



# ***GCSE Revision***

## **AQA Poetry Anthology**



## **Love and Relationships**

### ***The Farmer's Bride by Charlotte Mew***

**NATE's own GCSE Literature revision resources**

***Created out of NATE's experience and expertise in English teaching, learning and assessment.***

#### **What makes these resources unique:**

- matched to **GCSE Literature Assessment Objectives**
- clearly organised prompts focusing on **specific skills** of reading response
- have **skills progression** embedded so students are prompted through simple to more demanding reading responses.
- make students familiar with the demands of different questions and different question parts.
- designed for independent study at home/in school, and for group activity in lessons

Each unit covers **language, form and structure, and contexts and comparisons** – with additional **support and stretch** extension coverage.

# Poetry revision: *The Farmer's Bride*

**Study focus:** *A ideas, attitudes, feelings*  
*B language, form & structure*  
*C contexts & comparisons*



## Learning context

Students may find some poems from the past unfamiliar in language, setting or attitudes. It is important that students don't find any of these things an obstacle to responsive reading. It will help learning if the poems are approached as examples of how things used to be, inviting comment on unfamiliar language, setting or attitudes. Beginning with personal opinion, responses can be developed with discussion of cultural diversity and change.

Students will be helped by putting the poem in a general context of **Love and Relationships**. The focus may be on different kinds of love (or lack of it) and ways in which relationships reflect social customs and values, aspects of gender or a contrast between the ideal and the real.

## Teaching focus

The poem is best approached by focusing on character, starting with the farmer's feelings and attitudes. A leading question is whether his feelings create sympathy, or whether his attitudes prevent sympathy. A following question can be about a) the recorded and b) the implied feelings and attitudes of the bride. The poem provides scope for balancing sympathy with empathy as both characters suffer from an unsatisfactory relationship. The farmer's language shows Mew's concern to make him dramatically realistic in speech and attitudes.

The lesson reinforces the skills progression from the core skills of *select and retrieve* to the more developed skill of *explain*, then to the more sophisticated skills of *exploration, interpretation and analysis*. It prompts students to link ideas in the poem to personal as well as historical contexts.

## Lesson sequence

1 Students read the poem silently, annotating anything they don't understand\*, then teacher reads it aloud. (\*This could be homework preparation for the lesson.)

2 Students discuss in pairs/groups anything they found difficult to understand. Teacher explains.

### The Farmer's Bride – Charlotte Mew

Three summers since I chose a maid,  
Too young maybe—but more's to do  
At harvest-time than bide and woo.  
    When us was wed she turned afraid  
Of love and me and all things human;  
Like the shut of a winter's day  
Her smile went out, and 'twadn't a woman—  
    More like a little frightened fay.  
    One night, in the Fall, she runned away.

"Out 'mong the sheep, her be," they said,  
'Should properly have been abed;  
But sure enough she wadn't there  
Lying awake with her wide brown stare.  
So over seven-acre field and up-along across the down  
We chased her, flying like a hare  
Before our lanterns. To Church-Town  
    All in a shiver and a scare  
We caught her, fetched her home at last  
    And turned the key upon her, fast.

She does the work about the house  
As well as most, but like a mouse:  
    Happy enough to chat and play  
    With birds and rabbits and such as they,  
    So long as men-folk keep away.

"Not near, not near!" her eyes beseech  
When one of us comes within reach.  
    The women say that beasts in stall  
    Look round like children at her call.  
    I've hardly heard her speak at all.

Shy as a leveret, swift as he,  
Straight and slight as a young larch tree,  
Sweet as the first wild violets, she,  
To her wild self. But what to me?

The short days shorten and the oaks are brown,  
    The blue smoke rises to the low grey sky,  
One leaf in the still air falls slowly down,  
    A magpie's spotted feathers lie  
On the black earth spread white with rime,  
The berries redden up to Christmas-time.  
    What's Christmas-time without there be  
    Some other in the house than we!

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!

## **A Study focus: *ideas, attitudes, feelings***

Discuss/Write about the following:



### **3 Select and retrieve** (textual detail)

3a) What tells the reader how long this relationship has lasted?

3b) Which phrase suggests that there may have been a problem from the start of the marriage?

### **4 Explain** (extended textual detail)

4a) What impression of the farmer do you get from his comment: *"more's to do at harvest time than bide and woo"*?

4b) What do you think about the farmer and his friends when they *"caught her"*, *"fetched her home"* and *"turned the key upon her, fast"*?

### **Explain** (motives, attitudes, feelings, ideas)

4c) Do you agree with the Farmer's view his bride is equally afraid of all three things, *"love and me and all things human"*?

4d) What attitude to the bride is expressed by the description, *"We chased her, flying like a hare, Before our lanterns"*

4d) How much sympathy do you feel for farmer when he complains, *"But what to me?"*

4e) What is the farmer wishing for when he thinks about Christmas?

4f) How are the farmer's thoughts and intentions suggested by, *"Tis but a stair between us"*?

### **5 Interpret, explore, analyse** (writer's ideas and purpose, and effects on readers')

5a) How is the farmer's wife made to seem at ease with animals, if not with men?

5b) How is the farmer's wife made to seem a victim?

5c) How are the farmer's actions presented as part of a community response?

## **B Study focus: *language, form and structure***

### *6 Language*

In a dramatic monologue, the narrator's voice needs to be realistic. Choose 5 examples of words and phrases that seem typical of an uneducated nineteenth century countryman's speech.

### *7 Form*

7a) The poem is a monologue but, like many dramatic stories, it includes some variety in what other characters have said. Which are these?

7b) Charlotte Mew uses rhyme throughout the poem, but she varies the rhyme scheme in each verse. Choose some examples of rhyming couplets and some examples of alternating rhymes.

### *8 Structure*

The first two verses record what happened in the past, then the remaining verses are set in the present. How does the ending give a hint about what may happen in the future?

## **C Study focus: *contexts and comparisons***

*"Each task provides a contextual idea and if students focus their answer on this, they will naturally be able to access AO3."*

*"The mark scheme recognises a broad interpretation of context e.g. placing the extract within the larger context of the play, of a literary form or genre, of the student's own contemporary context as well as historical context."* [AQA examination advice]

**The context of ideas for all the poems in this cluster is that of the cluster title – Love and Relationships. Each poem should be approached as an example of some aspect of love or some aspect of relationship – or both.**

### *9a) The student's own contemporary context*

How do you think most readers today would react to a man who described his marriage with the words- *"I chose"*, and who *"locked up"* his wife when she ran away and was caught?

### 9b) The wider historical/literary context

What does the behaviour of the farmer and his friends suggest about customs and values in the countryside during the nineteenth century?

[The poem was first published in 1916, though it was written earlier. How do you think events in the first years of the 20th century may have changed the attitudes to women found in the poem?]

### 10 Compare with:

*Porphyria's Lover* (similar in dramatic monologue form, male persona & deviant attitude to women; different in setting, relationship and author gender)

*I think of Thee* (similar in passionate feelings about a partner ; different in a woman's attitude to love and relationship)

**Support:** (knowledge & understanding)

**Gloss:** *bide* – wait; *woo* – try to gain someone's love; *fay* – an elf or fairy; *beseech* – beg; *stall* – part of a stable.

**Fill background:** Charlotte Mew (1869-1928) was the first child of seven but three of her brothers died while she was growing up. Later, another brother and a sister were committed for the rest of their lives to mental hospitals. The remaining sisters, Charlotte and Anne, both decided not to marry so they wouldn't pass on any disabilities to their children. Charlotte's experience of death, mental illness and disappointment with life became themes in her poetry.

**Reinforce:** Which one best fits your image of the farmer?



**Stretch** (independent application and development of knowledge & understanding)

Compare other poems by Charlotte Mew exploring the sadness and frustration of unsuccessful relationships: *Pecheresse* (young woman's sense of sin and shame after a night of passion), *Saturday market*, (suffering caused by illegitimate pregnancy) and *From a Window*, (loneliness and loss). Compare her use of realistic speech for characters' voices in *Sea Love & Old Shepherd's Prayer*.

Mew's interest in failing and frustrating relationships between men and women, and her interest in ordinary people's speech are evident in this excerpt from *The Haymarket*.

---

A few yards from the Jolly Farmers a girl was standing in a doorway looking out at it. A woman with a red puffy face and a jug in her hand pushed past her out of the blackness of the passage behind and began talking noisily.

"You mark my words. 'E'll knock 'er silly before 'e's done. Wot's 'Erbert after orl? Not much. She always said she'd 'ave 'im, the dirty - - ! I wouldn't let it brike yer, Mibel!"

The girl said, 'Cawn't yer let it alone?' and the woman shuffled off, in loose felt slippers, to the Jolly Farmers, muttering 'A bit of muck like that!' and shuffled back two minutes afterwards wiping her mouth with the back of her hand to say it more noisily over again. The girl said, 'For Gawd's sake, let it alone!' and stood on, staring into the Market.

---