiritual child of the 1890's (Warner xviii), the term "spiritual child" must be carefully defined to place her there. Certainly, Mew was a questioner, as well as a flunter of some Victorian mores and practices, but she did not belong to the group who was described by Cruse as deciding that

nothing of the old must remain to mingle with the new. Victorian steadiness, conscientiousness, reticence, loyalty, dignity must go, along with Victorian stiffness, sentimentality and stultifying care for appearances. (11)
Mew practiced most of the virtues named in her care for her family. She had lost the worst of the vices, such as stiffness and sentimentality (to some extent), and although she is said to have cared for appearances, she did not care much. She certainly demonstrated a blatant disregard for "feminine" manners and dress. Fitzgerald says she had "become precisely the New Woman of whom the newspapers complained." Mew ranged about London in her tailor-mades and close-cropped hair, dropping in on new acquaintances, or watching the street life. She used rough language which they had never heard from her before. She smoked continually, rolling her own cigarettes. (64)

It was probably during the 1890's that Charlotte and her sister Anne made their decision not to marry. While it was a common Victorian practice to keep one daughter (never a son) at home to care for aged or aging parents, Charlotte and Anne Mew's decision was made by themselves; they chose not to marry, according to Alido Monro, "for fear of passing on the mental taint that was in their heredity" (xiii). Such a choice was considered an appropriate reason, even a responsibility, in the Victorian period. Pat Jalland, writing about the period from 1860 to 1914, includes the eugenics movement when discussing the importance of health for marriage:

Health was always an important consideration in
matrimonial choice in the nineteenth century and its significance increased towards the end of the century with the influence of eugenicist ideas that the nation's future citizens should come from the best stock. (84)

Mew's decision to remain single necessarily encouraged her independence, which shows up clearly in her life and in her writing. She is free from what Spacks calls "the female's compulsion to find some strong male on whom she can rely" (47). The women in Mew's work, like herself, live their lives just as threatened as do the men, with the same insecurities, the same knowledge that, at some level, they must depend on themselves. Crisp has shown that women had to pass through stages to become poets. Based largely on her reading of Elaine Showalter, she claims that Mew had gone beyond such "feminist" poets as Mary Coleridge and Alice Meynell to become the new "female" poet, able to "write without rebellion or resentment as her guiding purpose." Mew "could draw on male and female writers alike for examples in developing herself" (178-90). Mew also maintained an androgynous posture when dealing with the idea of an absent God.

Mew's life, while afflicted with sorrow and suffering, was also courageous, and at least part of the time, marked by excitement and joy. Both Charlotte and her sister Anne had much more freedom than the average Victorian woman. They each remained single and together shared the responsibility of their mother and of getting enough income
to add to hers so that they could all live as well as possible. There is no question that Mew was a "New Woman."
She faced the void and lived with the consequences, both in her life and in her work.
Short Stories

Charlotte Mew was both knowledgeable and intelligent. She was widely read, as we know from her schoolmates and from references in her work. By the mid 1890's, when Mew published her first short story, she was already one of the "New Women." According to Fitzgerald, she had already "taken to wearing a mannish black velvet jacket and tweed skirt" (61). She made new friends from The Yellow Book crowd. When Henry Harland, editor of The Yellow Book, chose not to buy her second story, however, she threw it in a drawer and published nothing else for five years. By that time The Yellow Book had ceased publication, due at least partially to the arrest and disgrace of Oscar Wilde, one of the journal's frequent contributors. Mew published her first story one year after the death of her old nurse Elizabeth Goodman; the second was published one year after the death of her father. She ended the century with only these two stories published.

Mew came to feel the loss of God so keenly that it became the center of many of her short stories and poems; like many of her fellow writers, such as Matthew Arnold, Emily Bronte, and Thomas Hardy, she came to know she had to survive without the God she had grown up with. In the '90's, however, she wasn't sure. As Davidow points out in
her dissertation, "The decade ... was a period of struggle, spiritual and intellectual, between heterodoxy and orthodoxy, between Paganism and Christianity" (113).

Mew's first two published stories are obviously written during such a period of turmoil. Both deal with relationships between people. They are, however, quite different. In her first published story, "Passed," the protagonist goes for a walk. With no particular destination, she decides to seek a church "newly built by an infallible architect" (65). Davidow sees the narrator as standing at the "Center of Indifference." She went to church "not to worship, but to observe the architecture" (Diss. 122). Even if the church can be seen as a spiritual metaphor, however, she gains nothing from it. "Its forbidding exterior was hidden in the deep twilight and invited no consideration.... Within the building darkness again forbade examination. A few lamps hanging before the altar struggled with obscurity" (67). The narrator, disappointed, turns to go. Before she leaves, however, she sees a young woman, who "imperatively dragged me into the cold and noisy street" (68). The young woman takes her to a place where another lies dead and then faints. The narrator tries to raise her, but she cannot obey the Christian command of love. "An alien presence has ever repelled me. I should have pitied the girl keenly perhaps a few more feet away" (69).
The theme of alienation has been introduced; the pity is there, but it is insufficient. After drifting into a kind of trance, the protagonist pushes "the trembling creature" away, and flees. Throughout the narrative, she tries to excuse herself for her unchristian failure to help the young woman. When she shows us the young woman's poor physical condition, she adds that "The possibility that she was starving missed my mind. It would have found my heart" (70). Months later, when she meets the woman she had deserted, she holds her "hands out, craving mercy" (77). The woman is with a man; they meet "my gaze with a void incorporate stare" (77). Then, "I knew my part ... in the despoiled body, with its soul's tapers long blown out" (78). The story ends with the protagonist asking whether the woman's laugh came "from some defeated angel? or the woman's mouth? or mine? God Knows!" (78).

The only answer the protagonist finds is found when she has gone back to the church, after failing in a guilty search for the young woman whom she had abandoned. Two scenes are presented to us: first, she sees a nun in charge of a group of school children. The scene represents the difference in the intent and actuality of Christianity, as the nun can't see through "the tinsel trappings and flaring lights" to the words of Christ. The other scene, however, seems to be a representation of true Christianity. Two girls, one an idiot, are holding hands; the normal one interrupts her prayer to kiss "the dreadful creature by her
side," with a divine "expression ... of habitual love" (76). The protagonist understands that the Christian ideal can be met in one's relationships with others. She leaves the church and steps into the street covered with snow, hating to mar "the spotless page that seemed outspread to challenge and exhibit the defiling print of man" (76).

As Fitzgerald has pointed out in her biography, "The real subject is guilt - the guilt of the provided-for towards the poor, the sane towards the mad, and the living towards the dead" (61). However, it is also about the search for something to give meaning to life. Is a moral life possible in the face of the absence of God? Mew's answer is ambiguous; she seems to be saying that one can achieve a kind of salvation only through works; during this time the local color movement, which stresses works over faith, was developing in North America, and yet the protagonist and the young woman she tries to help fail, both calling to a God they cannot get to answer and both looking to humanity in the place of such a God. Only in the two girls in church does she see the moral life. In her treatment of the poor idiot with her, the one girl follows the Pauline admonition to place love ahead of even faith and hope (1 Corinthians 13).

Mew also touches on the "Woman question" in this first published story. She sees the two women she meets as having "fronted the world from a sumptuous stage" (69),
only to find, when left alone, that they have no way to face life except through slow starvation or "selling themselves." If the latter is chosen without marriage, they are not only ostracized by their society but doomed by their God. With the rising number of "redundant women," many were left with no other choice but to stay with parents or married siblings. For the few who had neither, life was a terrifying prospect. Charlotte Mew and her sister Anne would face hardships themselves, though nothing so drastic, in only a few years. Another evil perpetrated on women by society was portrayed in Mew's description of a picture seen by the protagonist in a little shop on her way to the church:

There was a typical selection. Prominently, a large chromo of a girl at prayer. Her eyes turned upwards, presumably to heaven, left the gazer in no state to dwell on the elaborately bared breasts below.... This personification of pseudo-purity was sensually diverting, and consequently marketable. (67)

The protagonist says that, "My mind seized the ideal of such a picture, and turned from this prostitution of it sickly away." The Victorian way of seeing women as looking to heaven while serving man's sensual purposes was recognized by Mew as by many of her contemporaries for the danger it posed to both men and women.

Mew's second short story, "The China Bowl," while not published until 1899, was written shortly after "Passed." It is the most biblical story Mew ever wrote. It also
seems to have some elements in common with Hardy's *Jude the Obscure*. Davidow, in her dissertation and in her article, "Charlotte Mew and the Shadow of Thomas Hardy," has discussed this connection in some detail. Sue Bridehead's name was Susannah, as is the bride in Mew's story. Both women suffer from jealousy, and both are hurt by it. Although all the characters in Mew's story take their names from biblical characters, and Susannah has sat for a portrait titled "Judith," they all become travesties of those they are named after.

David, Susannah's husband, is in some ways a Christ-like figure more similar to Melville's Billy Budd than to the Biblical David. Brave in his work and in his bearing, he is childlike in his human relationships. He knows his mother wishes him to stay at home with her, and until his over-whelming passion for Susannah, he is more than willing to do that. Like Christ, he seems to exist to serve others, making only minimal demands. He is kind to all, forgiving to all, gentle to all. Unlike Christ, however, he is inarticulate, timid, and "slow of mind" (87). Further, once he meets Susannah, he is overtaken by passion. Although she is taller than David by "less than an inch" (86), she "dwarfed the small dimensions of the

2 Though characters in Jude are not named after biblical counterparts, characters are regularly associated with them: Jude and Arabella are associated with Samson and Delilah; Phillotson is the Philistine and so forth.
room" (85) in a way that he never did. She has "heavy masses of red hair," white skin, and powerful features (85).

A series of conflicts with David and Rachel end in David's dealing Susannah a brutal blow after she has sold Rachel's china bowl. Rachel leaves her home, and David soon follows. David, on the night of his child's birth, begs his mother to go to Susannah and ask her if "she's wantin to see her man?" (96). When his mother returns only to tell him that she turned away, he replies, "'so th' Almighty have a'done this day" (97). David leaves his mother's house that night, and is not heard of again until he is carried home a corpse two months later.

Susannah, softened by her infant, has been looking "for the slow speech and quiet eyes, and heavy footsteps" (98). Now, however, her "hoarded gentleness took flight" (99). She has his corpse taken to his mother, but she soon follows it there in a rage. Even though Susannah has prayed, "'God forgie me, I let 'ee go'" (98), she now makes a vicious verbal attack on Rachel. Susannah's failing is her inability to see her selfishness, her jealousy overriding all other emotions. Instead of the Christian asking for forgiveness, she is an almost Satanic figure of revenge and mockery. Rachel, hunched in a corner of the room, with features "pinched and drawn and grey" draws no sympathy from Susannah. Perhaps more than a Satanic figure, Susannah is a primitive one. Instead of destroying
her enemy as the biblical Judith did, Susannah destroys the husband she has chosen. When the morning sun rises, Rachel and David are both lying dead in the hut. None of the major characters in "A China Bowl" undergo a Christian redemption; only Rachel has hoped for one. Again, the story seems to stress works over faith, but the characters all either forget or ignore Paul's injunction for faith, hope and love. Even in the 1890's, Mew did not see death as an altogether frightening event; she describes the deaths of Rachel and David as sleep "secure from human severance and human woe" (102). The 1890's was an exciting and trying time for Charlotte Mew. Her nurse, Elizabeth Goodman, died in 1893; her father died in 1898. They had been the only authority figures, other than her mother, in her life. After her father's death, the family became aware of their financial situation; everyone's lifestyle had to change, but most especially Charlotte's and Anne's. A year after her father's death, Charlotte Mew celebrated her thirtieth birthday. She had grown up. The stories she would publish over the next six years, which form the bulk of her prose writing, would be very different from the first two short stories.

Mew entered the first decade of the twentieth century as the "head of household." Her father dead, she and her sister were very much aware of their financial position. The top two floors of their house had been let, and they both saw the necessity to earn money. Although not
poverty-stricken, they were in a situation that demanded the utmost care. Charlotte's story "The China Bowl" had been published in two parts by Temple Bar, a magazine which was, according to Fitzgerald, on its way to oblivion by the 1890's, when "it was being passed from one editor to another" (74). Also in 1899, Mew had sold the very short "The Governess in Fiction," her first published essay, to The Academy, even though it had been so cut and changed that she refused to let it appear under her signature. The first year of the new century passed without anything being published, but in 1901 Mew published two essays and one short story. The two essays, one about a woman hired by the family to do sewing when Mew was a little girl and one about a trip she made with several of her friends, were both published by Temple Bar. Her short story, however, was published by Pall Mall Magazine.

"Some Ways of Love" is a story about mistaken kindnesses and the high cost of principles. Henley, a young captain, is wildly in love with an older woman, Lady Hopedene, to whom he proposes. Lady Hopedene is afraid his professed love might be only youthful folly, and so proposes that he wait a year for her answer. She hopes that Captain Henley, who is going abroad for a year in his professional capacity, will retain his feelings for her, in which case she will have her happiness forever secure, as will he. While he is away he falls in love with Miss Playfair, but will make no commitment as he feels already
committed to Lady Hopedene. When he returns to Lady Hopedene expecting to be released, he finds that she has loved him desperately all along, that she is only afraid of taking advantage of his youth, and that she has, at the longest, only a year to live. When he explains his situation to Miss Playfair and asks her to wait for Lady Hopedene's death, she refuses. His principles rule his actions, and he chooses to spend his time with Lady Hopedene until her death.

This story seems to be one that Mew wrote with publication as her top priority. It has just the romance and fairy-tale quality that fit the popular fiction of the time. Mew does, however, bring in two of her themes, the role of ethical action and the role of women. Regardless of the price he must pay, Captain Henley adheres to an ethical system to make his decision. Actually, each of the three characters does the same. Miss Playfair, as her name indicates, insists on everything being open and honest. Lady Hopedene also makes her decision based on what she thinks is the right thing to do. However, Mew's familiarity with the historical idea of "the relativity of any particular life or culture" (Miller 9) allows her to present all three characters as "good" people at the same time they each have a different answer to the question of what "good" is. Some ethical issues regarding women's roles are also presented in the story. When giving Miss
Playfair a description of her rival, the Captain says she is

"Very small and fair; remarkably fair and witty and -- well, I hardly know how to put it, courageous: it was the kind of fine unfeminine courage she seemed to have, that--that trapped my fancy. It struck me as an uncommon trait; if she had been a man she would have been cut out for a soldier." (107)

Later, back with Lady Hopedene, he has the same thought:
"Her mind, he knew, was sounder than the minds of other women he had met, and he could not fail to trust the heart that shone so clearly, straightly, through the blue eyes regarding him" (108). Throughout history, people have tended to call any woman with admirable qualities "unwomanly." Mew has a rare sense of humor, and it is hard to believe she didn't write these lines "tongue in cheek."

In 1902 Mew published no essays and only one short story, a rather strange tale of the spiritual being chosen over the physical, or, perhaps, to the exclusion of the physical. In 1903 she published two short stories, both rather like the 1902 story. These stories are "In the Cure's Garden," "An Open Door," and "A White Night." "In the Cure's Garden" is about a priest, his charge, and the man who fell in love with her. From the priest's garden, which was lush, full of "the flowers of seduction and desire" (114), could be seen, in the winter or early spring, the convent on the hill. The girl was promised to this convent, a fact which the man must find out when he
asks her to marry him. He offers her "the world," but when he tries to describe it to her, she thinks only that "there would appear to be too much of distraction, too little peace" (117).

The garden metaphor runs throughout the story. The man seems not to realize, even after his discussion of the garden with the priest, that it is the garden, the flowers, and the time of year that cause him to feel his intense longing. The girl understands more than he. When he tells her that she and the flowers have "some strange affinity," she disagrees. "You think too much of them, ... we [the flowers] scarcely smile, we do not speak, we are not en rapport" (119). She knows instinctively that the flowers stand for the physical, she for the spiritual. Her comparison of her own immortality to the flower's short life of only one season represents what is to her the value of the spiritual over the physical. The differences in the English and the French attitudes are also presented. The girl's planned entry into the convent is seen by the man as death for the girl, while the priest sees it as "a much higher life than that which is assigned to most women" (122). After a confrontation involving the three of them, in which he is again turned down, the man finally realizes how different the girl is from the flowers. "The insistent odour of carnations was everywhere," but "I looked at the child and back again to the shrouded, unextinguished flowers. She had indeed no part with them" (125). The man
chooses the physical; the girl chooses the spiritual. The story ends without the destruction of either. It is the only one of Hew's stories in which the spiritual is chosen to the exclusion of the physical without the death of the person who made that choice.

"An Open Door" is a Protestant version of "The Cure's Garden." There are some differences. All the characters are given names. The household is one of a mother and her two daughters instead of a young girl and a priest. The young woman who chooses the spiritual life to the exclusion of the physical does it when she is already engaged to be married, and far from approving, her mother and sister see her decision to be a missionary as a disgraceful thing. At her mother's lament that her sister Laurence had all the advantages, "the most ruinous school in Paris, the most thievish milliner in town" (127), Stella replies: "Isn't it doubtful whether a suburban education and an inexpensive taste in hats would have averted the catastrophe? You know papa had crazes, supported women's suffrage ..." (128). This story has a much sadder climax than "In The Cure's Garden." Laurence spends three years training to be a missionary, goes out on her mission in a state of indecision, answers her former fiancé's plea for her return with indecision, and then dies.

The story has a rather bizarre ending. The sister, in a meeting with the fiancé, is told: "'But you are rational;
you of all people don't believe in 'souls' and ' salvation' and the rest'' (144). Her reply, "'This ... awful sacrifice, should make of one either a thorough infidel or a thorough Christian. Most of us halt contemptibly between the two'' (145). Upon his begging her not to "take it that way," she replies with her sister's words from the note: 'It's too soon --too strange. I do not know" (145).

Mew seems not to have decided in 1903 whether God is there for her or not, but she doesn't want to "halt contemptibly between the two." She seems unable to mix the physical and the spiritual or to be as casual about Christianity and her beliefs as most people are. The Yellow Book crowd has dispersed and Mew is left trying to find a place for herself, in her family, in society, and with or without God.

The last story of this trio is much stranger than the other two. It reminds one of the admiration felt by Mew for Emily Bronte. The story, after a beginning frame, starts simply with "It was in the spring of 1876" (146), after which it moves to a remote location and becomes filled with an inexplicable atmosphere. The narrator, after eighteen months work in Spain, is joined by his sister and her husband, who are on their honeymoon. Mew gives the sister and her husband the traits given to the Yellow Book men and women; according to Fitzgerald, the male writers were often "weak-willed and tired of life," while the women "were strong" (63). The husband "mourned
his little luxuries" (146), while his wife "knew absolutely nothing of fatigue" (148). Entering a large church just at twilight, they are accidentally locked in. After several hours of "intense, unnatural, acute" soundlessness, they hear "a key turn, and the swing back of a door, rapidly followed by a wave of voices breaking in." It was a chant:

a music neither of the senses, nor the spirit, but the mind, as set, as stately, almost as inanimate as the dark aisles through which it echoed; even, colourless and cold.

And then, quite suddenly, against its grave and passionless inflections something clashed, a piercing intermittent note, an awful discord, shrilling out and dying down and shrilling out again--a cry--a scream. (151)

Forty or fifty monks, dressed in brown, with the youngest in the front and the aged and infirm bringing up the rear, have at their very end "a figure, white and slight, erect--a woman's figure--" (152).

She moved and uttered her successive cries as if both sound and motion were entirely mechanical--more like a person in some trance of terror or of anguish than a voluntary rebel; her cries bespoke a physical revulsion into which her spirit didn't enter; they were not her own--they were outside herself; there was no discomposure in her carriage, nor, when we presently saw it, in her face.... She wasn't altogether real, she didn't altogether live, and yet her presence there was the supreme reality of the unreal scene, and lent to it, at least as I was viewing it, its only element of life. (152)

The narrator sees the monks as "nonentities and saints and devils, side by side." At some point in the ceremony, the
victim gains control of herself. "She drew herself to her full height and turned towards the men behind her with an air of proud surrender, of magnificent disdain" (153). She has become as Christ in "The Dream of the Rood." At some point in the ceremony, it becomes obvious that the woman will die. The male narrator, like the female protagonist in "Passed," tries to explain away his inaction by saying that "If she had swayed, or given any hint of wavering, of an appeal to God or man, I must have answered it magnetically" (156). The woman is buried alive. The ceremony is finished. "The altar lights were one by one extinguished" (157).

One point Mew would like to make in this fantastic story is that "what one is pleased to call reality is merely the intensity of one's illusion" (159). Another is that all of us are just specks, who, like the woman who was sacrificed, will be "swept away." The three stories juxtapose the spiritual with the physical. In the first of them, "The Cure's Garden," in particular, the man who was in love tried to get the girl and the priest to see that the spiritual and the physical could be joined, that neither had to be chosen to the exclusion of the other. Perhaps that explains why the reader does not witness the death of the girl. Both of the other stories climax with a woman's death. Whether Mew doesn't see the possibility for a man's choosing "pure" spirituality, or whether she wants the reader to see that society's expectations for the
"otherworldliness" of women do lead to death, her victims are women. Western civilization has always had cultures which forced conflict between women and men and it is from the traits usually attributed to women that Mew seems unable to free herself in these stories. Woman as the passive victim shows up in these stories again and again. Patricia Meyer Spacks points out that such a view is held not only by men, but that "Everywhere women ... embrace suffering, welcome roles of helpless submissiveness" (316). Even in these early works of Mew's, the women are already struggling to make choices. The girl of "In the Cure's Garden" seems to be choosing for herself, although she has probably been socialized into her decision so that it is not really what it seems. In "An Open Door" a choice is made which goes against the socialization that has taken place, which ends in death. Laurence, however, like the creative artist, may live on through her influence. In "A White Night" all choice is denied, and there is no possible redemption.

In 1904, Mew published her essay on Emily Bronte. Her unpublished short story, "Elinor," was probably written around this same time. Mew published one short story that year, "Mademoiselle." In this story, the protagonist is a woman who does try to combine the spiritual and physical. A Catholic, she is in love with a profligate, an artist whom she at least partially supports. Although she in fact
tolerates his bad and boorish behavior, he tries to persuade her that it is the other way around:

"For me, I have the wider mind. I treat you with more clemency. Are you not permitted to be devout, since in fact that becomes you very well? Do I not permit you to amuse yourself with these little acts of devotion for which I have a contempt supreme, these little follies?" (165)

Although everyone else sees her friend for what he is, Mademoiselle remains true. He tells her he is going to America, but really goes to Paris, where Mademoiselle dreams of going. Left behind, she borrows money so that she can support his mother while "he is yet struggling" (167). Her employer runs into him in Paris and obtains a promise that he will no longer take her money, but the employer never has any proof that he abides by his promise. The story ends with Mademoiselle living in "a less distinguished neighbourhood," involving the second such move for her. While she keeps up a pretense of "incurable gaiety," she eventually "got to look shrunken under the spangles" (169). Mew ends the story with the sentence, "It would seem Mademoiselle is waiting still" (169).

Mew, with all her friends, many of them since school days under Lucy Harrison, was well aware of what could happen to a woman who was left. Although she had more options than women who lived in the early or middle years of the nineteenth century, being deserted by her chosen lover could still, and often did, ruin a woman's life. Mew
was thirty-five when "Mademoiselle" was written. She may have written from her own experience, though we cannot know. Although most who have written about Mew mention that she and her sister Anne didn't marry because of the threat of insanity in their family, most cite as their source Alida Monro, who didn't even meet Mew until Mew was well into her forties. Whatever the reason for Mew's single state, she did suffer the consequences of it, although she might not have been willing to trade the freedoms she enjoyed for the financial security and social acceptability marriage would have provided.

"Mark Stafford's Wife" was published in January 1905. As with all but two of her other short stories, it was published in Temple Bar. "Mark Stafford's Wife" is about a woman who gives up her fiance. Instead of choosing a life of missionary work, however, she chooses another man, a writer. These two men seem to be representatives of two different attitudes held by writers of the time. Donald David Stone has written Novelists in a Changing World about the "transformation of English fiction in the 1880's." In it, he has used George Meredith and Henry James to represent the polarities in English fiction. In James' philosophy, "the individual became both the standard and the source of reality. If systems were false, one's subjective reality was always verifiable" (20). Meredith, on the other hand, who tried to show in his work "the difference between the masks we wear and the sentimental
ego concealed underneath ... did so in an effort to subdue egoism and unite the public and private selves" (20).

Charlie Darch, described in "Mark Stafford's Wife" as having "a lack of the modern intellectual veneer," may well stand for the school represented by George Meredith, who combined idealism and realism, and tended to cling to Victorian ideals, though he was a speaker for women's social freedom. In contrast, Mark Stafford, a representative of the Henry James school, saw art as providing the only meaning of life and relationships with people as serving only to further one's art. Stafford would, in fact, drive his wife to her death by becoming "some shapeless horror, looking over her shoulder straight ... into her soul" (188). When Darch discusses Kate, Mark Stafford's wife, with her former protector, and she tries to gain sympathy for Stafford, saying that "Mark himself admitted that she was his finest discovery," Darch "gave me a look which suddenly, decisively, divided us--put an impassable space between us" (189). They are so far apart in their views that further discussion is stopped. If Darch represents Mew's philosophy of literature, it is easy to see the distance between herself and James. Darch tells us that

I had submissively run through Mark Stafford's books and didn't care for them. They gave me too much the idea of a vivisectionist at work, the man with the knife, with, in his case, no great end to serve....
I grew indeed a little weary of his trumpeted superiority, his unique methods and results and all the rest; clinging more stubbornly, in the full blare of it, to my own obsolete ideals of his craft. (174-75).

It seems obvious in this story that Darch represents Mew's literary viewpoint, as well as her view of life. The simple, uncomplicated life, as far as it could be lived, was best. Although Mew herself lived in London, the writers she most admired had all chosen rural lives. Although Mew switched styles in a way that most writer's do not, "Mark Stafford's Wife" is so different from all her other stories, so much like a parody of James, that the possibility of its being a parody must at least be considered. The constant pauses, the restatements, the endless self-involvement, are all there in exaggerated form. It must have been a shock to Mew if she started receiving compliments for her ability to "copy" James so well. May Sinclair is quoted by Davidow as writing to Mew of "Mark Stafford's Wife": "'It is one of the very few good tales of that sort. Your style in this story reminds me of Henry James'" (148). Sinclair didn't even know Mew at the time Mew wrote the story. She gave her opinion in 1915, in the period when she and Mew were close. Davidow says of the story that "The technique of narrative is, indeed, in the manner of Henry James" (148). For Fitzgerald, the story "is a good imitation of Henry James" (92). Exactly why Mew would want to imitate James when his beliefs were
so opposed to her own is never brought up.

These differences were many. Mew, like Meredith and James, asserted her own personality and her own ideals in her work (Stone 4). Mew and James also shared the loss of God and the sense of alienation of modern humanity, and both ask the questions asked by Kierkegaard's hero, as quoted by Miller, yet their methods for dealing with these losses are radically opposed. While James replaces the old world view with a new one by letting art fill the place left empty by God, Mew tries, as Miller has said many other Victorians tried, "to bring God back to earth as a benign power inherent in the self, in nature, and in the human community" (15). For James, the aesthetic was everything, while for Mew, as for Meredith, social and moral themes overshadowed the aesthetic (Stone 4). Although Mew believed in autonomy and self-realization, she also believed in a sympathetic realism as opposed to the detached realism of James. Finally, much of the meaning of Mew's life rested in her family, and not in her art.

Mew did not publish another short story for almost a decade. Although Temple Bar went out of business, that

3 Where am I? Who am I? How came I here? What is this thing called the world? What does this word mean? Who is it that has lured me into the world? Why was I not consulted, why not made acquainted with its manners and customs ...? How did I obtain an interest in this big enterprise they call reality? Why should I have an interest in it? Is it not a voluntary concern? And if I am to be compelled to take part in it, where is the director? ... Is there no director? Whither shall I turn with my complaint? (qtd. in Miller 9)
would hardly be a reason for Mew to stop writing. Magazines folded constantly, but new ones started as well. Writers moved from publication to publication, little bothered by it. It seems to me that it must be considered as at least a possibility that Mew stopped publishing, not because the magazine that accepted her work went under, but because of the lack of understanding and the misinterpretation of "Mark Stafford's Wife." Another possibility may have been that Mew had to have an income. There is no reason to suppose her sister Anne would have worked while she remained idle. There were heavy family responsibilities as Anna Maria aged and needed more and more care. Mew may have taken employment that left her too busy or too exhausted to write.

Whatever the reason, Mew did not publish another short story until 1914, when "The Smile" came out in Theosophist. It is a story about choices that must be made between the spiritual and the physical, as so many of her stories had been, but is poorly done, not as good as most of her earlier stories. The protagonist, once she chooses the spiritual to the exclusion of the physical, dies. Mew obviously had strong feelings about the necessity of blending the two, rather than becoming either all-worldly or all other-worldly; also, the female protagonist of the story assumes a role normally reserved for the male hero. It was the last short story Mew published before her death.
Much has been said about the ease with which Mew sold her work, but in fact, at the time of her death, she had published only nine short stories; she left eight completed ones and one unfinished one unpublished, which is nine, exactly the number she had published. Mew often thought about writing a novel, but was always talked out of it by friends. Today, in a post-Freudian world, it is easier to see through things we are "talked out of," yet one cannot help wishing she had had someone who would have recognized the value of such an undertaking. Mew tended toward very long short stories, having constantly to work to cut them down. Also, had she written a novel and been even mildly successful, she might have had the kind of financial reward she so desperately needed.

Whatever the reason, with the exception of "The Smile," Mew sold all her published short stories between 1894 and 1905. Her essays were sold between 1899 and 1905; after having none published since 1905, one appeared again in 1912, three in 1913, and the final one in February of 1914, fourteen years before her death. It seems likely Mew had some employment during the years between 1905 and 1912. Such a possibility seems likely as Fitzgerald remarks that it was just at this time that her sister Anne "now took a disagreeable job" (111). Perhaps they each took a turn at "a disagreeable job," making Charlotte's continued literary production impossible.
The Poetry: The Farmer's Bride

"The Farmer's Bride" was published in The Nation in 1912. The two years following were productive ones for Charlotte Mew. She published three poems and three essays in 1913, followed by six poems and her last short story in 1914.

Although she published poems sporadically afterwards, she never published another short story after "The Smile," nor another essay after "The Hay Market." Both the short story and the essays are quite different from the ones she was publishing ten years earlier.

Her essay "The Hay Market" has a description of children playing in a neighborhood of beer taverns, the inhabitants of which consist mainly of tired, over-emotional adults. The children, like the hay itself, remind one of better things:

Cricket goes on all over it, with or without stumps, because there are always the posts, and most of the cricketers, by the way, are not much taller. The bigger boys play a game of bump-ball from head to head: the roller-skaters have to reel away on one leg down the side streets because the paving is too rough; but there are stilts, and stilt walkers are not as others are. No one knows till he has tried it what it is to walk a foot or two above the earth: if you could go on doing it for ever, you need envy no one, neither the angels nor the millionaires. Also you can make bonfires from knobs of coal and straw and scraps of rag and paper strewn about
the Square, and, if they don't go out at once, squat round them bivouacking on a prairie.

The posts you climb continually; the horse-trough is likewise always there to sail your hat and trail your arms in, hanging on by the waist until your eldest sister sneaks up from behind, and cops you out of it by the neck—or lower down. When you are small, not more than four or five, you are reduced to making gardens on the grass of the cobbled-stones with match-box sides for paths and wisps of straw for the garden trees, and ponds in the crevices with water fetched in your shoe (if it is not too holey) from the horse-trough; but it is difficult to find things really small enough for flowers. The gardeners will sometimes let you help them: their minute red hands are often chapped and always grubby, but if one happens to brush yours, you suddenly think of primroses, damp petals, gathered in some copse last spring. These are the only flowers in the Market, and the children's are the only real voices.

The above lines could have been written only by a poet. In the future, poetry is all that Mew would write. Mew's verse, like her prose, dealt largely with those issues which concerned her personally. Some of the issues, however, had changed during the time she was not publishing. The "decadent decade" of the nineties was long since over. Most of the people involved had died, drifted off, or joined the mainstream. The "new woman" had been replaced by the suffragettes, many of them militant. Although Mew appears never to have joined this movement, she was probably affected by it more than most women, as both her friends Alida Klemantaski and May Sinclair were active in it. Mew's main concerns were still those dealing with the purpose of life in a universe without God and of her place there, particularly as a woman.
Much of Mew's poetry deals with the battles she fought between the physical and the spiritual. Davidow says she "vacillated between the attractions of neo-paganism and orthodox Christianity" (Diss. 62), and it is probably her similarity to Sue Bridehead which led Davidow to think Bridehead's character was based on Mew. When Mew's poetry deals with romantic love, it ends in failure, although that is not always seen as failure for the person who has experienced it. For Mew, the experience itself is often worth a large price.

By the time Mew started publishing in the second decade of the twentieth century she was in her forties, and Thomas Hardy seemed to London's young artists to be a part of an age that was gone. Jimmy Dean Bishop discusses the English literary world in 1915 at length in his dissertation:

Only the Victorian classics were tolerated. Tennyson, Browning, and Arnold were still held in awe. Many people felt that at Tennyson's death poetry died. For these people, Swinburne and Meredith opened no new vistas; Dowson and Wilde and the Yellow Book coterie were not fashionable any more; ... Bridges and Hardy were too remote, and much of Kipling's verse was regarded as vulgar, or "unpoetic." (21-2)

At about this time, according to Bishop, three major coteries formed. One of these, the traditionalists, published in "a few conservative literary journals," leaving the battlefield to the other two groups, the Left, headed by Ezra Pound, and the Centrists, whose poets
included Walter de la Mare and John Masefield, both signers, along with Thomas Hardy, of Mew's pension. According to Bishop, the Leftists were "marked by a spirited rebelliousness," and were "composed mainly of Futurists, Vorticists, and Imagists." They were more interested in "purifying poetic technique than ... expanding the subject matter of contemporary poetry" (24-5). The Centrists, as their name implies,

tried to maintain a position between the poets of the old guard, those who refused to recognize the new poetic impulse, and those of the avant-garde ... who recognized only revolt.... The Centrists were always concerned with both technique and subject matter;... they consistently expressed greater concern for matter than for manner. (25)

By the time Charlotte Mew met Alido Klementaski in 1915, the first world war was in its second year. Mew had not published anything that year, whether due to the war or some other cause. The Poetry Bookshop had been open since 1913, and the first volume of Georgian Poetry had been published by Edward Marsh and Harold Monro. More importantly for the publication of Mew's poetry, perhaps, was the fact that Miss Klementaski had met Harold Monro at a poet's dinner and subsequently gone to work for him (Fitzgerald 147-8). Miss Klementaski, who had read "The Farmer's Bride" in 1912, now contacted Mew to see if she had more poems and whether she would like to attend a reading where Klementaski would be reading Mew's poetry.
She read "The Farmer's Bride" and "The Changeling" along with poems by Monro, John Masefield, James Joyce, Eleanor Farjeon, and D. H. Lawrence (Fitzgerald 149). After this Charlotte and Alida became close friends, even dropping in on each other. Mew became a regular at the Poetry Bookshop, and it was Harold Monro who published The Farmer's Bride in 1916. Years later Alida spoke of Mew's "oddness," with her outdated clothes, her "defensive air," and her confidence "at its very lowest" (Fitzgerald 151).

May Sinclair had introduced Ezra Pound to Mew's poetry and he had published "The Fete" in The Egoist in 1914, but Mew was closer to the Centrists than to Pound's camp. She did not exactly fit into either group, however, and by the time Monro published her volume the Centrists had become known largely as the Georgians, and Edward Marsh had become a central figure of that group. He did not choose to include poetry by any women in the first two volumes of Georgian Poetry and even though Mew was strongly recommended for both the third and fourth editions, she was left out of both. One reason may have been that, at least according to Bishop, "to be Georgian was to be anti-Victorian" (34). Mew was not. Those she admired most were Emily Bronte, George Meredith, and Thomas Hardy, all Victorians of a sort. All the poets who were included in Georgian Poetry received a much wider reading as a result of their inclusion in that volume. Another reason Mew wasn't more popular was her refusal to advertise herself.
Fitzgerald says "She was never anxious to be introduced to anyone if it meant being produced as some kind of discovery" (119). She would read only to individuals or small groups, often not at all. When pressed by Mrs. Dawson Scott to come read for her new writer's organization, The Tomorrow Club, Mew turned her down, and not very politely (Fitzgerald 136). Mew was, however, becoming widely known among the literati, and their admiration of her work, along with Alida Klementaski's, could only help Monro decide to publish a volume of her poetry.

The Farmer's Bride came out in the spring of 1916 after much difficulty. Georgian Poetry III had been out less than a year. According to Fitzgerald, 1000 copies of Mew's volume were printed, but all other sources list 500. Once Monro had inquired about the volume, Mew was adamant about seeing it through publication, even though wartime shortages threatened to postpone publication. War poetry had become so popular that everything else suffered; whether that was the reason cannot be known, but Mew's volume sold few copies.

"The Farmer's Bride," the title poem, is one of Mew's most famous. "The Farmer's Bride" has been compared to Jude the Obscure, particularly by Mary C. Davidow, both in her dissertation and in her essay "Charlotte Mew and the Shadow of Thomas Hardy." Davidow sees the farmer's bride
as similar to Sue Bridehead, suggesting in her
dissertation that Mew and Hardy might have met in the 90's,
and that Sue Bridehead might be based on Mew herself. Mew
may well have read *Jude* before writing "The Farmer's
Bride," but it is one of Hardy's poems, "The Homecoming"
(*Collected Poems of Thomas Hardy* 234-35), which seems more
similar to Mew's poem. Fitzgerald mentions the poem, but
says that "in that poem the farmer stands no nonsense on
his wedding-night" (102). While it is true that the farmer
sounds as if he will stand "no nonsense" in the first
stanza, he quickly becomes more tender-hearted than Mew's
farmer. He speaks directly to his bride "But my dear and
tender poppet, then, how came ye to agree / In Ivel church
this morning? Sure, there-right you married me!" He
continues in the next two stanzas:

"Now sit ye by the fire, poppet; put yourself at
ease:
And keep your little thumb out of your mouth,
dear, please!
And I'll sing to 'ee a pretty song of lovely
flowers and bees,
And happy lovers taking walks within a grove
o' trees."

"Now, don't ye gnaw your handkercher; 'twill hurt
your little tongue,
And if you do feel spitish, 'tis because ye are
over young;
But you'll be getting older, like us all, ere
very long,
And you'll see me as I am--a man who never did
'ee wrong."

The farmer now begins to lose his temper, as he had in the
first stanza. When his bride answers, she shows her own
resemblance to Sue Bridehead, in her jealous reaction to her husband's wish that he had taken another woman. It is only when Sue Bridehead is afraid of losing Jude to Arabella that she sleeps with him. When the farmer says

"Well, had I only known, my dear, that this was how you'd be, I'd have married her of riper years that was so fond of me. But since I can't, I've half a mind to run away to sea, And leave 'ee to go barefoot to your d--d daddee!"

She replies:

"I--I--don't know what to say to't, since your wife I've vowed to be; And as 'tis done, I s'pose here I must bide--poor me! Aye--as you are ki-ki-kind, I'll try to live along with 'ee, Although I'd fain have stayed at home with dear daddee! (234-5)

In "The Farmer's Bride" Mew's farmer talks to himself, never speaking to his bride. He is not so kind as Hardy's farmer. Although the wedding is long past, he still says "More's to do / At harvest-time than bide and woo." He is inarticulate when it comes to his wife, though the reader does not know whether he is with others. Although it has been three years since the wedding, there are no children in the house, and the wife "Sleeps up in the attic there / Alone, poor maid" (2). Although the two poems are similar, there are differences. First, Mew's bride seems more seriously frightened than Hardy's. It never seems
that "my dear and tender poppet" might physically run away, or that her husband might "turn the key upon her, fast."

Second, Hardy's bride juxtaposes her husband and his "Toller Down" with her "dear daddee" and her own home. Mew's bride seems satisfied with her surroundings; her fright is all over her husband and "all things human." She is "Happy enough to chat and play / with birds and rabbits and such as they / So long as men-folk keep away." "The Farmer's Bride," as Fitzgerald has pointed out, "doesn't sound like Hardy" (103).

There is no mention of whether Mew was familiar with Hardy's poem either before or after she wrote "The Farmer's Bride," or whether they ever discussed the similarity between the two poems. Another poet and novelist, whom Mew may have had even more respect for, was George Meredith. Although it is true she called Hardy "a giant in a pygmy world." she did so after the other great Victorians were dead. In one of her short stories, she places George Meredith and Emily Bronte as two of the greatest Victorians. Placing the poems of Mew and Hardy with George Meredith's "Love in the Valley" seems to verify Hardy's modern sounding remark quoted by Donald Stone that "the poetry of a scene varies with the minds of the perceivers. Indeed, it does not lie in the scene at all" (71). While Meredith and Hardy are alike in many ways, in many ways they are opposites. Siegfried Sassoon thinks them both "makers of the modern novel of psychology, introspection
and ideas" (127), and they both wrote poetry as well as novels. Stone and Lovett, however, both list differences in the philosophies of the two. According to Lovett:

Both accepted the theory of evolution, but while Meredith's reading of it gave hope of infinite achievement for man through the development of his intellectual faculties, Hardy saw consciousness as an adventitious circumstance in the cosmic process, something for which nature had made no provision. (318)

Stone saw their belief in Darwin as resulting in "cosmic plentitude" for Meredith, while for Hardy it resulted in a "cosmic muddle." Meredith had "confidence in the ability to transform one's environment and oneself sanely and honestly," while Hardy saw a "human helplessness before the forces of internal and external determinism" (77). While Lovett thinks that Meredith "believed in love between man and woman as the highest mood of revelation and achievement" and thought that "a great love was a justification and a consecration of life," and "the inspiration of the noblest passages in his writings" (311), Stone states that "Hardy depicted marriage as a fatal combination of dissimilar individuals already divided against themselves and now split against each other as well" (76).

Meredith's poem "Love in the Valley" was written half a century earlier than Hardy's or Mew's. It gives the man's point of view as he sings a "love song of his
sweetheart," a young girl just on the verge of maturity, as both Hardy's and Mew's brides seem to be. But this young girl glories in her youth, as does her hopeful lover. She is "Shy as the squirrel and wayward as the swallow." She is "hard to catch and conquer, / Hard, but O the glory of the winning were she won!" (609). The narrator leaves no doubt that he desires marriage. When he says "She was made to bruise and bless," he refers to the loss of maidenhood followed by pregnancy. He would like to be able to forget, but "Tell the grassy hollow that holds the bubbling well-spring, / Tell it to forget the source that keeps it filled." He now faces his desire to "own" her, and yet an equal desire to keep her as she is.

Stepping down the hill with her fair companions, Arm in arm, all against the raying West, Boldly she sings, to the merry tune she marches, Brave is her shape, and sweeter unpossessed. Sweeter, for she is what my heart first awaking Whispered the world was; morning light is she. Love that so desires would fain keep her changeless; Fain would fling the net, and fain have her free.

Her purity is precious; she seems to him "like a white water-lily." He feels timid of change at the same time he desires change. "Let me hear her laughter, I would have her ever / Cool as dew in twilight, the lark above the flowers."

The girl herself, however, is through with youth. She makes the decision to accept adulthood with its
accompanying sexuality, insofar as there is a decision to be made, for what is happening to her now is part of nature:

All the girls are out with their baskets for the primrose;
Up lanes, woods through, they troop in joyful bands.
My sweet leads; she knows not why, but now she loiters,
Eyes the bent anemones, and hangs her hands. Such a look will tell that the violets are peeping,
Coming the rose; and unaware a cry Springs in her bosom for odors and for color, Covert and the nightingale—she knows not why.

The narrator once again stands "at her chamber," but this time it is not in the morning as she awakes, but while "she sleeps." The imagery of flowers and scents is continued. "The white crowns the red rose," and "Jasmine winds the porch with stars two and three." The jasmine "breathes a falling breath that carries thoughts of me." He no longer sees her "sweeter unpossessed," but views the jasmine as a bridal flower, which "bears me to her pillow under white rose-wreaths."

Summer passes; the crops come closer to harvest.
"Earth in her heart laughs looking at the heavens, /
Thinking of the harvest: I look and think of mine." Four stanzas later is the harvest description:

O the golden sheaf, the rustling treasure-armful!
O the nutbrown tresses nodding interlaced!
O the treasure-tresses one another over
Nodding! O the girdle slack about the waist!
Slain are the poppies that shot their random
scarlet
Quick amid the wheatears; wound about the
waist,
Gathered, see these brides of Earth one blush of
ripeness!
O the nutbrown tresses nodding interlaced!

The above stanza seems somehow similar to Mew's last stanza
in "The Farmer's Bride" in description, yet the meanings
are opposite:

She sleeps up in the attic there
Alone, poor maid. 'Tis but a stair
Betwixt us. Oh! my God! the down,
The soft young down of her, the brown,
The brown of her--her eyes, her hair, her hair!

Both stanzas are full of sensual language, but Meredith's
couple can look forward to an appropriate consummation,
while Mew's couple literally cannot. The "full" language
in "Love in the Valley" is a language of ripeness and
harvest, while "The Farmer's Bride" is barren and desolate,
both in form and content.

Meredith's "bride" is not perfect, nor does she need
to be. The narrator tells us that "Gossips count her
faults, ... / Faults she had once as she learned to run
and tumbled; / Faults of feature some see, beauty not
complete. / Yet, good gossips, beauty that makes holy /
Earth and air, may have faults from head to feet." He
knows, regardless of her "surprise," that he is "the light
and living of her eyes." The narrator moves ahead to a
time past the marriage to the next spring, back to where
the poem began. Nature has completed her cycle. It is the
earliest spring, with "Youngest green transfused in silver shining through--." The new husband can only say "Could I find a place to be alone with heaven, / I would speak my heart out; heaven is my need." But no, for "All seem to know what is for heaven alone."

The joy of Meredith's poem, compared with the sorrow of Mew's and Hardy's, points up with poignancy the sadness of the latter's philosophies more than their life experiences. It is perhaps Mew's outlook as a woman, her recognition of the burden a woman has to bear that a man does not, a burden that the man is not completely aware of, which makes Mew's poem finally different from those of both Meredith and Hardy. For Hardy, perhaps, in "The Homecoming," life would be fine if it were not for the foolishness of the bride. In the last stanza, the husband tells his bride:

"That's right, my Heart! And though on haunted Toller Down we be, And the wind swears things in chimley, we'll to supper merrily! So don't ye tap your shoe so pettish-like; but smile at me, And ye'll soon forget to sock and sigh for dear daddee!"

Somehow the reader feels that everything the husband has said is true, and the bride will soon be fine. That impression does not hold true for Mew's bride. As a woman, she feels the trivialization and degradation which often follow for the bride, while both male poets feel the added
power to their own lives, through the service the brides render. Also, the woman feels the fear of penetration by the male, as well as the dangerous childbirth which may follow. Lastly, Mew's bride must feel that she has been both bought and sold.

Love is never a solution for Charlotte Mew, in her poetry any more than in her life. There is a dilemma here, for those of Mew's characters who choose the spiritual to the exclusion of the physical usually end in death, while those who choose the physical end with an emptiness which cannot be filled. To think that Hardy based Sue Bridehead, who has such an aversion to sex, on Charlotte Mew is to ignore the passion inherent in her poems. While Mew might choose to be like Meredith, with his "philosophy of sanity and the golden mean," (Boyer & Brooks 621) she is more like one of Hardy's "passive individuals" (Stone 94) who is helpless before her own biological determinism. She is more like Jude than Sue Bridehead, for like him she chooses this world over God's world. Also like him, once the void has become the governing force in her life, she chooses death. Unlike Jude, however, Mew's personas suffer not from guilt, but from estrangement. Most of Mew's poetry dealing with the physical is about illicit love, for which she refuses to apologize, either to humans or to God. According to Shelley Jean Crisp "She flaunts her allegiance to mortal passion in the face of God, refusing to grant him sovereignty over the flesh" (Diss 207). She repeatedly
chooses the physical over the spiritual.

Another poem in which the world is a vastly different place for the female than for the male is "Pecheresse." A young woman has given herself to a sailor. "I have lost the way / To Paradise for him. I sold / My soul for love and not for gold." She knows that "I shall die or perhaps grow old / Before he comes." She does not repent.

    Just so the long days come and go,
    Yet this one sin I will not tell
    Though Mary's heart is as frozen snow
    And all nights are cold for one warmed too well.
    But, Oh! ma Doue! the nights of hell!

The poem seems to be about a young woman choosing her lover over God, of choosing him even over an eternity of hell, but it is her life on this earth which is a burden. The women in this poem are juxtaposed to the men as the passive to the active. The men will "sail out into the night" while "their" women will wait for them. The men are working, earning a livelihood, while the women "watch the sea." The relationship of the men to the sea is one of partnership, while "their" women are passive observers. The young woman realizes the truth of this: "And I shall die or perhaps grow old / Before he comes." She says the sea "may have taken mine from me," but she doesn't mean just death. She later laments:

    While in some narrow foreign street
    Or loitering on the crowded quay,
    Who knows what others he may meet
    To turn his eyes away from me?
Many are fair to such as he!

While she thinks he may be lured away, she knows that she will not:

There is but one for such as I
   To love, to hate, to hunger for;
I shall, perhaps, grow old and die,
   With one short day to spend and store,
One night, in all my life, no more.

It is enough.

Perhaps in no other poem is the isolation of the individual felt to the extent it is in "The Quiet House." The pain belongs to a woman, and as in "Pecheresse" it is a pain that no man is familiar with, although it is the poem of a man that best matches Mew's mood. The poem is obviously autobiographical. Mew lost her oldest brother and youngest sister to insanity; with the exception of her sister Anne, all the other siblings and her father were lost to death. In this poem even the sister is gone, and the persona is left with only an aged parent who has been shamed by one of his children and refuses to leave the house. Worse, her father wants her with him at all times.

"To get away to Aunt's for that weekend / Was hard enough; (since then, a year ago, / He scarcely lets me slip out of his sight-)." Like Meredith, Mew uses the imagery of flowers and colors mixed with feelings, but the results are Hardyean and display her frustrated sexuality.

Red is the strangest pain to bear;
In Spring the leaves on the budding trees;
In Summer the roses are worse than these,
More terrible than they are sweet:
A rose can stab you across the street
Deeper than any knife:
And the crimson haunts you everywhere-
Thin shafts of sunlight, like the ghosts of
reddened swords have struck our stair
As if, coming down, you had spilt your life.

The sameness of her life is presented in one of Mew's
most successful stanzas; composed of one and two-syllable
words, there are 93 words and only 106 syllables:

The room is shut where Mother died,
The other rooms are as they were,
The world goes on the same outside,
The sparrows fly across the Square,
The children ple as we four did there,
The trees grown green and brown and bare,
The sun shines on the dead Church spire,
And nothing lives here but the fire,
While Father watches from his chair
Day follows day
The same, or now and then, a different grey,
Till, like his hair,
Which Mother said was wavy once and bright,
They will all turn white.

Her extreme loneliness is further exposed in the last
stanza:

To-night I heard a bell again-
Outside it was the same mist of fine rain,
The lamps just lighted down the long, dim street,
No one for me-
I think it is myself I go to meet:
I do not care; some day I shall not think; I
shall not be!

Mew seems here to court death, to hold it as the one
thing she has to look forward to. It is more like a Bronte
poem than most of Mew's. Emily Bronte's "Warning and
"Reply" has the same desire, the longing for rest. It is a poem of Branwell Bronte, however, that has the same longing for escape from life. In "On Peaceful Death and Painful Life" he asks:

Why dost thou sorrow for the happy dead?
For, if their life be lost, their toils are o'er,
And woe and want can trouble them no more;
Nor ever slept they in an earthly bed
So sound as now they sleep, while dreamless laid
In the dark chambers of the unknown shore,
Where Night and Silence guard each sealed door.
So, turn from such as these thy drooping head,
And mourn the Dead Alive - whose spirit flies -
Whose life departs, before his death has come;
Who knows no Heaven beneath life's gloomy skies,
Who sees no Hope to brighten up that gloom, -
'Tis He who feels the worm that never dies, -
The real death and darkness of the tomb.

This "death in life" is what the persona feels in "The Quiet House," a house where death seems a desirable alternative, with nothing to "brighten up that gloom." The female persona of "The Quiet House" accepts her lot in life as much as possible, although her desires do not disappear.

In Mew's most successful poem, "Madeleine in Church," the persona also refuses to admit she has done wrong.

J. Hillis Miller has said of Emily Bronte that she attempts, "like the romantics, to bring God back to earth as a benign power inherent in the self, in nature, and in the human community" (15). Mew, too, would like to meet an immanent God, and this desire, along with the despair accompanying the transcendent God she has been offered, are
nowhere more in evidence than in this poem. Madeleine has not come to church to ask forgiveness. She is anything but a humble Christian begging for mercy. She speaks to God honestly and directly. Linda Mizejewski claims that Mew, through Madeleine, "challenges God's imagination and vitality" in "a plucky confrontation." She goes on to say that

This Fallen Woman's attack on marriage criticizes precisely the precepts of True Womanhood which were supposed to have made every Victorian woman fulfilled: faithfulness, temperance, and motherhood, which Madeleine sees sharply as possessiveness first by the husband, then by the child, who, far from immortalizing the mother, ages her. This is the "loss" of self which for Madeleine would be much worse than her present loneliness. For the sensulist, to be "evermore" possessed as someone's "own" is a deathlike narrowing, and life, resistance to death, is indeed Madeleine's primary concern. (290)

Madeleine is a woman approaching middle-age. She is in a state of crisis. Unmarried, she has rejected traditional values. She has refused to be, in Miller's words, a "victim of the 'modern spirit,'" which he goes on to say "means to be forced to conduct oneself according to inherited institutions, beliefs, laws, and customs which no longer seem at all appropriate to actual conditions" (10-11). Also, as George Dangerfield has said, life wasn't easy for the unmarried woman at the turn of the century. "Everything was denied her. Education, business, love - all were impossible.... When a husband is a woman's career,
the woman without a husband is as good as dead" (146). So Madeleine, alienated from society, suffers from what J. Hillis Miller calls "a radical sense of inner nothingness" (8).

Madeleine goes to a church. She instantly states her position of doubt. She has lit a "small candle" which is faint, but "not so faint / As the far lights of everlastingness." She chooses a saint over Christ to "talk to" because she feels he is more like her, "something more like my own clay, / Not too divine." Thinking of that reminds her of her first husband and she runs through a list of ex-husbands and lovers. She at first seems ready to judge herself according to traditional Christian values: "It seems so funny all we other rips / Should have immortal souls," but she soon decides "it's no use this penny light -." Then, "I, too, would ask him to remember me / If there were any Paradise beyond this earth that I could see." In the next stanza, she speaks desperately to Christ:

Oh! quiet Christ who never knew
The poisonous fangs that bite us through
And make us do the things we do,
See how we suffer and fight and die,
How helpless and how low we lie,
God holds You, and you hang so high,
Though no one looking long at You,
Can think you do not suffer too,
But, up there, from Your still, star lighted tree
What can you know, what can you really see
Of this dark ditch, the soul of me!

She opens the fifth stanza with "We are what we are," and explains that since a child she has been so overwhelmed
with emotion "That joy and pain, like any mother and her unborn / child were almost one." Again, she uses the imagery of colors and scents and flowers and touch to expose her deep sexuality:

I could hardly bear
The dreams upon the eyes of white geraniums in the dusk,
The thick, close voice of musk,
The jessamine music on the thin night air,
Or, sometimes my own hand about me anywhere -
The sight of my own face (for it was lovely then)
even the scent of my own hair.

After describing a youth of overwhelming passion, she asks, "And when we are made thus / Who shall control" us, "Who shall teach us / To thrust the world out of our heart"? Madeleine has no intention of letting God off easily. She challenges him, asking if the true spirit of life must be foregone in order to enjoy the spiritual. She admits that nature might have been the answer "if one had learned the trick - / ...quite early on, / Of long green pastures under placid skies." If Mew herself had been born outside London, she seems to be saying, perhaps she could have gotten as much succor from nature as Bronte and Meredith and Hardy as it is, "What did we ever care for it, who have asked for youth?" As Mizejewski says, "If the Fallen Woman must confront her alternative life, that of a respectable, married woman, she must also face the consequences of her chosen route--the temporality of beauty
and pleasure" (291).

Madeleine does face the consequences of the loss of youth. She describes a picture of her mother, "at nineteen," but the picture represents "simply Youth, or simply Spring / To me to-day." The differences that have occurred seem only sad:

So exquisite, so heart-breaking a thing
Beside the mask that I remember, shrunk and small,
Sapless and lined like a dead leaf,
All that was left of oh! the loveliest face, by
time and grief!

Madeleine is aware that she, too, is approaching her mother's age. According to Mizejewski, "She thinks of the 'virtuous' people she knew who did not in fact live in the sense of being wholly alive.... Madeleine is unable to believe that happiness in a future world is worth the sacrifice of the present one" (291). When she looks to the traditional values for answers, she realizes she would be yoked not only to a husband, but to children who might be undesirable as well.

Mew's lines so often quoted "If there were fifty heavens God could not give us back the / child who went or never came" are ambiguous. The lament might be for a child lost to sin or death, or for the childless such as Mew herself. There is, however, an alternative reading. The lament could be for the child who was oneself, either for the loss that Wordsworth felt all children undergo, or for
the childhood missed due to heredity and environment. Madeleine reinforces her statement with one regarding the temporariness of all nature:

Not one of all the starry buds hung on the hawthorn trees of last year's May,  
No shadow from the sloping fields of yesterday;  
For every hour they slant across the hedge a different way,  
The shadows are never the same.

Even though Madeleine must accept these limitations of life, "she cannot forget that the church seems to be asking for surrender" (Mizejewski 292). She ends one stanza saying of God, "I do not envy Him his victories. His arms are full of / broken things." She begins the next stanza, But I shall not be in them. Let him take / The finer ones, the easier to break."

Madeleine insists that her youth, with the love of the physical, isn't gone yet. "And they are not gone, yet, for me, the lights, the colours, the perfumes." All of a sudden Madeleine feels that the choice she has been trying to make is not even possible. The God she has been turning down, yet talking to, is not even there. Miller has pointed out that "love, honor, God himself exist, but only because someone believes in them.... And as soon as a man sees God in this way he is effectively cut off from the living God of faith" (12). Madeleine says that:

But this place is grey,  
And much too quiet. No one here,
Why, this is awful, this is fear!

She feels more than her alienation from God and from humanity. She feels the absence of God. She goes on to say "No one to sit with, really, or speak to, friend to friend." As Mizejewski is aware:

With her promiscuity and rejection of marriage, she is thoroughly outside the structures which give the consolation not only of religion but of stability and community. She fears not the extinction of death so much as the process of dying alone. (292)

In order to escape this lonely death, Madeleine pleads desperately, "There must be someone. Christ' there must, / Tell me there will be someone. Who? / If there were no one else, could it be You?" Crisp thinks that "the pity of Madeleine's desperate yearning for spiritual reassurance is that she already walks the only true path life offers" (221). In her own life Mew depended heavily on her sister and mother. When her mother died, Alido Monro was surprised at how upset Mew was; she could neither eat nor sleep, and said "'I feel like a weed dug up and thrown over a wall'" (Fitzgerald 189). After her sister Anne's death Mew was in the position of Madeleine - absolutely alone; within a year she committed suicide.

What Madeleine was searching for in church was impossible for her to find. "In Madeleine's mind, the key to the story is that Mary Magdalene must have undergone some kind of enlightenment without relinquishing her
sexuality and worldliness, as the orthodox Christian is supposed to do" (293). Madeleine tells Christ "That you can change the things for which we care, / But even You, unless You kill us, not the way. Madeleine imagines that Mary Magdalene was able to have both peace and passion together, without the renunciation demanded by Christianity. She tries to compare it to a human, sexual love.

I wonder was it like a kiss that once I knew,
The only one that I would care to take
Into the grave with me, to which if there
were afterwards, to wake.
Almost as happy as the carven Dead
In some dim chancel lying head by head
We slept with it, but face to face, the whole night through -
One breath, one throbbing quietness, as if the thing behind our lips was endless life.

She then emphasizes her belief in the imagination as saviour.

So Mary chose the dream of Him for what was left to her of night and day,
It is the only truth: it is the dream in us that neither life nor death nor any other thing can take away:
But if she had not touched Him in the doorway of the dream could she have cared so much?
She was a sinner, we are what we are: the spirit afterwards, but first, the touch.

Christ is not part of Madeleine's dream. She sees him only
"outside, too gravely looking at me." What "if my forgotten spirit came / Unwillinging back, what could it claim / Of those calm eyes, that quiet speech"? If Madeleine's spirit was to go "Unwillingly back to the burden of old imaginings / When it has learned so long not to think, not to be." It would only "speak as it has spoken to me of things / That I shall not see!" Mew concludes with a stanza in which Madeleine goes back to her childhood, when her very active imagination believes Christ on-the-cross to be alive, "so hurt, so hurt!" Then, as now, "I used to think it would not hurt me too, so terribly / If He had ever seemed to notice me / Or, if, for once, He would only speak." This seems to confirm Davidow's belief that Madeleine, like Sue Bridehead, is regressive (Diss. 227-29).

According to Bishop, Louis Untermeyer called "Madeleine in Church" "one of the few 'great' poems of our day." It may well be the poem that caused so many of her contemporaries to think Mew such a great poet. When has humankind's yearning after an absent God been stated so accurately, in such a touching manner? In much of Mew's poetry, she yearns desperately for a returned God, but always for an immanent one. For Mew, a transcendent God is an absent God. She wants a God she can touch, that she can talk to, that she can laugh with, that can take a joke. The stern God with the scarred hands has nothing to offer Mew. He must be at least, as Bronte desired, both immanent
Mizejewski has pointed out the danger of Mew's theme to the Victorian outlook. First, like Oscar Wilde, she believed in the "body and spirit" being one; the church, however, "only reinforces further separation of body and soul by asking for renunciation, for the world to be thrust from the heart" (295). Second, she "is striking at the heart of the myth," due, of course, to her failure to have Madeleine surrender, to be converted "from sensuality to spirituality" (294). Mew has "Madeleine in Church" end with Madeleine "bruised but not beate-". She has not accepted "things / That I shall not see!". After her long soliloquy, she is closer to herself, not to God. She has looked at her situation bravely and realistically. As Mizejewski affirms, she refuses the belief "that the spiritual life is more 'real' than are present physical life and desire," and even argues "with the Christian idea that the worldly sensualist has necessarily lost her soul" (288). It is no wonder that Monro had to change printers after his compositor refused to set up Madeleine in Church (Fitzgerald 157). Mew is an individualist who according to D. H. Lawrence's definition is one "who must act in his own particular way to fulfill his own individual nature" (Stone 78). This individuality applied to Mew's relationship to men as well as to God.

In each of these four poems, "The Farmer's Bride,"
"Pecheresse," "The Quiet House," and "Madeleine in Church" the subject of the poem, whether in a relationship with God, a lover, a father, or oneself faces problems peculiar to women. Mew often had male personas and was quite successful with them, but it is in the poems where the persona or subject is female that Mew does her best work. In poems like "Madeleine in Church" where the woman refuses to accept what life has given her, who asks philosophical questions of her God, her society, and herself, Mew reaches heights shared by few. In "The Farmer's Bride" the subject is a timid, frightened girl who has become the "possession" of a farmer who either could not or would not take the time for the necessary steps that would make possible a successful union. The young woman in "Pecheresse" is much more independent, a hint of the Madeleine to come, but is still wrapped up in a passive "feminine" role that prevents action. The spinster of "The Quiet House" is so miserable that she longs for death, but is at least aware of the role she has been forced into. Madeleine is older than the others; she is also much more experienced. She asks, she implores, she demands.

Of the four women of these poems two are spiritual; the farmer's bride, whether from fear or for some other reason, is mentally unbalanced, and the persona of "The Quiet House," who longs for the physical but is forced into the spiritual by her father's and society's expectations and longs for death. Both the persona in "Pecheresse" and
in "Madeleine" have chosen the physical. The young woman of "Pecheresse" feels the loss of contact with God, "since this one sin I have not told," but she misses her lover more than God. Madeleine is older than the women of the other three poems. She is experienced, and aware of the increased vulnerability for women who express their sexuality. She still chooses the physical, however, and is courageous in her forthright honesty. The order of the poems in the volume is interesting, and even though the volume ends with a poem titled "Expecto Resurrectionem," the others seem to give the lie to this last one. It seems to be Mew's one act to satisfy conventional expectations.

Mew wrote a letter to a friend once saying that she had been reading Alfred Noyes and was particularly struck by his poem, "The Old Sceptic," saying that it was "the most touching poem I have read for years, and which, as far as sentiment goes, I might have written" (Davidow 297). The poem is one in which the persona would like to forget his religious doubt and return to the faith of his fathers. Mew might have wished for a return to the faith she grew up in, but for her, as for Hardy, such a return was impossible. Mew was living as a "modern" in the twentieth century.
Later Poetry

Between the first and second editions of The Farmer's Bride, published in 1916 and 1921, Charlotte Mew gained many admirers, among them Sydney Cockerell, Thomas Hardy, and A. E. Housman. It was due largely to the encouragement received from Cockerell and Hardy that Mew was able to write additional poems to add to the others for the new edition of her book. She remained good friends with Alida Klementaski, who married Harold Monro in 1927. It was they who published the 1921 edition of The Farmer's Bride, as well as Saturday Market, the title the book was published under in America. From these volumes Mew gained Louis Untermeyer and Virginia Woolf as fans.

The new poems are quite different from the older ones. Of the four poems discussed earlier, only the mentally unbalanced farmer's bride makes an attempt to escape, and she makes only one. The personas of "Pecheresse" and "The Quiet House" seem both to be in a permanent position. In "Pecheresse" in particular, the persona is willing to "grow old and die" waiting for her lover, with whom she has spent only "one night, in all my life." Madeleine, who does seem to be crying out for something or someone who can give meaning to her life, has tried to find that meaning so far in a number of relationships with men. In the new poems,
however, very temporary relationships are all one can hope for, and life's meaning must be found in nothing more than a series of these. The personas are not dependent on God; neither are the personas, when female, dependent on men. The man's only function is temporary.

There are three poems in the addendum to the 1921 edition of The Farmer's Bride that particularly point up the temporariness of life and all it has to offer. These are "On the Road to the Sea," "Song," and "Sea Love." The new poems open with "On the Road to the Sea." No one of the poems could better represent the temporary nature of relationships than this one, as it is about two strangers who pass a pleasant half-hour together. "On the Road to the Sea" presents a man and woman through the man's eyes. They have both reached middle-age. The man sees "behind the strangeness of [her] eyes." He realizes that "[he] shall never touch [her] hair / Or hear the little tick behind [her] breast," yet "[he has] brushed [her] hand and heard / The child in [her]: [he likes] that best." Here is a man different from most. Unlike the farmer in "The Farmer's Bride," he is ready to accept the woman on her own terms. "I will not stare into the early world beyond the opening eyes, / Or vex or scare what I love best," perhaps because he is aware of the enormous depths of sadness in the woman. The poem opens with:

We passed each other, turned and stopped for half an hour, then went our way,
I who make other women smile did not make you-
But no man can move mountains in a day.
So this hard thing is yet to do.

The sadness does not make the man turn away. Instead he asks "Is there not something in grey skies / And in grey sea?" Yet the man is physical, and he does not hesitate to show it:

But I want your life before mine bleeds away-
   Here-not in heavenly hereafters-soon,-
I want your smile this very afternoon,
(The last of all my vices, pleasant people used to say, I wanted and I sometimes got-the Moon!)
He is not content, however, with what he wants, but wants her to have the same desires. He closes his soliloquy with this hope:

Peace! Would you not rather die
Reeling,-with all the cannons at your ear?
So, at least, would I,
And I may not be here
To-night, to-morrow morning or next year.
Still I will let you keep your life a little while,

See dear?
I have made you smile.

"On the Road to the Sea" is the most Meredithian poem Mew wrote. Siegfried Sassoon, a contemporary of Mew's who published a book on Meredith, quoted May Sinclair as saying that Shirley, a portrait of Emily Bronte by her sister Charlotte in her book of that name, was "the ancestress of George Meredith's women." That Emily Bronte and Meredith
were Mew's favorite writers probably attests to the fact that she desperately wanted things to be different, but that, like Hardy, the "faiths by which my comrades stand / Seem fantasies to me" (Collected Poems of Thomas Hardy 59). However, the joy to be realized from thirty minutes of quiet and light conversation fit in with Meredith's belief that life's chief pleasures can be found in nature and in the mind (Lovett 305). This poem actually moves close to the religion of humanity of George Eliot (Miller 12-13).

"Song" was first published in Literary Digest in 1920, one year before it was included in the second edition of The Farmer's Bride. It has even more of a "Carpe Diem" theme than "On the Road to the Sea." Further, Mew seems to be consciously imitating Herrick's "To the Virgins, to Make Much of Time," one of the most famous carpe diem poems in English. Another unusual aspect of the poem is the very short (for Mew) line lengths. Mew's lines in "Song" are even shorter than Herrick's in his poem. Also, juxtaposed to Herrick's four stanzas of four lines each are Mew's two stanzas of eight lines each. Although Mew's poem is certainly not of the quality of Herrick's, it stands alone of her poems for its brevity in syllables and line length.

It is printed in its entirety below:

Love, Love to-day, my dear,
Love is not always here;
Wise maids know how soon grows sere
The greenest leaf of Spring;
But no man knoweth
Whether it goeth
When the wind bloweth
So frail a thing.

Love, Love, my dear, to-day,
If the ship's in the bay,
If the bird has come your way
That sings on summer trees;
When his song faileth
And the ship saileth
No voice availeth
To call back these.

Perhaps the biggest difference in the two poems is in the attitude of the persona. In Herrick's poem, the persona seems to be a man who is interested in educating a young woman to the facts of life (at least those that will benefit him). In Mew's poem, on the other hand, the persona immediately sets up an ironic tone in the first line, giving the impression of being one of the same sex as the poem is written for, one who has learned a bitter lesson.

The last of the three poems, "Sea Love," is one of Mew's best. She has captured the universality of the love which seemingly will last forever but that disappears leaving barely a trace.

Tide be runnin' the great world over:
   T'was only last June month I mind that we
Was thinkin' the toss and the call in the breast
   of the lover
   So everlastin' as the sea.

Heer's the same little fishes that sputter and swim,
   Wi' the moon's old glim on the grey, wet sand;
An' him no more to me nor me to him
   Than the wind goin' over my hand.
Davidow, in her dissertation, sees the persona as primarily lonely (188). While the persona does seem that, she seems to go beyond loneliness. According to Bishop, the persona "comes to regard her loss with resignation and to accept transience as a matter of course" (166). It is the void of the modern that permeates this poem. Mew has now reached a stasis in her philosophical outlook not present in the original edition.

The two years following the publication of the second edition of The Farmer’s Bride were filled with sadness and trouble for Charlotte Mew and her family. The lease on the house they had been living in since 1888 expired in 1922, and Charlotte and Anne were forced to find a new residence. Since they lived largely on Anna Maria’s fixed income, the great cost-of-living increases that accompanied WWI made it almost impossible to find any decent place. Finally, when Mew was in despair and on the point of moving into a hotel, they found a modest upstairs apartment on which the rent was over half of their yearly income (Fitzgerald 185). By the end of the year Anna Maria fell, and in May of 1923 she died. Mew was devastated by her mother’s death and grieved for months.

Mew’s friends did not forget her in this time, and by the end of December Mew received formal notification of the civil list pension which Cockerell had arranged for her after the loss of her mother’s annuity had threatened her
and Anne's financial survival. The pension was 75 pounds a year; the signers were Walter de la Mare, John Masefield and Thomas Hardy. During her mother's illness Mew published her last poem. It was "Fin de Fete," the poem which was found in Hardy's own writing after his death, and which was given to Mew as a treasured keepsake. The two sisters were very happy for two years and then Anne became ill with cancer of the liver and died a slow death during which she was very ill. The death occurred in 1927; in 1928 Mew committed suicide by drinking Lysol.

The Rambling Sailor was published in 1929. Again, even though the poems are not dated, they are quite different than the ones published earlier. There is much more a concern with death in these poems. The order is interesting again as well. The first three poems have slightly differing attitudes about death, becoming increasingly positive in tone. It is as though they each had the same persona who is trying out different attitudes about death and the afterlife. "In the Fields," the first of the poems, simply asks a question:

Lord, when I look at lovely things which pass,  
Under old trees the shadows of young leaves  
Dancing to please the wind along the grass,  
Or the gold stillness of the August sun on the  
August sheaves;  
Can I believe there is a heavenlier world than this?  
And if there is  
Will the strange heart of any everlasting thing  
Bring me these dreams that take my breath away?  
They come at evening with the home-flying rooks  
and the scent of hay,
Over the fields. They come in Spring.

In the second poem "From a Window" the persona sounds as though it is himself he is trying to convince. He tries to believe that he is interested in the afterlife he will be entering, and not the life he will be leaving:

Up here, with June, the sycamore throws
Across the window a whispering screen;
I shall miss the sycamore more, I suppose,
Than anything else on this earth that is out in green.
But I mean to go through the door without fear,
Not caring much what happens here
When I'm away:-
How green the screen is across the panes
Or who goes laughing along the lanes
With my old lover all the summer day.

In the third poem "Not For That City" the persona has lost his unsureness, and has decided in favor of true death, or rest, over an afterlife:

Not for that city of the level sun,
Its golden streets and glittering gates ablaze—
The shadeless, sleepless city of white days,
White nights, or nights and days that are as one—
We weary, when all is said, all thought, all done.
We strain our eyes beyond this dusk to see
What, from the threshold of eternity
We shall step into. No, I think we shun
The splendour of that everlasting glare,
The clamour of that never-ending song.
And if for anything we greatly long,
It is for some remote and quiet stair
Which winds to silence and a space of sleep
Too sound for waking and for dreams too deep.

Mew seems to indicate with her last line that the whole
idea of an afterlife, of a lush and lovely paradise has been a dream all along. The perfection the traditional Christian afterlife is supposed to offer sounds more boring than desirable to Mew.

"The shadeless, sleepless city of white days,
White nights, or nights and days that are as one-
We weary, when all is said, all thought, all done.

The second stanza adds that "I think we shun / The splendour of that everlasting glare, / The clamour of that never-ending song." Mew's readiness to accept death is clear. The lines make death seem pleasant, something to look forward to, even to long for.

In "Old Shepherd's Prayer," the persona considers an afterlife as though offered a choice. In the last stanza he tells God:

Heavenly Master, I wud like to wake to they same green places
Where I be know'd for breakin' dogs and follerin sheep.
And if I may not walk in th' old ways and look on th' old faces
I wud sooner sleep.

Here is someone who can still talk to God in the old way. He does not see God as coming from man's imagination, and so he can long for an afterlife similar to the life which has suited him so well. In "Smile, Death" Mew addresses death in a poem reminiscent of Emily Dickinson:
Smile, Death, see I smile as I come to you
Straight from the road and the moor that I leave
behind,
Nothing on earth to me was like this wind-blown
space,
Nothing was like the road, but at the end there
was a vision or a face
And the eyes were not always kind.

Smile, Death, as you fasten the blades to my
feet for me,
On, on let us skate past the sleeping willows
dusted with snow;
Fast, fast down the frozen stream, with the moor
and the road and the vision behind,
(Show me your face, why the eyes are kind!)
And we will not speak of life or believe in it or
remember it as we go.

Mew wrote a poem titled "To A Child in Death." In it
she laments the fact that a parent is not strong enough to
protect the child from death. She uses a bird metaphor in
which the "strong wing" of the parent is not strong enough;
she then compares the child to Christ, who was the son of
God, and who yet died "Under the shadow of that wing."
Vicki Feaver has compared "Madeleine in Church" to a poem
of Christina Rossetti, "Death is Swallowed up in Victory."
In both poems the wing imagery is used, but Rossetti uses
it to show death as a victory, saying that "'Underneath his
wing / I shall lie safe at rest and freed from care.'" It
seems that Rossetti looks to death as a "victory," as
everlasting life, while Mew sees either life or death-as-
permanent sleep as the victorious way. Rossetti believes
in rest only until a resurrection, but Mew cannot believe
in a resurrection at all; even if she could believe in a
resurrection, her poems make clear that she at best would have to weigh it against eternal rest.

Another interesting aspect of Mew's poetry is the self-centeredness of the author/narrator. In poems where a lover is no longer available, Mew often has the persona see the absence only as it relates to the persona's time. "I So Liked Spring" is one of these. The poem opens with "I so liked Spring last year / Because you were here;-- The closing stanza states that

This year's a different thing,-
I'll not think of you.
But I'll like Spring because it is simply Spring
As the thrushes do.

This same quality is far less attractive when applied to the death of the child. After lamenting the child's lost opportunities, the persona reverts to the death as it applies to him:

What shall we do with this strange summer, meant for you,-
Dear, if we see the winter through
What shall be done with spring?

Of course, as Feaver has shown, Mew's "object is not to provide them [the personas] with masks but to strip them bare; to reveal the workings of their conscious and unconscious minds" (1413). Mew's honesty must be admired, even if it is painful.

Again and again in Mew's poetry, God seems to fall short. The poems end with one titled "Moorland Night." In
it Mew seems to reach a resolution in which she deserts the
traditional God, the traditional death, and the traditional
afterlife. She looks to a return to the elements in the
manner of Matthew Arnold in his title poem of Empedocles on
Aetna. Although Arnold temporarily withdrew the poem
because it failed, in his opinion, to "inspirit and rejoice
the reader," to "convey a charm," or "infuse delight"
(Arnold 204), even the briefest reading of Mew's poetry
shows that she did not believe that a requirement for the
poet. At any rate, Mew seeks her answer through nature in
some obscure way in this poem:

My face is against the grass-the moorland grass
is wet-
My eyes are shut against the grass, against my
lips there are the little
blades,
Over my head the curlews call,
And now there is the night wind in my hair;
My heart is against the grass and the sweet
earth;-it has gone still, at
last.
It does not want to beat any more,
And why should it beat?
This is the end of the journey;
The Thing is found.

The last line sounds quite positive, not equivocal at all.
She goes on:

This is the end of all the roads-
Over the grass there is the night-dew
And the wind that drives up from the sea along
the moorland road;
I hear a curlew start out from the heath
And fly off, calling through the dusk,
The wild, long, rippling call.
The Thing is found and I am quiet with
the earth.
Perhaps the earth will hold it, or the wind, or that bird's cry,
But it is not for long in any life I know. This cannot stay,
Not now, not yet, not in a dying world, with me, for very long.
I leave it here:
And one day the wet grass may give it back-
One day the quiet earth may give it back-
The calling birds may give it back as they go by-
To someone walking on the moor who starves for love and will not know
Who gave it all these to give away;
Or, if I come and ask for it again,
Oh! then, to me.

Mew seems to be ready, not only for death, but ready to join the void Bishop has written about so extensively. Bishop, however, thinks that

Cognizant of the Void, which nullifies the old orthodox systems of values and which negates the traditional views of divine purpose, Mew confronts the ultimate, stark reality of the vacancy of the cosmos and the meaninglessness of human experience.

It seems to me that "Moorland Night" negates this view of Mew as seeing the "vacancy of the cosmos and the meaninglessness of human experience." After all, she has said twice in the poem that "The Thing is found." Her heart "has gone still, at last." So to Mew the Void has, in one sense, ceased to exist. Matter can be neither created nor destroyed; it can only change its form. In this idea Mew found her own eternal life. It is one in which she can be at rest. It is one she can even look
forward to. The last stanza of "Moorland Night" makes this clear.

Bishop's view that Mew saw the "meaninglessness of human experience is also wrong, in my belief. She found life's meaning in her work, although it was so limited that she could not find the satisfaction she craved. She also found life's meaning in her few close friends. Most of all, she found life's meaning in her relationship with her family. Although her views made a man/woman relationship as part of the family impossible, she held the relationship with her family as the most important part of her life. Her mother's death affected her much more than any of her friends supposed it would, and her sister's death brought on the mental instability which led to her own death.

As a woman, Mew was in a precarious position, both professionally and personally. Much has been said of the problems women of the time faced in trying to live an independent life. As Crisp shows, however, Mew was far more successful than she could have known at the time. She was one of the first women to break free of Showalter's Feminine and Feminist roles and be truly Female. She chose this role in the face of poverty and ostracism by much of society. As Walter de la Mare said when he met her, "She just knows humanity ... one of the rarest things in the world" (Fitzgerald 196). In the small canon that she left, Mew shares this knowledge with us all.


