

# The Farmer's Bride

Charlotte Mew

## OVERALL SUMMARY

"The Farmer's Bride" uses **dark imagery** combined with a **first-person** narrator to tell the tale of a Farmer's bride who, fearful of her husband, attempts to run away but **to no avail** (no luck). It paints a **sinister** picture of female **subjugation** (oppression) and shows how throughout time women have been **objectified** to the point where they become objects to **acquire** rather than actual people.

## STANZA SUMMARY

- The farmer, the speaker of the poem, introduces that he chose a wife over the summer, whom he married but seems disinterested in. The wife became progressively more afraid of him, to the point where she tries to escape and runs away.
- He and the rest of the village go searching for his escaped wife, chasing her until she is captured and returned home.
- After the wife's re-capture, she is extremely uneasy around men but happy to be alone with nature.
- Things worsen and his wife becomes more and more unhappy and will not bear him sons.
- The farmer's wife sleeps in the attic, afraid of her husband and the farmer does not question why.

## CONTEXT

- The poem was published in 1916 Charlotte Mew had a particular interest in the **subjugation of women** and the way their mental health declines after marrying a man after seeing a lot of her family experience a similar thing.
- Mew had siblings who suffered severely from mental illness and were institutionalised and from a young age she had a deep-rooted fear of marriage and its relation to mental illness.
- Her work is heavily influenced by her family related trauma.

# Key Themes & Analysis

## SUBJUGATION OF WOMEN

- The farmer sees his wife as another responsibility / duty, or an object he must **acquire** and objectifies her as such. He recounts how he **"chose a maid"**, using the verb **"chose"** to show the **immense** power he holds in comparison to the extremely minimal power his wife has. Furthermore **"maid"** de-personalises her, taking away the qualities which make her an individual person worthy of being given **agency** (choice)
- He describes her as **"too young"** and having a **"wide brown stare"** and being **"soft"**. Mew uses infantilising imagery which makes him seem predatory and thus she exemplifies how young women were often forced into marriages with older more mature men.
- He recounts that **"her eyes beseech when one of us come within reach"**, using a **rhyming couplet** to make his language sound almost **playful**; he has no **empathy** for her. He makes the reader **despise** him as his tone is cruel
- Furthermore, the **sibilance** he uses makes the line sound **ominous, suspenseful**, as though he is whispering like one would a scary story which adds to the **haunting** nature of the poem.
- He likens her to a **"leveret"** and describes the **"grey sky"**, **comparing** her to a hare again therefore **extending the simile** and using a **pathetic fallacy** to **guide the poem towards its grim end** and **mirror** the depression the wife feels through the weather.
- In the final description of her: **"her hair!"**, Mew uses a possessive pronoun which **exacerbates her objectification**, reducing her to her singular features and thus ridding her of any humanity.
- Overall, Mew uses a **plethora** of effective language techniques to demonstrate the melancholy the farmer's bride feels in her situation and demonstrates the way women were **subjugated and stripped of their free will** by men.

## ZOOMORPHISM

- The Farmer uses **animalistic imagery** to describe his wife.
- When she runs away, he describes her as ***“flying like a hare”***. Using a **simile** to compare her to a small yet quick animal, evokes imagery of predators and prey and is also a lexis that which he is familiar with given his profession. It is as though he cannot **comprehend** her being a human with emotions and sees her as **equivalent** to an animal
- He relates how she does all the housework, after her re-capture, ***“like a mouse”***, again using a simile to compare her to a fragile creature.
- The **semantic field of nature** should make the poem serene, but his malicious tone instead makes the poem eerie and suspenseful. The beauty of what he is comparing her to (nature) **juxtaposes** against the way he callously objectifies her.
- He calls her ***“shy as a leveret”***. The use of **extended animal similes** combined with the fact that he is a farmer, makes it sound as though he is speaking about her in terms, he is familiar and comfortable with. It makes it so, as readers, **we are forced to only view the wife through his eyes in his terms**, with his comparisons of her to various small meek animals. This is incredibly objectifying.
- It also shows that he views her as akin to his **agricultural burdens** to do with the harvest; he sees her on the same level as he sees his work .

## ISOLATION

- The speaker of the poem is **burdened** by responsibility. He says, *"more's to do at harvest time than bide and woo"*. The use of **rhyming couplets** might sound **elegant** in another context but here, it makes the speaker sound tired, as though **the metre** of the poem, combined with the **long vowel** sounds are pulling him **reluctantly** through his harvest obligations.
- Describing his wife's escape, he recounts how she ran *"over a seven-acre field"*. He adds to the poem's **semantic field of nature and isolation**, making the land around him seem lonely and vast.
- At one moment in the poem the *"short days shorten"*, creating **an overarching sense of melancholy** through a pathetic fallacy, increasing the sense of isolation seen in the poem.
- The farmer's isolation is **self-inflicted** at the start of the poem but when his wife *"sleeps up in the attic there alone"*, the power balance shifts and the farmer now has **isolation enforced on him**.
- The language becomes more **disjointed** towards the end of the poem, representing his **gradual loss of control** and Mew uses repetition and disjointed syntax to demonstrate this.
- The speaker's **erratic** actions and un-empathetic disposition are shown to be a result of his **immense seclusion**, which is self-inflicted at the beginning of the poem. But by the end the power dynamic has shifted as his wife secludes herself and the speaker descends into madness.

# Form

## DRAMATIC MONOLOGUE

- The poem is written in the form of a dramatic monologue, which means we have **unfiltered access** into the speaker's thoughts due to the first-person narration.
- This means we get a very biased view of the farmer's situation with his wife, only hearing his thoughts on the matter and never hers. This is especially effective if we consider that even the poem **objectifies the wife**, as the speaker does, viewing her through a male gaze and never hearing her thoughts, thus **de-humanising her**.

## RHYME

- There is not a **definitive** (discernible) rhyme scheme but there are occasional rhyming couplets which drive the metre in certain lines.
- The lack of rhyme scheme gives the impression that the speaker is un-educated, which makes sense given he is a farmer.
- Alt- it could suggest that he is losing power of his wife. He once entirely controlled her, able to isolate her himself. Yet as the wife now chooses to **"sleep up in the attic"** she is perhaps regaining control. **Thus, the lack of definitive rhyme emulates his lack of definitive power.**

# Structure

## ENJAMBEMENT

- Mew uses enjambement to further the melancholic and depressing atmosphere of the poem. It makes it seem like that rim atmosphere is **everlasting**, like there is no escape, mirroring how his wife feels.
- The **ceaselessness** of the lines is poignant in regard to the wife's seclusion and fear (enjambment after "afraid", "she wasn't there" and "she sleeps up in the attic").
- Thus, Mew uses this to show the **relentless objectification** of the wife has led her to become a shell of her former self- she no longer possesses an identity due to the **ceaselessness of her oppression**.

## ANAPHORA

- The repetition in the final lines: "her hair, her hair!" gives the sense that the speaker has begun his mental decline. He has less control over his language, which mirrors his mentally compromised state.
- It puts **emphasis** on the line, marking it as the final thing we take away from the poem, that being the speakers **descent into insanity**.

# Comparisons

Winter Swans	THEME	FORM	STRUCTURE	CONTEXT
Similar	<b>Love</b>  The poem's both deal with the concept of love and while the two speakers are immensely different in their attitude to women, they both have some level of love for their partners.	<b>Rhyme</b>  Both poems lack a rhyme scheme that is regular which creates a sense of conflict and chaos	<b>Enjambement</b>  Both poems make use of enjambement to make the conflict in their poems seem drawn out and long lasting.	<b>Relationships</b>  Both poems seem concerned the relationships between me and women and explore conflict within those relationships.
	<b>Conflict</b>  Both poems show a rift (conflict) between the respective couples which has created tension.	<b>Monologue</b>  Both poems are monologues as they both use a first-person speaker.		
Different	<b>Compassion</b>  In Winter Swans the speaker shows far more compassion for their partner, they demonstrate genuine concern about the rift which is a harsh contrast to the farmers unfeeling <b>disposition</b> (nature).	<b>Stanzas</b>  While both poems have uneven stanzas Mew's poem has longer stanzas, giving the effect that the speaker is rambling incoherently, whereas Sheers sounds far more composed.	<b>Final line</b>  Sheers' poem ends with full stop making the ending seem final and definite, whereas Mew's poem finishes with an exclamative sentence, making his speaker sound delirious.	<b>Generational difference</b>  The poets existed in fundamentally very different eras which affects the way they write about people and their relationships. Sheer's takes a more modern approach on love whereas Mew was conditioned by the norms of her era and is thus more traditional and bound to these social norms
	<b>Contentment</b>  The Farmer ends the poem in a state of delirium whereas the speaker in Winter Swans appears more <b>content</b> and healed at the end of the poem.			

Singh Song	THEME	FORM	STRUCTURE	CONTEXT
<b>Similar</b>	<b>Conflict of duties</b>  Both speakers speak of the battle they have between their obligation towards their duties Singh in his shop and the farmer for the harvest but having to balance having a wife as well.	<b>Rhyme</b>  The poems both lack a discernible rhyme scheme which makes them sound disjointed  <b>Monologue</b>  Both poems use the first-person narrative making them sound like a monologue	<b>Enjambement</b>  Both poets use enjambement but to different effects	<b>Class</b>  Both poets grew up in households haunted by poverty and explore working class people in their poems.
<b>Different</b>	<b>Love</b>  While Singh fondly tells of his wife and, in the end, chooses her over his material job, the farmer cares not for his wife's wellbeing and fundamentally misunderstands her and her needs  Respect for women Singh allows his wife so much freedom to the point where she is looking at other men online, but the Farmer controls every aspect of his wife's life and allows her little to no freedom because he does not respect women.	<b>Reprise</b>  Singh song has a reprise of certain lines making it seem more cohesive and upbeat whereas the Farmer's bride almost runs like a narrative	<b>Enjambement</b>  The enjambement in Singh Song makes the speaker sound spontaneous and improvised whereas it makes the farmer seem isolated and delirious.	<b>Culture vs gender</b>  Where Nagra focuses on his culture and racism, Mew chooses to focus rather on gender inequality.