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CHARLOTTE MEW.

Louisiana State University and Agricultural and
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ASCENT INTO NOTHINGNESS:
THE POETRY OF CHARLOTTE MEW

A Dissertation

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Jimmy D. Bishop

August, 1968
TABLE OF CONTENTS

Chapter | Page
-------|------
I. INTRODUCTION | 1
II. HISTORICAL PERSPECTIVE: THE GEORGIAN LITERARY SCENE AND CHARLOTTE MEW | 15
III. CHARLOTTE MEW: A BIOGRAPHICAL SKETCH | 63
IV. POETRY: A VIEW OF THE VOID | 103
V. POETRY: A SEARCH FOR FULFILLMENT | 137
VI. POETRY: THE LOSS OF PARADISE | 180
VII. POETRY: ASCENT INTO NOTHINGNESS | 207
CONCLUSIONS | 232
A SELECTED BIBLIOGRAPHY | 242
VITA | 252
ABSTRACT

The poetry of Charlotte Mew has never been accorded the critical acclaim it deserves because of a biased attitude taken toward Georgian poetry. Admittedly, Georgianism is not one of the great periods of poetry. Nonetheless, it marks a turning point in the development of British poetry. Rebelling against the flaccid poetry of the fin de siècle and the Edwardian period, the Georgian poets sought to revitalize poetry. They recognized that this art form had reached an impasse, and they feared that its demise was imminent. With the introduction of realistic verse about 1910, however, a new surge of poetic activity erupted, and for several years poetry became a vital force in British letters. Eventually, though, the Georgians turned away from the realities of their world; they retreated to an idyllic Arcadia, where they sought sanctuary in a world filled with moonlight and larks. As this tendency toward escapism mushroomed during the postwar years, these poets called down upon the Georgian poetic the scorn and condemnation of rival coteries.

Unfortunately, from a critical standpoint, time has tended to condemn all poets of those years as Georgian. Modern critics continue to attribute the faults of a few
They have indiscriminately accepted the critical vituperation hurled at the Georgians, and few scholars have undertaken a re-examination of the period in an effort to see the poets in relation to the temper of the age. Because of this situation, Charlotte Mew remains unknown today. Yet, when placed into historical perspective, the quality of Mew's poetry is remarkable, not when it is compared stylistically with the poetry of her more original contemporaries, like Yeats, Eliot, or Pound, but when its content and style are viewed in relation to the spiritually anemic verse of the Edwardians and Neo-Georgians, and in large part the Georgians. While she was no prophet, her work is symptomatic of the new vitality that was to undermine the decadence of Neo-Georgianism.

Unlike her Georgian compatriots, Mew expressed the agonies of living in a world where the simple security of the old orthodox assumptions was no longer tenable. Cognizant of the absence of this security, she envisioned the cosmos as the Void, that immense empty space which nullifies all human activity. In large measure, Mew's poems are allegorical presentations, or symbolic expressions, of her emotional responses to the phenomenal world and to her awareness of the Void. Her poems are a record of her efforts to escape the sterility and meaninglessness imposed by the Void. At times, she seeks to find meaning in life through human relationships, to create her own reality, but at
every turn, her endeavors are thwarted. At times, she turns to nature and to spiritual aspirations. Her efforts, however, are fruitless. Seemingly, she comes to regard death as a benevolent force that will bring an end to her restless spirit. By embracing Nothingness ecstatically, she expects to transcend the phenomenal world and thereby attain stillness.

Her work thus stemming from a cultural tradition which no longer sustains the poet, Mew probes her own experiences. She brings cosmic order down from abstraction to personal sensibility, creating a kind of poetry at the antipode of intellectualism. It is a poetry that speaks not to society but to the individual experience. It is a poetry that has its meaning not in the content of its expression but in the tension of the dramatic relations of its personae.
CHAPTER I

INTRODUCTION

The experience of each age requires a new confession, and the world seems always waiting for its poet.

Emerson

With the appearance of The Farmer's Bride (1916), Charlotte Mew left the quiet of her Bloomsbury house to take an active part in the swelling chorus of Georgian writers. Outside a circle of poets associated with Harold Monro's Poetry Bookshop, she was not well known. Although she had published short stories, essays, and poems in various journals, she was still an unknown quantity. Brought by Alida Klemantaski (later Mrs. Harold Monro) into the whirl of poetic activity of the Poetry Bookshop, Mew, by her manner, reflected her self-deprecating nature. She had never sought public acclaim; in fact, even now with the encouragement and backing of Monro and the Bookshop, she was reluctant to be subjected to the scrutiny of the public eye. But her personality was such that although "shy and sometimes silent, in congenial company she was the very best of talkers. Like some other melancholy natures, she could keep a table convulsed with laughter, her wit being as sharp as were her powers of observation."
Unfortunately for Charlotte Mew and her literary patrons, this slim volume of poems caused little stir in the poetry circles about London; it was scarcely even noticed by the reviewers. Furthermore, it sold badly. Only 500 copies were printed, but to the Poetry Bookshop this was a big edition since first editions seldom ran over 250 copies. Nevertheless, Monro and Klemantaski still felt their faith in Mew's work was justified, a faith which only intensified Mew's disappointment over the failure of The Farmer's Bride to elicit critical acclaim. Not long after the publication appeared, she wrote Harold Monro expressing her disappointment: "I did think that one or two more or less influential people who have used all sorts of adjectives about the F. B. would have put some in print, but there it is..." Undoubtedly, in the heat of their enthusiasm, Klemantaski and Monro failed to take into account that the tastes of the British reading public, which was eager for war poetry or else the escapist doggerel characteristic of many of the Georgian poets, were not yet developed sufficiently to appreciate the intense personal anguish that pervades Mew's poetry.

Although The Farmer's Bride was neither a critical nor a financial success, it, along with previously published poems, drew about Mew a small group of enthusiastic admirers. Sydney Cockerell called her "a poet of rare quality" and soon became one of her chief benefactors.
Siegfried Sassoon sought her company and almost immediately turned patron; he prodded friends and editors alike in search of new markets for her poems. Words of admiration came from Poet Laureate Robert Bridges, from Hugh Walpole, from Sara Teasdale, from V. Sackville-West, and from Edith Sitwell. May Sinclair, now an all-but-forgotten post-Freudian novelist, ranked Mew along with D. H. Lawrence and brought her work to the attention of Hilda Doolittle, Richard Aldington, and Ezra Pound. Virginia Woolf called her "the greatest living poetess." In America, Louis Untermeyer, who was introduced to the poetry by Siegfried Sassoon, became another champion, and from him came only praise: "Had Miss Mew printed nothing but the original booklet [The Farmer's Bride], it would have been sufficient to rank her among the most distinctive and intense of living poets."

The patronage and friendship Mew valued most, however, came from Thomas Hardy, who along with Sydney Cockerell and Siegfried Sassoon, initiated a movement in 1923 to secure her a pension on the Civil List. The recommendation was written by John Masefield and signed by Hardy and Walter de la Mare. Recognizing that British sensibilities were still not receptive to Charlotte Mew, Masefield wrote: "As she is a poet, writing poetry of a rare kind, she may not be widely known for many years. We feel that it would be a wise and gracious act, worthy of a great people, to
give to this rare spirit the means of doing her work until
the world can appraise and reward it."18 Five months later,
in recognition of her work, Mew was awarded a pension of
£75 per year.19

Despite the endeavors of such influential friends,
Charlotte Mew's reputation remained static, except for an
occasional surge. In 1921 the Bookman requested that its
readers suggest the names of modern poets who should be in-
cluded in a "Golden Book" of verse. In the replies, Char­
lotte Mew was named as one distinguished modern poet who
should not be overlooked. Typical of the remarks was a
statement of Lady Margaret Sackville: "I think that Miss
Charlotte Mew should be represented in any future anthology.
Her poems . . . are, in my opinion, the most interesting
verse ever written by a woman."20 And in the same issue
Gerald Gould wrote: "I should like to insist on my belief
that almost any poem from Miss Charlotte Mew's small collec­
tion would be worthy of a place in almost any anthology."21

While the readers of Bookman urged the inclusion of
Mew, it was left to her original benefactor, Harold Monro,
to take positive steps toward achieving the recognition she
merited. Unsuccessful in his endeavors to persuade Edward
Marsh to include her in Georgian Poetry,22 Monro gave her
representation in Twentieth Century Poetry (1929), and in
Some Contemporary Poets (1920) he wrote a generous appraisal
of her work.23 But Monro was never able to secure a niche
for Mew among the modern poets, and soon her work sank into that morass of early twentieth-century disenchantment. Apart from a small circle of fellow poets, she had no large following, and in subsequent years her reputation was eclipsed by the giants of the waste land, not to mention her dismissal because of her association with the Georgians. As Wilfrid Gibson writes: "It would seem then that the Georgian poets are alleged to have been a mutual-admiration society of third-rate poets who all wrote dull poems to a prescribed academic formula--a sort of co-operative company for the turning out of standardised verse."\(^\text{24}\)

With such prevalent attitudes affixed to the poets on the Georgian scene, it is not surprising that Charlotte Mew has received little attention. Though her poetry is seldom read today, outside of a few poems re-printed in anthologies, her name appears occasionally in some rather unexpected places. In *The Towers of Trebizond* (1957), Rose Macaulay has her Turkish students comment upon the authors they read: "We study English poetry . . . Dylan Thomas, Spender, MacNeice, Lewis, Eliot, Sitwell, Frost, Charlotte Mew."\(^\text{25}\) The most significant event, though, occurred in November, 1953, when the BBC in its West of England Home Services program presented a half-hour dramatization of Mew's Cornish play *The China Bowl*.\(^\text{26}\) That same year also saw Alida Monro's edition of the collected poems, which included a biographical sketch, a long-needed addition to the scholarship on Mew.
Finally, in 1960, the first significant study of Mew's life and work, Mary Celine Davidow's "Charlotte Mew: Biography and Criticism," appeared as a doctoral dissertation at Brown University.

This renewed interest in Charlotte Mew may, in large measure, be indicative of the changing critical attitudes towards modern poetry now taking place, for in the past two decades, a new direction in poetry has gained enough force to challenge the entrenched line established by the "heroic" age of Hopkins, Yeats, Eliot, Pound, and Stevens. In an effort to lead the reader to an understanding of poetry through the "emotive imagination," the new revolution is attempting to overthrow the chartered intellectuality of its predecessors. As David Wright remarks, these writers made poetry an "industry rather than an art," which wandered "off in the direction of the decorative, where style and technique is all and thought, if anything, a peg on which to hang a Chinese box of semantic ingenuities."  

Striving for an intermediate position between the antipodal schools of the academic and the beat, this new emotive approach to poetry indicates a return, in some measure, to the style and techniques inherent in British poetry at the turn of the century, especially that era referred to as "Georgian." By returning to more traditional patterns in form, while maintaining at the same time the vitality and vigor of post-World War I poetry, the new poetry casts
doubts upon the achievement attributed to the poets of the waste land. Furthermore, perhaps in the wake of their meteoric rise, other poets of significance were ignored. But now that the giants of that "heroic" age are no longer in the foreground, and since emotive poetry has become a significant force on both sides of the Atlantic, critics have undertaken a re-examination of that highly abused period of British poetry. This renewed interest in the pre-World War I poets has evoked a more objective evaluation of their achievements, with the result that the term Georgian is no longer the term of opprobrium that it once was. In large measure, much of its original dignity has been restored. For the most part, it is now merely a historical label designating that period of poetic activity that lasted from 1910 to 1922.

Until recently, the goals, achievements, and failures of those struggling poets had to be garnered from various memoirs and reminiscences, written by the poets themselves, and even then, critical evaluations of the era were highly divergent. The estimations ran the scale from excessive praise to vituperative scorn. But then, these people were too wrapped up in their own work to put the period into the proper perspective; they were wholeheartedly engaged in the struggle to rescue poetry from the sterility of the fin de siècle. Perhaps with the advantage of distance, the present age can achieve the proper objectivity and place that
monumental struggle in perspective. In fact, recent studies growing out of this renewed interest in emotive literature have undertaken the task of clarifying the role that the Georgian movement played in the continuity of British poetry. In 1965 Robert H. Ross, in *The Georgian Revolt: The Rise and Fall of a Poetic Ideal, 1910-1922*, published an intelligent and unbiased history of those years of crisis. In an earlier study, Saul Galin, in a doctoral dissertation at Columbia University entitled "Georgian Poetry 1912-1922: 'Georgians,' Georgian Mavericks, and Rupert Brooke," analyzed the five volumes of *Georgian Poetry*, edited by Edward Marsh. Then in 1967 a vital link in the development of the movement was clarified by Joy Grant in *Harold Monro and the Poetry Bookshop*, in which she traces the influence Monro exerted upon his fellow poets and the role played by the Poetry Bookshop in promoting the Georgian ideals.

Although these studies are primarily historical in nature, individual poets have also been the subjects of recent criticism. In Galin's study, a major portion of the work is an evaluation of Rupert Brooke, and Grant devotes a large section to the study of Monro's poetry, in addition to accounts of F. S. Flint, Anna Wickham, and Charlotte Mew, three poets whose work she considers is yet to be recognized. And a new major work is Michael Thorpe's *Siegfried Sassoon: A Critical Study* (1967), a minute analysis of Sassoon's artistry as both poet and novelist.
As scholarly studies examine the role played by the Georgians in the development of modern British poetry, the significance of their contributions becomes evident. Now that the critical stance against the Georgians has been altered, perhaps other deserving poets, like Charlotte Mew, will finally be recognized for the part they played. Unlike Emily Dickinson, whose poetic genius began to be fully recognized by the academicians in the 1950's, the mark of Charlotte Mew's achievement has yet to be evaluated. Because she stood always just outside the mainstream of Georgianism, literary historians tend to ignore her. Furthermore, the sensibilities of the British populace during the second decade of the twentieth century were not receptive to any poetry that revealed a naked soul in dramatic conflict with the established conventions. The nation was trying to assuage the wounds inflicted by the recent holocaust with Germany. Working within this framework, the Georgians sought escape through pastoral lyrics, and as the bounds of their ordered universe tended to disappear, the poets retreated farther into their idyllic Arcadia. To ask the public to enter into Mew's Heraclitean world-view, a dynamic, unpredictable multiverse of process and flux where the simple security of the old orthodox assumptions had vanished, was unthinkable to a Georgian. Consequently, Charlotte Mew never found favor with the organs of Georgianism; her work was never accepted for inclusion in Marsh's widely-read
Georgian Poetry.

With the advantage of distance, it is now possible to recognize that Mew was more in line with the flow of British poetry than were the Georgians. While the Georgian poets sought sanctuary in a world filled with golden buttercups, blue violets, and swallowtail butterflies, Mew presented the emotional entanglements of a person dispossessed from the world. Her characters strive to come to terms with an alien universe. Thus, Mew's work anticipates the direction that post-World War I poetry was to take. With the breakthrough in poetry that Eliot and the ensuing waste land tradition established, the Georgians and their contemporaries diminished in stature to a point of virtual non-existence. The condemnation of the victors served to annihilate the enemy Georgian camp. Unjust as their censure may have been, as well as that of succeeding generations who continued to mouth unquestioningly identical attitudes, the resurrection of the Georgians has been no easy task. Certainly, their faults are no mean obstacle to overcome, and unfortunately, time has tended to condemn all poets of those years as Georgian. None has come through unscathed. But now with a historical perspective and clearer view of the struggles that characterized those years of crisis in the development of poetic principles and techniques, the poets and the various poetic alliances can be differentiated and each in turn evaluated on its own merits.
Perhaps only now can critics heed Frank Swinnerton's plea of 1934, when he called for a re-appraisal of Charlotte Mew and noted that here was a poet whose work begs for further attention. Although a number of influential personages have expressed admiration for her work, their words have done little to enhance her reputation. Furthermore, their comments amount to little more than appreciation. No one has tried to view her in relation to the time in which she was writing, nor to see her as a poet working within the waste land tradition, nor as a poet struggling against the strictures of style established by Housman, Bridges, and Hardy, nor to recognize her as a poet whose thought and style bear a strong affinity with the poetry of Frost and Dickinson, and to some extent with Blake. More important, however, no one has as yet attempted to come to grips with the poems themselves. And after all, the poetry is the criterion on which her reputation as poet must stand or fall. Only with Mary Davidow's book in 1960 was there a critical examination of Mew's life and work; however, there was no attempt at an analytical study of the poetry. The present work attempts a further exploration of Charlotte Mews's poetry and, by examining her poetry in relation to the Georgian movement along with extensive analyses of poetic themes, intends to measure the extent of her poetic achievement. There is no attempt to puff Mew to the heights of her
heavily appreciated contemporaries, but to try to give due
praise and to attune the reader's ear to a poet who de­serves to be heard.
Notes


5Cockerell, p. 21.

6Letter of Sydney Cockerell to Charlotte Mew, November 30, 1924, in the Berg Collection.

7Ibid.


9Letter of Louis Untermeyer to Charlotte Mew, in possession of Mrs. Monro.

10Letter of V. Sackville-West to Mary C. Davidow, March 13, 1959, in possession of Miss Davidow.


12Letter of May Sinclair to Charlotte Mew, July 17, 1913, in the Berg Collection.

13Davidow, p. 76.


18 Letter to Prime Minister Stanley Baldwin, in private collection of Frederick B. Adams, Director of the Pierpont Morgan Library. A copy appears in Davidow, p. 345.


20 Bookman, LX (December, 1921), 138.

21 Ibid., p. 141.


24 Wilfrid Gibson, "The 'Georgian Poets,' or Twenty Years After," Bookman, LXXXII (September, 1932), 280.


26 Davidow, p. 260.


CHAPTER II

HISTORICAL PERSPECTIVE:
The Georgian Literary Scene and Charlotte Mew

In February, 1912, Alida Klemantaski bought, as was her usual custom, a copy of The Nation. Opening it to see if there might be a new poem, she was elated to find Charlotte Mew's "The Farmer's Bride." Overwhelmed by the poignancy of this work, she committed it to memory, and a year or two later recited it to Harold Monro, who had recently opened the Poetry Bookshop, with the intention of publishing the work of new poets in an effort to present them to a larger audience. At Monro's suggestion, Miss Klemantaski sought out the elusive poet. She wrote a letter asking whether Mew had further poems, or a number of poems that could be collected into a small volume. Responding in her accustomed reticent manner, Mew acknowledged the tentative suggestion, but expressed her doubt that anyone would care to read her poems. Miss Klemantaski, however, was so impressed by the quality of Mew's work that she was not to be rebuffed by the poet's self-deprecatory manner. In a gesture to encourage Mew, she wrote to her saying that she intended to read two of her poems at one of the public readings given at the Poetry Bookshop. Moreover, she proposed
that Mew might like to attend, as there would also be a number of other new poems read.

On a Tuesday evening in November, 1915, Charlotte Mew came for the first time to the little shop at 35 Devonshire Street, Theobalds Road. Located in a colorful area in Bloomsbury, the slum quarter, the Poetry Bookshop opened onto a street which boasted three pubs; moreover, the police always patrolled the vicinity in pairs. Indeed, it was an unusual place for a shop dedicated to the promotion of poetry. Nevertheless, on this November evening, as people wandered about the shop before going upstairs to the reading room, Charlotte Mew arrived shortly before the reading was to begin. In a memoir about Mew, written in 1953, Miss Klemantaski describes the event:

At about five minutes to six the swing-door of the shop was pushed open and into the room stalked Charlotte Mew. Such a word best describes her walk. She was very small, only about four feet ten inches, very slight, with square shoulders and tiny hands and feet. She always wore a long double-breasted top-coat of tweed with a velvet collar inset. She usually carried a horn-handled umbrella, unrolled, under her arm, as if it were psychologically necessary to her, a weapon against the world. She had very fine white hair that showed traces of once having been a warm brown. Her eyes were a very dark grey, bright with black lashes and highly arched dark eyebrows. Her face was a fine oval, and she always wore a little hard felt pork-pie hat put on very straight. The whole time she was speaking she kept her head cocked at a defiant angle. When she came into the shop she was asked: "Are you Charlotte Mew?" and her reply, delivered characteristically with a slight smile of amusement, was: "I am sorry to say I am."

On this occasion, Charlotte Mew began her association with the Poetry Bookshop, which had in the past two
years become a center for poetic activity in London. Officially opened on January 8, 1913, by Henry Newbolt, the Poetry Bookshop drew to its environs the literati. At the formal opening about three hundred people squeezed into the small shop. In attendance was, of course, the guest of honor, Newbolt, along with Edward Marsh, W. H. Davies, and Robert Frost, who arrived quite by chance, and uninvited. Frost later commented upon the occasion: "One dark morning, early in the New Year, or maybe it was late in December, I found myself pausing before the window of a shop where a clerk was arranging volumes of current poetry. A notice announced the opening, that night, of Harold Monro's Poetry Bookshop. I went in and asked if I might return for the evening. The assistant told me the guests were 'Invited.' But I might try." According to Frost, he did return that evening, and found congenial companions among the hosts of Georgian poets. Here, he met F. S. Flint, and through him, he later was introduced to Ezra Pound.

Such chance meetings and ensuing friendships must have gratified Monro, for he wanted the Bookshop to be more than a business establishment; he wanted to institute a kind of guild hall. He put the entire building at the disposal of poets and public alike. Soon it became a lively meeting place for artistic people, and the two attics on the top floor were made available to needy poets. Wilfrid Gibson, Lascelles Abercrombie, Wilfrid Owen, and Robert Frost all
took advantage of Monro's hospitality. In 1914, rather than accept payment for poetry sold to Poetry and Drama, Frost took it out in room rent at the Bookshop. With his family in London with him for a week, he was excited by the prospect of living at the shop, where, as he recalled, "all the poets will be in and out there. It will be something that Lesley and the children will be sure to remember." But the Poetry Bookshop was more than just a haven for indigent poets, or a gathering place for after-theater crowds. It was also a place, where, for twenty-three years, poets could read their own poetry before a receptive audience. These public poetry readings became a means by which new poets could launch their careers or older established poets could read their work aloud in informal surroundings. Through these proceedings, Monro sought to awaken the public's appreciation to poetry, especially to the value of verse read aloud. Amid the quiet, informal atmosphere of the Bookshop, the poets found "something like a small village meeting-house in its ensemble." At the poetry readings, the poets, as Dr. G. B. Brooks has written, found "the seats arranged in rows,--the windows curtained with green--and the white plaster walls broken by diagonals of black beams. All was in semi-darkness, lit only by a shaded lamp over against the reading-table, in a little space set in a far end of the room. The seats would fill rapidly. . . . There was a short pause. . . . Then the
person who was to read came up the 'middle aisle,' took his or her place at the desk, and so started." Occasionally, the events were marked by less solemnity than this quiet atmosphere indicates. Eric Gillett, who was living in the Bookshop at the time, recalls a particular evening in 1914 when Rupert Brooke was reading. After Brooke had read a few lines in a low voice, an old woman, with ear-trumpet in hand, exploded, "Speak up, young man." Few sessions, though, were marked with the color that Yeats brought to his performance. In 1959 in a talk prepared for the New Zealand Broadcasting System, Arundel del Re described the evening:

The dark curtains were drawn across the windows and the room was in darkness except for the golden light shed on the reader's table from the two slender oak candlesticks. From the workshop next door came the muffled beat of the gold-beaters' mallets. A ripple of expectation ran through the packed audience, then a deep expectant hush as the poet stood silent for a moment framed in the candlelight against the dark curtain, a tall dark romantic figure with a dreamy inward look on his pale face. He began softly, almost chanting, 'The Hosting of the Sidhe,' his silver voice gradually swelling up to the solemn finale. No one moved, waiting for him to continue. I cannot remember how long he read--all lyrics--some sad, some gay, some tragic, varying the pitch and tone of his voice to suit the mood, weaving a spell over his listeners.

For the most part, the poetry readings were generally somewhat less colorful than on this particular occasion. During the following years other distinguished poets assumed the role of readers. These included Ford Madox Hueffer, De la Mare, Rupert Brooke, John Drinkwater, Robert Bridges,
Edmund Gosse, T. S. Eliot, Ezra Pound, Edith Sitwell, Robert Graves, Harriet Monroe, Francis Meynell, and Alfred Noyes. From the very inception of the shop, Monro had intended for writers to come and read their own work. Many of the poets felt under some obligations to give readings, and did so, except a few who would have found it agony, as would have Charlotte Mew. These few saw their work admirably presented by Alida Klemantaski.12

The vitality evident on these evenings and the enthusiasm generated by the gatherings were indicative of the atmosphere created by the Georgian renascence, which had begun to take shape around 1912. Furthermore, such gatherings were conducive to the promotion of new poets and also to the propagation of new ideas about poetry. It was into this intellectual milieu that Miss Klemantaski introduced Charlotte Mew in 1915. Amid this whirl of poetic activity, Mew began her association with Harold Monro and the Poetry Bookshop, which had already become the center for the Georgian coterie. From this association, Mew's name became allied with the Georgian cause, and she was later subjected to the critical spleen of rival coteries. Accordingly, time has since adjudged her a Georgian, and her reputation has suffered because of this association. Indeed, for almost fifty years, the collective reputation of the Georgians has been at a low ebb. Often they have been misrepresented and misunderstood because of the ignorance of their subsequent critics, or
because of the biased positions of these critics. Certainly, not all Georgian poets were lark-lovers nor moon-watchers. A number of the Georgians, among them Charlotte Mew, deserve rescue from the obscurity which the weaknesses of a few of the body have drawn down upon the heads of the entire group. To rescue Mew from this almost universal obscurity, however, the modern critic must view her work in relation to the period in which she was writing. He must re-examine the rise, triumph, decay, and fall of the Georgian poetic ideal; then, he can measure her achievements on an individual basis, and not according to what her compatriots failed to accomplish.

I

At the time Charlotte Mew came to the Poetry Bookshop, the Georgian renascence had already been under way for four years. It had begun as a reaction against the general neglect of modern poetry that existed throughout England. During the last twenty years, poetry had reached a cul-de-sac. For the most part, 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; in Ireland, Yeats was too involved with the Celtic Revival to attract the attention of the British; Bridges and Hardy were too remote, and much
of Kipling's verse was regarded as vulgar, or "unpoetic."
The intellectual climate of the time was such that the only
contemporary poetry which could gain public approval was
that which bore a thick veneer of conservatism. As Vivian
de Sola Pinto writes, it was the "poetry of the school-prize
bound in half-morocco."\textsuperscript{16} It echoed the English classics,
but it did not reflect the contemporary England of the "in­
ternal combustion engine, the express train and the fac­
tory."\textsuperscript{17} Typical of this Edwardian "school-prize" poetry
were the poems of Sir William Watson and Stephen Phillips.
Their polished but stale verses easily found favor with an
audience whose poetic standards demanded no more than "a
metrical statement of poetical experience or of sentiments
that were flattering to the reader."\textsuperscript{18}

By 1911, the Edwardian tastes had gone sour, and the
public was weary of the stale diet. Hence, the time was
ripe for a revolt. Then two events, occurring almost simulta­
taneously, gave shape to a poetic resurgence. First, there
developed an awareness that public interest in poetry was
beginning to reawaken, but more important was the change
that was taking place in the nature of poetry. From all
indications, poetry was beginning to move toward a realistic
trend. Then, with the publication of Masefield's \textit{The
Everlasting Mercy} (1911), the seminal work of the new realistic
tendency in poetry, the renascence was definitely under
way, sending a "new lifeblood coursing through the enfeebled
body of British verse." The renewed public interest in poetry confirmed once again the nation's awareness of its ancient poetic heritage, and as Edward Shanks notes, "people began to argue, and even to quarrel, about poetry as though it were really of some importance, and--what is always a significant sign--the charlatan began to lift an alert and interested head."

At the same time, the existence of the new vigor, the new release of spiritual energy, pervaded all areas of the arts, but nowhere was it so apparent as it was in poetic circles. Perhaps D. H. Lawrence captured that exhilaration better than anyone else when he commented upon the "great liberation" the age was experiencing in casting off the staid qualities of the fin de siècle. Reviewing the first anthology of Georgian Poetry in 1913, he wrote:

This collection is like a big breath taken when we are waking up after a night of oppressive dreams. The nihilists, the intellectual, hopeless people--Ibsen, Flaubert, Thomas Hardy--represent the dream we are waking from. It was a dream of demolition. Nothing was, but was nothing. Everything was taken from us. And now our lungs are full of new air, and our eyes see it is morning, but we have not forgotten the terror of the night. We dreamed we were falling through space into nothingness, and the anguish of it leaves us rather eager.

Undeniably, the young poets were aggressive; they were impatient with the academic tradition saddled upon them. Besides, they were eager to experiment with new forms and new subject matter. But once the impulse toward a poetic resurgence had made itself manifest, the harmony
existing among the poets turned to discord. Coteries began to form, and eventually there emerged three major warring factions. One camp--traditionalists, or Rightists, as Robert Ross labels them, like Watson and Phillips--offered little challenge. This group adopted the view that nothing was wrong with the present state of British poetry. Following forms and themes long worn out, they assumed the role of genial versifiers. Failing to adjust to the new environment, the traditionalists found sanctuary only in the pages of a few conservative literary journals, thus leaving the field in almost complete possession of their rivals.

The real war of the coteries, however, raged between what Ross calls the "poets of the Center and the Left." By far, the more violent and aggressive part was the Left. Formed from a coalition of small parties, the Left attracted such enfants terribles as Ezra Pound, Wyndham Lewis, and Filippo Marinetti. Marked by a spirited rebelliousness, this diverse faction, composed mainly of Futurists, Vorticists, and Imagists, was both insolent and brash, and by all means, experimental in its use of poetic techniques. These men may have been strident, but they were dedicated and determined to save poetry from its present paralysis. They spared no means to find fresh approaches to a new poetic. To these poets, "formlessness, anything was better than the damnable jingle of a form that had no more life in it than . . . flowers under a glass bell." Accordingly,
the Leftist poet trampled upon traditional verse forms. His interest showed a stronger inclination toward purifying poetic technique than toward expanding the subject matter of contemporary poetry.

In opposition to these factious voices stood the Centrists, who 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, the Leftists, who recognized only revolt. The Centrists, who numbered among their ranks such poets as Walter de la Mare, W. H. Davies, Rupert Brooke, Lascelles Abercrombie, and Gordon Bottomley, were not willing to deny completely their inheritance from their predecessors; yet, they shared with the Leftists an abhorrence of archaic poetic diction. Here the area of agreement stopped, for the Centrists observed in their compatriots' work a roughness in expression that offended their traditional views. At the same time, they willingly recognized an esthetic value in experimentation, and certainly they were not averse to trying new forms occasionally. They, however, could never bring themselves to experiment with the radical forms which the Leftists flaunted before the public. Unlike the Leftists, the Centrists were always concerned with both technique and subject matter; nevertheless, it must be noted that they consistently expressed greater concern for matter than for manner. Despite their apparent reserve, the poets of the
Center were formidable foes, and they approached their cause with the same dedication and studied deliberation that the Leftists evinced. Like their rival coterie, though, the Centrists were also acutely aware of the urgent need to rescue modern poetry from the abyss into which it had fallen after the death of Tennyson.26

With these divergent forces zealously dedicated to the same cause, the age saw itself standing on the threshold of a new era in poetry, as well as on the brink of open warfare. But from the very beginning, the Centrists had the advantage; they had the support of the older established poets and the reading public. Although the Leftists were quite vocal in their pursuits, they were too avant-garde to gain much popular acceptance. Occasionally, their projects seemed to border upon the fringes of insanity, and thus, some of their adventures were destined for an early death, as happened with Futurism and Vorticism, two of their boldest endeavors. On the other hand, the Centrists followed a more conservative path and always exercised extreme caution. They had recognized quite early the drift toward realism and had kept in step with it. When Masefield's The Everlasting Mercy caught fire, they were in a position to move the renascence forward. Further impetus was then given to the movement when the public accepted enthusiastically the realistic poems of Wilfrid Gibson and Rupert Brooke.27 The establishment of the Poetry Bookshop by Harold Monro was
undoubtedly the major force in giving the Centrists the ascendance over the Leftists. In sympathy with the Centrists' views on poetry, Monro, who was also editor, publisher, and dean of the Bookshop circle, was in a key position to foster the Centrists' cause, as well as shape public tastes. With his desire to popularize poetry and to promote young poets, Monro soon became the unofficial head of the Centrist movement, a leadership he was later to relinquish to Edward Marsh, who was to give to this phase of the poetic renaissance the name Georgian.

II

Although the poetic renaissance was in full swing by 1912, it lacked organization, and its achievements were rather sporadic. The Bookshop had been able to afford an outlet for some of the new energy coming from the younger poets, but Monro was in no position to encourage all the voices clamoring to be heard. At this point Edward Marsh, then private secretary to Winston Churchill, happened upon the scene at precisely the right moment. Convinced that vital new voices were not getting the hearing they deserved, he, following Monro's example, set out to secure for these neglected young men an appreciative audience. To accomplish his aim, Marsh proposed issuing a collection of poems drawn from these promising but neglected poets. He hoped the volume might continue to shake public lethargy and, at
the same time, give status to unrecognized talent.30

A relative newcomer to the world of poets and publishers, Marsh developed an interest in poetry because of a dissatisfaction with his work at the Admiralty, where Churchill was First Lord.31 Eager for intellectual stimulation, Marsh began to move about in literary circles. By chance, he got acquainted with Francis Meynell, who introduced him to contemporary poetry. In the process, Marsh read Alice Meynell's work and became enraptured with modern poetry. Amid this "hotbed of literature"32 at the Meynell household, Marsh discovered new vistas never before open to him. As he commented later, he remarked that Francis Meynell "poured the new wine into my old bottle, and I drank deep."33 Becoming aware of the events occurring about him, Marsh wanted to draw attention to some of these neglected poets. In a conversation with Rupert Brooke about the issue, Brooke suggested writing a book under twelve pseudonyms and issuing it as an anthology selected from the writings of a dozen poets. Marsh, however, objected to such an elaborate plan when there were at least a dozen promising poets whose work could be used to compile a legitimate anthology. Marsh modified Brooke's proposal, and final plans for the anthology were ironed out over a luncheon at Gray's Inn. Present at the session were Brooke, Gibson, Monro and his sub-editor Arundel del Re, John Drinkwater, and, of course, Edward Marsh. When the subject of a title was broached, Marsh urged his choice
of "Georgian Poetry," since custom tended to label periods by the name of the reigning monarch. Now that George V occupied the throne, it was only appropriate that the new anthology should be named after him, and at the same time, Marsh wanted to make a distinction between this poetic era and the preceding Edwardian decade. Conscious of a poetic renascence, Marsh gave written expression to the current poetic revolution in the preface to the first volume of *Georgian Poetry*: "This volume is issued in the belief that English poetry is now once again putting on a new strength and beauty.... This collection drawn entirely from the publications of the past two years, may if it is fortunate help the lovers of poetry to realize that we are at the beginning of another 'Georgian period' which may take rank in due time with the several great poetic ages of the past." As is indicated in the preface, Marsh selected his poems from volumes recently published. He believed that most readers were busy professional people who had only a "week-end interest" in the arts. While they probably would not take the time to read a complete volume by a single writer, they would appreciate being able to sample the work of a number of writers brought together under one cover.

Examination of the qualities of the poems Marsh selected for inclusion in the first anthology reveals that his tastes were in complete accord with those of the Centrist coterie. At first, he had planned to include Ezra Pound and
Robert Frost, but then decided to exclude Americans. In all probability, these two Americans did not measure up to his sense of traditional standards. Later, in his memoirs, Marsh stipulated the poetic taste by which he was guided in selecting the poems for Georgian Poetry:

I liked poetry to be all three (or if not all three, at least two; or if the worst came to the worst, at least one) of the following things: intelligible, musical, racy. And I was happier with it if it was written on some formal principle which I could discern, and from which it departed, if at all, only for the sake of some special effect, and not because the lazy or too impetuous writer had found observance difficult or irksome.... I like poetry that I wanted to know by heart and could learn by heart if I had time. 

By intelligible, Marsh admitted that he meant the opposite of obscurity. Although not excluding the "poetry of suggestion," he strongly maintained that "poetry is communication, and that it is the poet's duty, to the best of his ability, to let the reader know what he is driving at." For the second criterion, music, he stressed the need for a "singing quality," without which he felt poetry could not survive. But racy was a somewhat careless choice of words, as Marsh himself admitted. By it he intended to imply that poetry must have an "intensity of thought or feeling," which must counteract the "vapidity which is too often to be found, alas, in verse that is written with due regard to sense, sound, and 'correctness.'" The last criterion was certainly a criticism of the Watsons and Phillipses, as well as of the languid poetry of the nineties. As for form,
Marsh showed a decidedly conservative attitude. At heart, he still appreciated "vintage" poets. Barred by his essentially traditional approach to verse forms, he was unable to tolerate much of the work being done by the younger poets, which to him was so experimental as to be bizarre.

At times, he antagonized a number of poets by remaining adamant in his insistence upon formal patterns. He engaged in open quarrels with Sturge Moore and D. H. Lawrence, and his antipathy toward Marinetti and Pound was common knowledge. With conservative criteria as his poetic yardstick, his tastes in the literary arts were decidedly those of the cultivated amateur. Undoubtedly, he felt comfortable among the Centrist poets who gravitated toward Monro's Poetry Bookshop. Thus, willing to be modern but not too modern, Edward Marsh was able to bring the poetry of the Center to the forefront and make it the dominant poetic force during the prewar years.  

With the triumph of Georgian Poetry 1911-1912, Marsh gave direction and a name to the Centrist position. The public reaction to the volume was astounding. Even Marsh and Monro were taken by surprise. Skeptics and well-wishers both were compelled to acknowledge the existence of an audience eager for poetry, an audience the size of which had been underestimated, if not unsuspected. As the sales mounted, the reputation and power of the Centrist, or Georgian, faction increased. Although Monro set out to issue
only 500 copies, by 1914 the volume had gone into a tenth edition. By a final reckoning in 1939, the sales of Georgian Poetry had reached an estimated 15,000 copies. Marsh had judged accurately the national temper. Immediately, other coteries issued anthologies in an effort to tap the new market for poetry. Among the new efforts were Pound's Des Imagistes and the Sitwells' Wheels. The collections mushroomed to the point that by 1913 James Stephens wrote to Marsh: "There seems to be a number of anthologies in preparation just now; whether your magical 6th edition is responsible for them or not, I don't know, but I am contributing to three and have refused to contribute to ten." Marsh, however, was not an individual to allow rivals to benefit too greatly from his successful venture. In November, 1915, he issued a second volume of Georgian poetry, which surpassed the triumph of its predecessor; this volume sold 19,000 copies.

Again, Marsh had judged accurately the public's eagerness for poetry; furthermore, he knew their tastes. He knew what they would buy and what they would read. Although both volumes of Georgian Poetry were popular, neither reflected catholic tastes since the selections were not entirely representative of all phases of the poetry of the age. Marsh had, after all, intended to favor only those poems which approached his fundamental standards, and evidently, since both anthologies sold well, his tastes must
have been in accord with those of the general public. From the poems in *Georgian Poetry I*, the diversity seemed to bear out Marsh's aim to put the "beautiful and neglected" before the world. With *Georgian Poetry II*, though, a definite tendency began to take shape, giving credence to the claim that a specific "Georgian" poetic had emerged.

As many a critic has discovered, the term *Georgian* is ambiguous, and for the literary historian, it raises serious questions about the nature of poetry during the second decade of this century. Should the term be restricted to only those poets who appeared in Marsh's anthologies? Should it be expanded to include all poets, both Center and Right, who favored tradition? Or should it be extended to all poets who were of the same persuasion as Marsh's contributors? Through usage, *Georgian* has become a generic term to describe all who opposed the Leftists. Of course, the ambiguity results from the fact that the term must be applied to a large number of very different poets. Also, it must be noted that Georgianism was never a cohesive movement. No one ever issued a Georgian manifesto. In the beginning at least, Georgianism was no more than a reaction against the general neglect of modern poetry. Its major purpose was to avoid the inert, bloodless verse of the Edwardians. By 1915, the Georgian poets were only a group of young artists of similar persuasion. They could hardly be called a movement. Robert Ross has suggested what is
perhaps the most satisfying way of handling the term. To him, Georgian "connotes not so much a poetic coterie as a state of mind held in common by poets of divergent aims and methods."44

What, then, were the characteristics of this "state of mind"? From 1912-1915, what did it mean to be Georgian? First of all, it meant to be "modern," in the sense of "new," as motion pictures, feminism, and airplanes were "new." The younger voices were impatient with their predecessors' "Wordsworthian prattle" and "Tennysonian memorial surveys." They were full of dynamism and displeased with the current staid practices, the "mellifluousness and verborosity" that surrounded them.45 Also, to be Georgian was to be anti-Victorian. When Ezra Pound proclaimed in 1912 that modern poetry must free itself from Victorian "poppycock," that it must use "fewer painted adjectives," he was also speaking for the Georgians as well, for they too sought freedom from Victorian lushness and fin de siècle enervation. And in their revolt against Victorian flaccidity, the Georgians turned their attention toward reviving the dramatic poem. Their quarrel was not so much with the major Victorians, like Browning, as it was with the Decadents, who, they believed, had removed poetry from its human associations and locked it up in the study.

Another aspect of what might be called the Georgian credo was its insistence upon simplicity in diction.
Reacting against Victorian decoration, the Georgians were unanimous in their desire to write in the manner and accent of natural speech. They could not bring themselves to try the extreme measures adopted by the Imagists or Futurists, but they were all certainly "blood relatives" in their aim to avoid languid diction. Unfortunately, the Georgians' antipathy toward decorated verse sometimes produced singularly banal verses of their own. But in their best work, the Georgians have a deceptive simplicity that belies a high order of technical mastery.46

But above all, from 1912-1915, the single most distinguishing trait of Georgian poetry was its dependence upon realism. After all, it was the tendency toward realism that originally gave impetus to the rise of the Centrists, many of whom later became Georgians. Among recent critics of Georgian poetry, Allen Pryce-Jones is the only one who stresses with conviction an insistence upon the necessity to recognize realism as a major Georgian hallmark. As he suggests, "It is impossible to imagine Sir William Watson writing a poem about seasickness, yet the subject came quite naturally to Rupert Brooke. After all, people are sea-sick; why, then, should they not write poems which--in Eddie Marsh's phrase--are disquieting to read at meals?"47 If anyone doubts the presence of realism in Georgian poetry, he need look no farther than Georgian Poetry I. Here, the realistic vein is certainly evident in Masefield and Gibson.
But nowhere is it so abundant as in Lascelles Abercrombie. In "The Sale of St. Thomas," he dwells lovingly upon human degradation, as in his description of a missionary's death:

Another stranger
Who swore he knew of better gods than ours,
Seemed to the king troubled with flees, and slaves
Were told to groom him smartly, which they did
Thoroughly with steel combs, until at last
They curried the living flesh from off his bones
And stript his face of gristle, till he was
Skull and half skeleton and yet alive. 48

Or later, in a soliloquy, St. Thomas describes the flies of India:

And flies! A land of flies! where the hot soil
Foul with ceaseless decay steams into flies!
So thick they pile themselves in the air above
Their meal of filth, they seem like breathing heaps
Of formless life mounded upon the earth....
I abhor flies,--to see them stare upon me
Out of their little faces of gibbous eyes;
To feel the dry cool skin of their bodies alight
Perching upon my lips! 49

Obviously, Abercrombie used realistic detail simply for its own sake, and not for some well-defined artistic effect. Because of this tendency toward repellent and irrelevant descriptions, a trend even more pronounced in Georgian Poetry II, Marsh became the subject of angry polemics. With the publication of Abercrombie's "End of the World" and Bottomley's "King Lear's Wife," the issue came to a head. The excessive realism was regarded as a sign that the Georgian state of mind was in the first stages of hardening into a coterie. Further, the poets were losing their individuality and beginning to imitate each other.
Deceiving themselves, they failed in their awareness that poets are artists, and artists, in turn, are "individuals who, unless they go their own way, must become sterile." 50 Although this may be true, they had pulled poetry out of a slough of artificiality. Now, they were charged with an insincere use of realism. 51 For these poets, it seems realism was a gimmick. For a time it served them well. It enabled them to bring to modern poetry a new vigor. Afterward, though, they were unable to develop any further. They had, however, accomplished their initial goal, to secure a hearing for modern poetry. Unfortunately, these courageous poets were unable to go forward again, to refine their Georgian poetic, and in a vain attempt to retain their position as the spokesman for the age, they tended to indulge in excessive brutality. As critical reactions began to mount against them, the Georgians grew defensive; they rallied around Marsh and their injured comrades in a manner that indicated a hardening of the line. Had Marsh and his contributors been willing to recognize the implications of these critical attitudes, they would have been aware that Georgianism was showing signs of decay. And indeed, never again was Georgian poetry to enjoy the extravagant praise or the public support accorded it in the period 1912-1914.
Although Georgian Poetry I and II contained the seeds of self-destruction, the real test of the stability of the Georgian poetic was yet to come. The shock and bewilderment created by the outbreak of war caused a momentary lull in poetic activity. After the initial paralysis wore off, a deluge of patriotic verse was loosed upon England. To some observers, the upsurge of patriotism promised to bring a new strength and beauty to poetry. As Frank Swinnerton described those early war days, "One curious and disgusting phenomenon of the first war months was a flood of jubilant articles by professors, near-professors, and literary romantics who detested Realism, Futurism, and Blast, and tranquility. They said, with one accord, that the war would prove the salvation of English letters. It would purge us of evil humours, and release the stream of pure poetry that had been too long muddied by science, meticulousness, and nonsense."52 Instead of a "salvation of English letters," there appeared, for a time, a danger that the serious professional poets "would be swept from public view by the flood of puerile rhymes from public school subalterns and patriotic effusions from armchair patriots and bloodthirsty old ladies from Bath."53

But the British have always exhibited a strong backbone, and poetry was not to die so easily. The old-line poets, such as Hardy and Bridges, were still on the scene,
though mostly in the background. A number of the younger voices had been silenced by the war--Rupert Brooke, T. E. Hulme, Wilfrid Owen, Isaac Rosenberg, Charles Sorley, and Edward Thomas. There were, however, still significant voices in England. And when Edward Marsh began to compile the material for *Georgian Poetry III* in 19	extsuperscript{18}, he had the work of three major groups from which to choose. First, there were the first-generation Georgians, men like Bottomley, De la Mare, W. H. Davies, Ralph Hodgson, and Monro. Then, there were the "trench poets"--Robert Graves, Siegfried Sassoon, and Robert Nichols. In addition, just appearing on the scene was a group of young poets who seemed promising enough to be entitled to a hearing. Of this last group, the most noteworthy were W. J. Turner, John Freeman, and J. C. Squire.\textsuperscript{54}

If Marsh wanted to demonstrate, as he claimed he did, that British poetry was continuing to grow in spite of the war, he would surely have to select representative verse from these three groups, especially if he wished to avoid laying this anthology open to the charges of exclusiveness levelled at *Georgian Poetry II*. Evidently, Marsh took the allegations to heart, for he showed more catholicity in his selections for the 1918 volume. He included the old-line Georgians, the "trench poets," and the new group of younger poets, who later came to be known as the Neo-Georgians. To counteract the coterie charge, he even proposed including
a woman poet and approached Harold Monro for suggestions. For the first time, Marsh was willing to seek advice. Writing to Marsh, Monro strongly recommended the inclusion of Charlotte Mew's "The Farmer's Bride."\textsuperscript{55} Marsh, though, had his doubts, and, in turn, asked Walter de la Mare for an opinion. His prompt reply was negative. He felt the tone was inconsistent, and the rhymes and rhythm were too imprecise.\textsuperscript{56} Thus supported by De la Mare's estimate, Marsh rejected Monro's recommendation. Out of pique because Mew was excluded from \textit{Georgian Poetry III}, Monro wrote Marsh: "... you couldn't really want my opinion, seeing that you rejected it in the one case in which I give it with real emphasis."\textsuperscript{57}

On other matters, Marsh was less obstinate. He submitted to Monro a tentative list of poems and poets for the third volume, and on this occasion, the two men were more nearly in mutual accord. Marsh's willingness to heed advice and to compromise his earlier stance toward representativeness paid off, for the appearance of \textit{Georgian Poetry III} did not create the critical flurry that accompanied its predecessor in 1915. This issue was uncontroversial; it was conservative. From a historical point of view, though, the volume is quite significant; it marked a new direction in Georgian poetry. The work of the first generation of Georgian poets showed an inclination to reject war as a subject of poetry. Instead, they tried to uphold the
values of peace time. The punch had gone out of their writing. On the other hand, the "trench poets" produced the most impressive work, but their poems were in large measure topical. The group which emerged as the most significant to the literary historian was the second-generation Georgians, or more conveniently, Neo-Georgians, because they were to become increasingly more important in the volumes of 1919 and 1922. These Neo-Georgians turned their backs on the war and escaped from the holocaust expending the nations of the West. They deliberately turned away from contemporary life and fled to a fake kind of pastoralism where the "daydream of the unspoiled English countryside became an anodyne." They retired to the world of Giotto, a world of timelessness, where the colors are fainter, the sounds farther off, the air stiller, and where man moves about in the haze of a vaporous dream." Or as Robert Ross describes them, "the Neo-Georgians were poets of the moon; their verse was washed white with the pale beams of Diana." At any rate, the Neo-Georgians were leading the Georgian poetic into a cul-de-sac, from which it could never free itself. Whereas Georgian in 1912 and again in 1915 had implied vigor, youth, and revolt, after 1917 it became languor, enervation, and vapidity. Accordingly, the postwar poems were covered over with a glaze of beauty, a beauty used as an opiate to hide ugliness. This retreat from the world of men and pain is amply illustrated in a verse by F. W. Harvey:
From troubles of the world
I turn to ducks,
Beautiful, comical things,
Sleeping or curled,
Their heads beneath white wings
By water cool,
Or finding curious things
To eat in various mucks
Beneath the pool,
Tails, uppermost, or waddling,
Sailor-like, on the shores
Of ponds. . . .61

By their retirement to an effusive pastoralism, the
Neo-Georgians were curiously out of step with the temper of
the times. Obviously, they were losing touch with the Eng­
land of the late war years. As a result resentment and hos­
tility toward the Georgian poetic set in. Even a staunch
Georgian like Harold Monro began to drift away from an al­
lance with these second-generation Georgians. With the
issuance of the Chapbook, Monro reflected a swing toward
the Left. Although the work of a few Georgians was included,
poets from the newer schools dominated: Herbert Read,
"H.D.," F. S. Flint, the three Sitwells, and Richard Aldington.
In later volumes, he even asked T. S. Eliot, Aldous
Huxley, and F. S. Flint to review the state of contemporary
British poetry. In addition, he turned his attention to
American poets, and in 1920, he gave an entire issue over
to Edna St. Vincent Millay's Aria Da Capo. There were, also,
other signs that the tide had turned against Georgianism,
for by 1918 other coteries that had managed to survive the
war years had become openly hostile to Georgian poets.62
Leading a slashing assault against them, Edith Sitwell, using the pages of Wheels, gave Georgian poetry one of the most scathing dismissals it has ever had from the hands of any partisan critic:

In that verse . . . the praise of worthy home life alternated with swollen, inflated boomings and roarings about the Soul of Man. These beauties reigned triumphant, together with healthy, manly, but rather raucous shouts for beer, and advertisements for certain rustic parts of England, to the accompaniment of a general clumsy clod-hopping, with hob-nailed boots. Birds became a cult. Any mention of the nest of a singing-bird threw the community into a frenzy. Dreamy plaster-faced sheep with Alexandra fringes and eyes like the eyes of minor German royalty, limpid, wondering, disapproving, uncomprehending, these were admired, as were bulldogs weeping tears of blood. Nor was Romance absent. At one moment, any mention of 'little Juliet,' 'Helen of Troy,' or of Troy itself roused a passionate interest. The names alone were sufficient. Again, any allusion to a violin—although this must be called a fiddle—any simple description of a gaffer doddering in the village alehouse, melted the audience to tears. Yet with all this romantic simplicity, the businessman's careful logic was never absent, combined, strangely enough, with the legendary innocence of the country clergyman (this last trait being a tribute to the memory of the unfortunate Wordsworth).

Other journals also joined the postwar anti-Georgian reaction. *Art and Letters*, *Coterie*, and *Criterion* provided outlets for partisan opinions. Of course, it must be noted, the Establishment did not go undefended. *Athenaeum*, *Voices*, *To-day*, and *London Mercury*, all Centrist organs, knew how to counterattack. By 1920, though, Georgianism was a dead movement, but it was not "allowed to die a peaceful death in the natural course of poetic affairs but was to be hooted to its grave by the unnecessarily derisive jeers of those
self-appointed poets and critics who had mounted a death watch over Marsh's anthology. From all sides came the jeers, and even parodies, which became a popular device for ridiculing any poet who seemed to reveal "Georgian proclivities." The most masterful parodies came perhaps from the pen of E. V. Knox, who published in Punch under the nom de plume "Evoe." At various times he did parodies of John Drinkwater, W. H. Davies, De la Mare, Ralph Hodgson, John Freeman, Alfred Noyes, and Thomas Hardy. The parody that is of paramount interest here is the one he did in 1921 on Charlotte Mew, who by that time had a small following among the literati. The Farmer's Bride, originally issued in 1916, had by then undergone a second edition, and in early 1921 came out in America under the title Saturday Market. Because of her association with the Poetry Bookshop, to the anti-Georgian forces, Mew wore the badge of Georgianism. And this alliance was sufficient to attract the parodist's darts. In a poem called "The Circus Clown," Knox took careful aim and ridiculed Charlotte Mew's poetry:

The moonlight drips on the parlour floor;
I shall go mad if no one wipes it up.
When I was one year old Nurse used to say,
"It's no more use to cry when milk is spilt
Than cry about the moon." There were big bars
Across the nursery window. You said once,
"Life is all bars on which we beat in vain
Praying for drinks." I smiled when you said that.
I wonder why it was you made me smile.
I think because you had a funny face,
White as the moonlight, and a red, red nose,
And the moon dripped upon the floor like this
Two years ago. The floor looked just the same.
There is something very terrible about a floor.
And then the fete...

The sparrows twittered in the dusty square; 
One only saw the plane-trees and the pump. 
The curé said we mustn't roll our eyes 
Or wink to little boys across the square. 
He could not say we must not watch the moon. 
The band came up the street, the lions, the bears, 
O noise of roundabouts, eternal swing! 
Où est mon chapeau? Il est sur la table.

I had my hair done in a pigtail then. 
O noise of roundabouts, eternal swing! 
Oh, round and round! Why did you stare so hard? 
I sometimes think a hoop is like the moon. 
Où est la méchante fille? Elle est partie. 
The girl had a green ribbon in her hair.

The forest road...

It stretches away into shadows infinite. 
The boughs are like crossed bars, crossed window bars. 
The moon drips through them. Are not those wolves' eyes, 
Green in the dusk? I always hated green. 
Green is a terrible colour, and so is red. 
There are red roses in the garden now, 
Red roses dans le jardin de ma tante, 
Shrilling a passionate pain amongst the green. 
Why can I never walk in gardens now 
Without remembering your red, red nose?

You must have meant me to come out to you; 
No bird could coo--ee quite so loud as that. 
Perhaps I have a delicate chest. Perhaps 
I ought not to have gone in those thin shoes. 
I have had measles twice, loved only once. 
Oh love! But love hurts more than measles do. 
Why did you send me back? I could have gone 
All round the world with that white caravan 
And watched you smile. You said you like my hair; 
Mine was so long that I could sit on it. 
As-tu le ruban vert de mademoiselle?

And still the sparrows twitter in the square, 
And no one but the curé comes and goes 
Under the dusty plane-trees. And at night 
The moonlight drips. You will never come again. 
But would you know me if you came again? 
The little girl she has grown so big. Who knows? 
Ah, God! why did they make me bob my hair?
To a sensitive poet like Charlotte Mew, the satire was loaded with numerous barbs, and from all indications, she felt the sting quite severely. In a letter in 1958, Knox apologized for the unintentional pain he had caused her. Apparently, Knox did not take his own work very seriously and expected the recipients to find the parodies delightful little verses, not devices for settling a vendetta.68

As Knox says, Hardy and Masefield were amused by his travesties of their works,69 but all the parodies aimed at the Georgians were not so casually intended. The coterie warfare was bitter, and the poetry produced by the anti-Georgian faction flaunted the very traits that were anathema to the Georgians. Often, the product was so avant-garde that it appeared to be descending into incomprehensibility, which the modernists claimed was not a stunt to attract attention, but instead, they asserted it was the only effective means for transmuting the postwar world into poetry. Furthermore, their work seemed to be shifting toward private poetry. The shift had actually begun before the war, but by the postwar period, poetry from the Left had definitely turned toward a cultivation of the esoteric and thereby willingly sacrificed its public.70

Both obscure verse and private art ran counter to the Georgian poetic, especially to the Neo-Georgian traits that dominated the third volume of Georgian Poetry. They also diametrically opposed Marsh's poetic canons. During
the postwar years, he became even more intolerant of the Left, and with Monro's assistance, he decided to compile a fourth anthology in an effort to stem the tide toward obscurity. Monro questioned the advisability of issuing another volume at this time, but he yielded to Marsh's insistence. Early in 1919, Marsh began collecting material. Once again, as in 1917, he expressed an eagerness to include a woman poet. And once again, Monro pushed the candidacy of Charlotte Mew. At the same time, Edward Shanks urged Rose Macaulay, and Sassoon suggested Edith Sitwell, which must have amused Marsh after the remarks she had printed about his contributors. Marsh, however, ignored all suggestions and chose Fredegonde Shove. Again, as in 1917, Monro was not amenable to Marsh's choice, and informed him of his disappointment: "The absence of Charlotte Mew is of course again a conspicuous flaw." Nevertheless, Marsh pursued his own course. In a few months, his work was completed, and *Georgian Poetry* IV appeared in November, 1919. Like its predecessor, the volume came under immediate attack for its adamant refusal to adapt to the temper of the times. Amy Lowell called it "weary verse" and went on to exclaim that it was "a profound labour to read this book." The consensus of the critics, moreover, conceded that the Neo-Georgians were primarily to blame for the poetic sterility of the anthology. As Amy Lowell pointed out in her review, Neo-Georgian verse was derivative, and "good poets are

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never echoes, and never were, and that is the long and short of it."73 Her conclusion tends to support Swinerton's dictum: poets are artists, and "artists are individuals who, unless they go their own way, must become sterile."74 From the evidence afforded by the poems, the Neo-Georgians were certainly guilty of emulation, of preserving identical attitudes already "worn smooth by the rippling of innumerable minds."75

In spite of the critical reception given Georgian Poetry IV, Edward Marsh remained undaunted. He believed in his mission, and in 1922, he issued a final volume of Georgian Poetry. By the time it appeared, it was universally conceded that the anthology had outlived its day. The critics, moreover, were no less caustic now than they had been three years earlier. Edmund Gosse said that the poets were so simple as to be "silly," that they dwelled upon minutiae. "The radiating vistas of intellectual and moral life," he added, "do not interest these young poets in the least. Their eyes are not lifted to the mountains, but are occupied in minute inspection of the ground. They listen to the whisper of their own inner feelings, and the daisy at their feet doth the same tale repeat."76 Actually, Marsh had anticipated the tack the critics would take. No longer willing to ignore the attacks upon his anthology, he prefaced Georgian Poetry V with a lengthy defense of his anthologizing principles. With razor sharp phrases,
he quieted for the time being the customary charge that he had set himself up as an "arbiter" of poetic standards. He also denied the allegation that Georgian Poetry sought to establish a school of poetry. Furthermore, he insisted that his only aim was to place before the British public "a number of writers doing work which appeared to me extremely good, but which was narrowly known..." On the basis of its conception, he disavowed once again the assumption that Georgian Poetry was, or should have been, representative. As editor of the volumes, it was his prerogative to include or exclude any poet whose work did or did not meet with his approval. In addition, he made it quite clear that he did not like the poetry from the Left, and he felt no obligation to promote it. "Much admired modern work," he remarked, "seems to me, in its lack of inspiration and its disregard of form, like gravy imitating lava." Then he parried with, "Its upholders may retort that much of the work which I prefer seems to them... like tapioca imitating pearls."

Not only did the preface to Georgian Poetry V effectively defend Marsh's anthologizing principles, but it also expressed his admission that Georgian Poetry was dead. It had existed as a means to correct inequities, and that aim it had accomplished. Surely, no one can say that this goal
was not admirable, and for this reason alone, Edward Marsh must be admired. In addition, he must be given credit for another distinction; he made poetry popular, a feat rarely so effectively accomplished. Few people of his own day, or since, have been willing to acknowledge his meritorious achievements. Indeed, few people seemed ever to accept Marsh's avowed purpose. During the life of Georgian Poetry even, the reviewers for the various journals gave no heed to his intentions, which were clearly stated in the prefaces to the anthologies. Given the inflammatory rhetoric of the past five decades, subsequent critics, and many who should know better, have indiscriminately accepted the assumptions prompted by Marsh's detractors. The blindness of the critics can perhaps be explained by the fact that, in all probability, they have misunderstood the use of the word Georgian, which is unquestionably ambiguous. Traditionally, it has been a common practice to use monarchs' names to describe the literature of a given period. Elizabeth I gave her name to the literature of the late sixteenth century, and Victoria, to the work of the late nineteenth century, and Edward VII, to the first decade of the twentieth century. Naturally, then, one automatically assumes that Georgian refers to the literature produced during the reign of George V, and thus, expects any anthology to be representative of all phases of literary activity. If an anthology calls itself Georgian Poetry, the reader expects to find represented the work of
the Right, the Left, and the Center. Marsh, however, did not wish to be representative. As a result, the term Georgian has become a designation for those poets of the Centrist persuasion, not just the poets included in the anthologies. It must be noted, though, that even in this context, Marsh's anthologies do not adequately represent the poets who were in accord with what might be called the Georgian temper, or set of mind. Again, Marsh sought only to publish the work of new, young poets of the Center, who, he felt, were not getting a proper hearing.

As much as to any other influence, Georgian Poetry owed its demise to Marsh's conservative tastes and his inflexibility in matters of form. Never very avant-garde, Marsh grew steadily more conservative after the war, and as the poetic experimentation from the Left moved toward obscurity and excessive intellectuality, he hardened his line upon lucidity as the sine qua non for modern poetry. Forced into an uncompromising position by the threat coming from the Left, he shored up his defenses by embracing the Neo-Georgians. These young poets, however, started the Georgian poetic on a downhill course, seeking sanctuary in a world of half-lights and shimmering mirages. One of the foremost practitioners of such bloodless verse was John Freeman. His "'It Was the Lovely Moon'" was characteristic of the failure of the Neo-Georgian imagination:
It was the lovely moon--she lifted
Slowly her white brow among
Bronze cloud-waves that ebbed and drifted
Faintly, faintlier afar.
Calm she looked, yet pale with wonder,
Sweet in unwonted thoughtfulness,
Watching the earth that dwindled under
Faintly, faintlier afar.
It was the lovely moon that lovelike
Hovered over the wandering, tired
Earth, her bosom grey and dovelike,
Hovering beautiful as a dove... .
The lovely moon:--her soft light falling
Lightly on roof and poplar and pine--
Tree to tree whispering and calling,
Wonderful in the silvery shine
Of the round, lovely, thoughtful moon.83

Even Harold Monro fell under the hypnotic spell of the Neo-Georgian countryside, and in a perversion of the Georgian pastoral entitled "Week-End," he extolled the joys of rural life:

The train! The twelve o'clock for paradise.
Hurry, or it will try to creep away.
Out in the country every one is wise:
We can be only wise on Saturday.
There you are waiting, little friendly house:
Those are your chimney-stacks with you between,
Surrounded by old trees and strolling cows,
Staring through all your windows at the green.
Your homely floor is creaking for our tread;
The smiling tea-pot with contented spout
Thinks of the boiling water, and the bread
Longs for the butter. All their hands are out
To greet us, and the gentle blankets seem
Purring and crooning: 'Lie in us, and dream.'84

This opening stanza of Monro's poem is sufficient to reveal the banality of the Neo-Georgian pastoral spirit. Dominating the final two volumes of Georgian Poetry, these second-generation Georgians were "imaginatively bankrupt." They had lost "the ability to feel deeply and, perhaps more
important, the ability to create out of what they saw, the power to transmute raw experience into art, to give shape, form, direction, and significance to the data of the senses." In turn, they called down upon the once vital, energetic Georgian movement a condemnation from which it has never been fully rescued. Because of the spiritual anemia of these second-generation Georgians, all Georgians were grouped together indiscriminately, "labeled lark-lovers, and ignominiously dismissed from further consideration." Apeneck Sweeney and Mrs. Porter had won the day. That fearful anarchy which Edward Marsh envisioned became a reality. The "moonlight" poets paddled off to an idyllic world somewhere in the backwater, where the emotions and themes of the age could not intrude upon their illusions. And there they endured, "apparently unaware, as Eliot complained, of the 'tragedies and ecstasies' of the 'adult, sophisticated, civilized mind' of the twentieth century." Even though Eliot scored the Georgians, notably the Neo-Georgians, for withdrawing to an idealized world beyond time and change, the Georgians, when at their best, possessed a simplicity and an unsophisticated emotional quality that was alien to the poets of the Left. It was this lack of sophistication which formed one of the principal barriers between the Leftists and the Georgians. In the poetry of the Left, emotion was neither simple, nor direct. In fact, as James Reeves comments, it "reveals itself mainly in a
mistrust of direct emotion, of a simple response to primary experience, and of direct passionate utterance." In addition, the poets indicate a "fear of being caught with the heart exposed." In short, they had become afraid of emotion, and often concealed it behind a barrage of verbal pyrotechnics. To these "sophisticated, civilised minds," the comparative innocence of the Georgians was anathema. But there may be just as much virtue in innocence and simplicity as there is in intellectuality and urbane sophistication. Despite their differences in tone and technique, both the traditionalists, or Georgians, and the experimentalists, or Leftists, to use Eliot's phrase, were striving to prevent "the dissociation of sensibility" that had hampered their predecessors. Both factions sought a harmonious blending of thought and emotion. The experimentalists worked from behind a veil of cynical wit, self-mockery, and verbal displays; the traditionalists approached poetry with an innocent eye, an optimistic view, and a mistrust of rhetoric. Neither approach was more intrinsically poetic than was the other, and each one was indicative of a certain state of mind. Consequently, Georgian poetry should not be dismissed merely because the emotions and the forms are uncomplicated.

Undeniably, Georgian poetry deteriorated drastically during the postwar years, and some of the prewar poetry was inferior. Certainly, some Georgian poetry lacked the
appropriate marriage of thought and emotion. Some poems were even devoid of thought; they were shallow and often trivial, or didactic. Some poets could not transmute personal experience into art, and some turned reality into an open field, as Edith Sitwell charged, dotted with "Dreamy, plaster-faced sheep with Alexandra fringes." On the other hand, some of the Georgians were uncommonly effective poets who never forgot the basic truths about poetry. As J. Middleton Murry has pointed out, poetry is after all "rooted in emotion"; furthermore, "it grows by the mastery of emotion," but "its significance ... depends upon the quality and comprehensiveness of the emotion."93

Unquestionably, some poets of the age lost sight of their art, or else could not control the medium well enough to raise their experience to the level of an artistic creation. One poet, though, who never forgot the basic truths about poetry and who had the strength to avoid the shallow simplicity of fellow Georgians was Charlotte Mew. Never in the mainstream of the Georgian movement, she was, nevertheless, in sympathy with the basic Georgian tenets. In stylistic matters, she was somewhat bolder than her compatriots, but never to the point of breaking camp to follow the Leftist commands. Her poems were, for the most part, dramatic monologues, written in broken, staccato phrases; formal stanza patterns were not allowed to dominate thought. Unlike that of many of the Georgians, her meter was determined by the
emotional quality of the poetry itself. In subject matter, Mew was not a typical Georgian. She never suffered from the lassitude nor spiritual anemia that plagued her contemporaries. Nor did she ever turn to the fake Wordsworthian pastoral, or the distant lands of the imagination and story books. Innocent of T. S. Eliot's criticism of the Georgians, she knew from personal experience the "tragedies and ecstasies" of twentieth-century society. She struggled against the confines of an unfriendly universe, a universe from which man had been dispossessed. She could say along with Arnold that her world too was "Swept with confused alarms of struggle and flight." And like Eliot, she dwelled in that waste land where one knows only "A heap of broken images, where the sun beats,/ And the dead tree gives no shelter, the cricket no relief,/ And the dry stone no sound of water." This was certainly not the idyllic Arcadia of the Neo-Georgians, nor the unspoiled English countryside of the Georgians. It was, instead, the world of an individual in conflict with the established codes. Also, it was the world of an individual poet who was trying to come to terms with the problems of her age; it was a world produced by a "tortured human consciousness."94

In developing the conflict, Charlotte Mew revealed the agonies of a soul, stripped naked by an unpredictable universe where the simple security of the old orthodox assumptions was no longer tenable. Because of her image of
a shattered man in a shattered world, and also her irregularities in style, according to Marsh's views, Charlotte Mew was never elected for inclusion in Georgian Poetry, and Harold Monro was never able to do for her what Marsh did for a number of young, promising poets who were not getting a proper hearing. And yet, Mew, almost better than any other poet, successfully maintained the Centrist position, that position which Marsh fought so rigorously to promote; she was attuned to the problems of the age and gave voice to them while adapting a modified view of traditional form. Also, the emotion expressed in the poems was intense and yet controlled; it was never allowed to run rampant or to sink into bathos. Praising her achievements in form and content, Harold Monro wrote:

She writes with the naturalness of one whom real passion has excited; her diction is free from artificial conceits, is inspired by the force of her subject, and creates its own direct intellectual contact with the reader.

Biased as Monro undoubtedly was, his estimate of Mew's poetry was based on critical standards, not personal prejudice. In 1920, following Monro's lead, Alida Klemantaski (now Mrs. Harold Monro) rated Mew as "one of the best poets of the century." Though extravagant in her admiration, Mrs. Monro wanted to gain recognition for a Georgian poet whose work never suffered from the poetic nadir of the Neo-Georgians. And yet Charlotte Mew still remains an unknown poet largely because in the three decades since her death,
critics and literary historians have indiscriminately ac­
cepted the critical abuse hurled at the Georgians by rival
coteries during the postwar years, and also because few
scholars have undertaken a re-examination of the period in
order to see the poets in relation to the temper of the age.
Notes


4Grant, pp. 62-63.


7Sergeant, p. 120.

8Grant, p. 80.

9Ibid., p. 77.

10Ibid., p. 81.

11Ibid., p. 78.

12Ibid., pp. 82-83.

13Ross, p. ix.


17Ibid., p. 118.


19Ross, p. 12.

20Ibid., pp. 13-14.

58


23 Ross, p. 23.

24 Ibid., p. 25.

25 Drinkwater, p. 298.

26 Ibid., p. 299.

27 Ross, pp. 27-29.

28 Ibid., p. 79.


30 Reeves, p. xii.


32 Marsh, *Number of People*, p. 320.

33 Ibid., p. 319.

34 Hassall, pp. 181-191 passim.


36 Reeves, p. xiii.

37 Marsh, *Number of People*, p. 322.

38 Ibid., p. 323.

39 Ibid.

40 Ross, pp. 83-95 passim.

41 Ibid., pp. 99-108 passim.

42 Ibid., p. 109.

43 Marsh, *Number of People*, p. 329.
44 Ross, pp. 117-118.


46 Ross, pp. 120-125.


49 Ibid., p. 16.

50 Swinnerton, Background with Chorus, p. 175.

51 Ross, p. 138.

52 Swinnerton, Background with Chorus, p. 175.

53 Ross, p. 144.

54 Ibid., p. 145.


56 Letter of Walter de la Mare to Edward Marsh, September 3, 1917, in Berg Collection.

57 Ross, p. 156.

58 De Sola Pinto, p. 133.

59 Galin, p. 36.

60 Ross, p. 165.


62 Ross, pp. 166-169.


64 Ross, p. 198.

65 Ibid., pp. 175-200 passim.


See Davidow, p. 355.

Ibid.

Reeves, p. xiv.

Hassall, p. 493.


Ibid., p. 125.

Swinerton, Background with Chorus, p. 175.

Ross, p. 211.


Ibid.

Ibid.

Reeves, p. xiii.

Gibson, p. 280.

Ross, p. 214.


Ross, p. 223.

Ibid., p. 241.

Ibid., p. 239.
88 Reeves, p. xxi.
89 Ibid.
90 Ibid.
91 Ibid., p. xvi.
93 Ross, p. 212.
94 Grant, p. 126.
96 Harold Monro, Some Contemporary Poets, p. 82.
97 Grant, p. 125.
CHAPTER III

CHARLOTTE MEW: A BIOGRAPHICAL SKETCH

For some time now, an appreciation of Charlotte Mew's poetry has been neglected because of the negative critical stance taken toward the Georgian poets en masse, and yet over the years various poets and critics—individuals like Thomas Hardy, Walter de la Mare, Frank Swinnerton, and Louis Untermeyer—have attempted to make the public aware of her poetic achievements. Despite such expressions of admiration, Mew's reputation is not widespread. Writing to Sydney Cockerell in 1932, Siegfried Sassoon, who regarded Charlotte Mew as his "spiritual benefactor," commented upon the situation: "I often wonder how wide her fame has spread and suspect that it is still absurdly limited. But time is the only agent, and many will be on the rubbish heap when Charlotte's star is at the zenith where it will remain."1 But that "zenith" has yet to become a reality. The failure of subsequent generations to recognize Mew's poetry, however, may, in large measure, be accounted for. Probably the most important factor that prevents any change in her status as a significant poet, in addition to the stigma attached to the label Georgian, is the almost complete absence of substantial biographical material. From all indications, Mew was

63
never an effusive social person, and she tended to guard
with great care the details of her private life.

To date, only two attempts to provide an insight into
the personality of Charlotte Mew have appeared, if Mrs.
Monro's brief notice in the Dictionary of National Biog-
raphy is discounted. The first significant biographical
sketch was Alida Monro's "Charlotte Mew--A Memoir," actually
an introduction to the Collected Poems of Charlotte Mew
(1953). Although not entirely accurate in factual content,
the sketch is valuable for its portrait of Mew. Clearly,
the scope is somewhat limited since the material is largely
drawn from Mrs. Monro's relationship with Mew during the
last ten years or so of her life. The only other noteworthy
contribution is the biographical study compiled by Mary
Celine Davidow in 1960. Based upon all available sources,
including interviews with relatives and friends alike, Miss
Davidow's work provides a wealth of material, but as a biog-
raphy the study is incomplete, and it is unlikely that a
complete critical biography will ever be written. The in-
formation is simply not available; Charlotte Mew was a reti-
cent individual who shied away from public notice and left
few records. Although no writer who publishes his work and
gains a following of ardent admirers can expect to enjoy
the privileges of the utterly private life, Charlotte Mew
came about as close as anyone possibly can in withholding
her life from public scrutiny.
While it may be a tribute to her personality, it is a source of frustration to a biographer that she veiled her inner life so successfully. Much of her dislike for the social world stemmed undoubtedly from an awareness that by virtue of her temperament she was alienated from people. In a poem entitled "Fame," she describes herself as a person who has received acclaim, and is thus brought into an uncomfortable social milieu. Here, for one who enjoys the simplicity of rural life, she is unable to cope with the sophisticated manners of the crowd:

Sometimes in the over-heated house, but not for long, Smirking and speaking rather loud, I see myself among the crowd, Where no one fits the singer to his song, Or sifts the unpainted from the painted faces Of the people who are always on my stair; They were not with me when I walked in heavenly places....

A bit later she reveals an ambivalence in her attitude toward public acclaim. Clearly, in the first lines, she notes her dissatisfaction with the public life and longs to return to a private existence. Yet, at the same time, she finds fame has a strong attraction: "Yet, to leave Fame, still with such eyes and that bright hair!/ God! If I might!" (ll. 16-17). Reluctant to turn her back on fame, she wishes to return to the security of isolation and to take with her some fragment from public life. Suddenly, the ambivalence is resolved when she discovers a dead lamb under a fence; she is shocked into the realization that death annuls all the acts of life:
A frail, dead, new-born lamb, ghostly and pitiful and /white,
A blot upon the night,
The moon's dropped child!
(11. 22-24)

Now she can reject fame and return to her own private world with the assurance that personal acclaim has no real value.

A similar preference for the private life is expressed in "Afternoon Tea." Here the tone is light, but the levity belies the serious intent. On a casual reading, the language appears almost infantile. Actually, though, there is a subtle irony in the lines:

Please you, excuse me, good five-o'clock people
I've lost my last hatful of words,
And my heart's in the wood up above the church steeple,
I'd rather have tea with the birds.

Gay Kate's stolen kisses, poor Barnaby's scars,
John's losses and Mary's gains,
Oh! what do they matter, my dears, to the stars
Or the glow-worms in the lanes!

I'd rather lie under the tall elm-trees,
With old rooks talking loud overhead,
To watch a red squirrel run over my knees,
Very still on my brackeny bed.

And wonder what feathers the wrens will be taking
For lining their nests next Spring;
Or why the tossed shadow of boughs in a great wind shaking
Is such a lovely thing.5

By implication, the speaker senses a sublimity in nature, or the private world. The images contrast nature's vitality with the enclosed, lifeless state of the social milieu. By using the language of condescension, the poet succeeds in mocking the ostentation of these smug, self-satisfied sophisticates. She refuses to get caught up in their world of

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trivia and longs for the solitude of a transcendent nature that is ignorant of man's spiritual sterility.

For a person who indicates such a distrust of humanity, it is little wonder that Charlotte Mew was a quiet, withdrawn person, preferring the stable solitude of isolation to the barren humbuggery of society. As one might expect, she showed a marked reserve in her conduct, a reserve that had a way of keeping strangers and casual acquaintances at a distance. According to Mrs. Monro, Mew maintained a self-deprecatory manner among strangers. In all probability, though, this mefiant behavior was only a defense to cover the warmth of her personality, for as she became acquainted with people, her defiance vanished. From accounts of those few individuals who were permitted to penetrate this shell of reserve, a friendship with Charlotte Mew was valued highly. One of those privileged persons was Siegfried Sassoon, who always acted as her champion. And Sydney Cockerell, a life-long friend, often praised her for her warmth and wit. Fully aware of her shy manner, "in congenial company," he noted, "she was the very best of talkers. Like other melancholy natures, she could keep a table convulsed with laughter, her wit being . . . sharp. . . ." Walter de la Mare, after meeting Mew at lunch one day, commented upon her remarkable ability to tell stories: "I remember all her talk, but when I try to repeat some of the stories she told me, somehow I lose all the essence. She
just knows humanity--one of the rarest things in the world." And Margaret Chick, a school acquaintance, said that even as a young school girl Charlotte Mew was a spirited person who enjoyed telling amusing stories because she liked to make people laugh. According to the reports of friends, Charlotte Mew would in all probability have agreed with Swift when he wrote Pope: "I hate and detest that animal called man, although I heartily love John, Peter, Thomas, and so forth. . . ."

Friends and acquaintances say that Mew, despite her misanthropic nature, was not a morose or cynical individual. As a matter of fact, she was generally vibrant and possessed a "tameless and relentless spirit." Consequently, she frequently felt fenced in by social codes, and in an act of rebellion, she departed boldly from the accustomed role imposed upon Victorian women. Refusing to play the docile, submissive female, Mew defiantly opposed social strictures. She took up the new habit of smoking cigarettes, as a means of calming her nerves. She even became adept at rolling her own cigarettes, which she smoked in a long holder. In addition, she bobbed her hair, and often went about the city unescorted, contrary to social decorum. For a time she moved in and out of a circle of friends who were associated with the stage. Furthermore, it has been reported that profanity was not an unknown language to her.

Vibrant, iconoclastic, misanthropic--these qualities
describe the complex personality of Charlotte Mew as she appeared to acquaintances. Although she exhibited signs of exerting her strong, independent nature, she also felt the restraints imposed by Victorian codes of behavior, orthodox codes from which she was never able to free herself entirely. Thus, behind those "animated bright-eyed facial expressions" lay taut nerves, strained by the duality of her temperament.12 Apparently, this duality developed quite early in her life, and probably was a reflection of her childhood experiences. As Mrs. Monro notes, Mew inherited her father's zest for living and her mother's sense of propriety.13

Growing up in a household marked by the father's extraversion and the mother's inhibitions, Charlotte Mew came to understand the frustrations and anxieties inherent in a dual personality. In her early years, Mew's father was noted for his "gaiety and extravagance." Born in 1832 in Newport, Isle of Wight, Frederick Mew grew up on a farm at a time when Newport was a popular vacation resort. In addition to the usual visitors who came to enjoy the mild summers and the sea coast, there was the royal family, who spent time at Osborne House, recently bought by Queen Victoria and Prince Albert. At this time, Mew's father, Henry Mew (1790-1859), was owner of the Bugle Hotel and overseer of Newfairlee Farm, where his children grew up. At about the age of sixteen, Frederick Mew moved into London, where he was articled to an architect. The usual training period
was approximately five or six years, and by 1856, he was working out of the office of Manning and Mew at 2 Great James Street, London. In this same year, he had a design on exhibit at the Royal Academy. By 1860, Mew had become an Associate of the Royal Institute of British Architects and had set up the firm of Kendall and Mew at 33 Brunswick Square. This business relationship was a fortunate one for Mew, for Henry Edward Kendall, Jr., was a prominent architect. Because he was highly regarded in his profession, Kendall was often employed to supervise the restoration of historic buildings. Among the many jobs he attended to were the restoration of Knebworth, then in the possession of Bulwer-Lytton, and the alterations carried out at Twickenham, Pope's river-side villa.

It was through this business venture that Mew met Kendall's daughter, Anna Maria, and three years later, in 1863, he married her in Saint George's Church, Bloomsbury. The young couple then set up house at 30 Doughty Street, Mecklenburgh Square. Here Anna Maria Kendall Mew began a new life, a life removed from the Victorian prosperity that was evident in the Kendall household. Actually, little is known about Mrs. Mew's early life, but from the social position her family maintained, it is fairly safe to assume that she grew up in a cultured family. Her brother, Edward, trained as an architect, but never pursued a career. Instead, he lived on a small trust left by his Grandfather.
Cobham. Also, Mrs. Mew's sister, Mary Leonora Kendall, was prominent in London social circles. She spent her winters in London and summers in Brighton. When in Paris, she often visited Princess Mathilde Bonaparte, at whose home she held a standing invitation to the Friday evening salons. On several occasions, Charlotte Mew accompanied her aunt to these gatherings. From the leisurely lives led by both the brother and sister, not to mention the professional and social esteem won by the father, it is possible to suggest that Mrs. Mew's childhood was passed in a fashionable and cultural environment.

To what extent this social milieu may have affected Mrs. Mew is not known. It is not difficult to imagine, however, that she brought with her to her home on Mecklenburgh Square a certain aura of prestige. But what is certain is that she believed she had married beneath her social position. To compensate for the loss of social prestige, she developed a perverse concern for appearances. She looked upon household economies with disdain and regarded domestic duties as the sole province of servants. Whenever financial problems occurred, she suffered from embarrassment, for somehow these reverses might reflect upon her name. This obstinate concern for social values would suggest that Mrs. Mew was certainly not an intellectual. In fact, two of Charlotte Mew's school acquaintances described Mrs. Mew as a "silly" person, and Mrs. Monro records that whenever she
visited the Mew family, "Ma," as the children called her, "was treated very much as if she were a naughty child, and . . . was always told to go up to bed."16

Nevertheless, Mrs. Mew brought to her new home a sense of decorum. Even though she was not fitted by her family background or emotional disposition to cope with the exigencies of a home and family,17 Mrs. Mew began her new role as a Victorian wife. During the next sixteen years she gave birth to seven children, only four of whom survived childhood. The first was Henry Herne (1865-1901), who showed signs of becoming a brilliant architect, but before his apprenticeship was complete, he suffered a mental collapse and was committed to an asylum. The second child, Frederick George Webb (1867), lived only two months. Then on November 15, 1869, Charlotte Mary was born. Two years later Richard Cobham (1871-1876) entered the household; then, in 1873, Caroline Frances Ann (1873-1927) began her life in the Mew nursery. Already Charlotte and Richard were enough to keep the nursery in an uproar. On Charlotte's sixth birthday, in 1875, another brother was born, David Kendall, later changed to Christopher Barnes. This last child, however, died four months later of convulsions. And in December of 1876, death again stalked the nursery; Richard, at the age of five, died of scarlet fever. Now only Henry, Charlotte, and Anne were left to play about the house. Not until three years later was the last child born. Freda
Kendall (1879-1958) came into the household when Charlotte was ten, and the occasion called for a celebration. Thus, with the assistance of six-year-old Anne, Charlotte wrote her first poem, "Christmas 1880."¹⁸ Like her brother Henry, though, Freda later showed signs of insanity and had to be committed to an asylum, where she remained until her death in 1958.¹⁹

Even though Charlotte had Freda, Henry, and Anne to play with during her childhood, she never forgot her memories of Richard and Daniel (or Christopher), nor was the memory of grief for a dead child ever to be erased from Mew's mind. This experience is recorded in a poem published in 1902; the date of composition, however, is unknown. In the poem simply called "Song," Mew gives expression to a child's acquaintance with death:

Oh! Sorrow, Sorrow, scarce I knew
   Your name when, shaking down the may
In sport, a little child, I grew
   Afraid to find you at my play.
I heard it ere I looked at you;
   You sang it softly as you came
Bringing your little boughs of yew
   To fling across my gayest game.

Oh! Sorrow, Sorrow, was I fair
   That when I decked me for a bride,
You met me stepping down the stair
   And led me from my lover's side?
Was I so dear you could not spare
   The maid to love, the child to play,
But coming always unaware,
   Must bid and beckon me away?

Oh! Sorrow, Sorrow, is my bed
   So wide and warm that you must lie
Upon it; toss your weary head
   And stir my slumber with your sigh?
I left my love at your behest,  
I waved your little boughs of yew,  
But, Sorrow, Sorrow, let me rest,  
For oh! I cannot sleep with you!  

Another memory which Mew was never to forget was that of her nurse, Miss Elizabeth Goodman, who left the Kendall household to follow Mrs. Mew to Mecklenburgh Square. As was customary in the nineteenth century, a household servant was part of any well-run house, and to Mrs. Mew, a servant was a necessity. Since a maid gave a household social standing, Mrs. Mew was quite concerned that her home should give the appearance of a wealthy establishment. Also according to custom, the nurse's authority in the nursery was absolute. In her role as nurse, Miss Goodman had the task of training and disciplining the children. It was her duty to prepare them for the evenings when they should join their parents downstairs, where they were expected to observe decorum without infringing upon their parents' activities. Furthermore, it was Nurse's duty to teach the children their first lessons in reading and writing, and while they labored over the written assignments, she might darn their socks or mend their clothes.

At any rate, the second-floor nursery had to fulfill all the children's needs. It became their home, their school, and their playground. Here, they played, studied, ate, and slept. Moreover, all activities were laid out according to a fixed schedule. Meals were served at eight,
twelve, and six. And at bedtime, the children had to say their prayers; nightly, they confessed their sins, which under Miss Goodman's tutelage meant that sins had to be explicitly enumerated, and asked God's forgiveness for their misdemeanors. This evangelical atmosphere, along with the rigid discipline evident in the nursery, was prevalent throughout the childhood of Charlotte Mew. Even though days in the nursery were trying, it was Sundays that really tested one's stamina. Often in the morning, the family attended services at the nearby Foundling Hospital, which was noted for its children's choir and where, in 1750, Handel presented _The Messiah_. The afternoons and evenings were observed with solemnity; no games, toys, or fairy-tales were permitted. For an exuberant child like Charlotte, the regimen of these days must have indeed been trying.

Just as life in the household nursery was marked by a strict adherence to discipline, so were the hours spent on the playground in Mecklenburgh Square. During the week whenever the Mew children went to the Square, Miss Goodman constantly reminded them that they were now before the public and must therefore be on their best behavior. Too, she warned them against vigorous games, for they might get dirty or sweaty. On one occasion a cousin from the Isle of Wight recalled a visit to London when she and Freda went to the Square to play. After an afternoon of hard play, they returned to the house, happy, disheveled, and sweaty;
whereupon, Nurse Goodman promptly punished both girls for having gone against the house rule of maintaining a proper sense of feminine gentility at all times. Brought up in this kind of repressive milieu, it is not surprising that the tameless Charlotte was a difficult girl to control. According to a cousin, Mary Mew (now Sister Mary Magdalen), Charlotte was a determined child who usually got whatever she wanted. A particular incident that occurred one summer in Newport when Charlotte was about ten indicates her unruly nature. On this occasion, Charlotte and Nurse Goodman had gone to Newfairlee Farm to spend several days. At the railroad station, they were met by Mary Mew and her mother. As the party started to leave for the farm, Charlotte charged ahead of the others, jumped into the carriage, and took her place alongside the driver. Astounded by the child's impudence, Nurse Goodman smarted Charlotte with her parasol and, at the same time, told her to take her proper place with the others. Charlotte, however, grabbed the parasol, broke it in two, and resumed her place beside the driver. Of course, as one might expect, she did not go unpunished for her behavior, for as soon as the party arrived at the farm, Charlotte was severely reprimanded.22

Despite the efforts to turn Charlotte into a well-disciplined young lady, she remained a law unto herself. As a student at Lucy Harrison's School for Girls in Gower Street, Mew constantly refused to submit to the Victorian
mould designed to produce submissive girls, all of whom, she thought, willingly substituted a fixed pattern of behavior for their individuality. Here at the school, Mew was introduced to English literature, music, art, and mathematics. True to her independent nature, she studied only those courses which interested her. As a result, she learned a great deal about English literature, virtually nothing about mathematics, and a little about art and music.23 As one schoolmate remembers her, Charlotte Mew was always an unpredictable girl. Unlike the other students, she wore her hair in a bob, and she was occasionally given to emotional displays, as happened on the day she learned of Miss Harrison's impending retirement. At the time Mew heard the news, she was practicing piano exercises; she jumped up and started to bang her head against the wall.

Nevertheless, despite Mew's quixotic emotional nature and her resistance to a formal education, Lucy Harrison imparted to her an enthusiasm for literature and exerted a considerable influence in developing Mew's literary inclinations. Also, Miss Harrison was called upon to help curb Mew's abounding spirit. At the request of Frederick Mew, who felt that the stability of the Harrison household would be a good influence upon his daughter, Miss Harrison took in Charlotte as a boarder. How effective this stabilizing force may have been cannot be determined, but at any rate, by the time Charlotte Mew left the school in Gower Street,
she was what one might call an accomplished young woman. She was adept at needlework,24 and she was an accomplished musician, playing both piano and organ.25

There are no records for the years following Mew's departure from the Harrison school, and not until the mid-nineties can the biographer pick up the threads of her life and literary career. Miss Davidow suggests that during this period Mew met Thomas Hardy through some mutual acquaintances and fell in love with him, an affection which he reciprocated. And according to Ford Madox Ford, Hardy was, in the early nineties, disillusioned with his marriage and suddenly set "himself at liberty for the rest of time to sport in woodlands with . . . the muses." To find distraction, he went into London, where he attended the theater and numerous dinner parties, and he also came into frequent contact with the Yellow Book coterie.26 But, in time, he again set "himself at liberty" and turned his attention to another woman. As Miss Davidow conjectures, Charlotte Mew was deeply affected by the romance and later used her poetry as a kind of confessional to express her emotional involvement. Furthermore, she suggests that Hardy, too, was able to turn his experience into an artistic creation. Miss Davidow believes Hardy molded Sue Bridehead in _Jude the Obscure_ (1895) in the image of Charlotte Mew. Undeniably, the two women are quite similar. On the rational plane, both profess to be emancipated Victorian women, but on the
emotional plane, neither is completely free from the evangelical discipline learned in childhood. Miss Davidow bases these contentions upon what seems to be insufficient circumstantial evidence. To account for the possible meeting of Hardy and Mew, she suggests that since both poets had mutual friends in London, they might have been brought together by these friends. There are no records that such an occurrence ever happened. To support the possibility of a liaison, however, she calls attention to an unhappy love affair that is described in the poems. Here, the speaker, who is, in all probability, Mew, tells how she has been deserted by her lover, who has abandoned her to pursue another woman. In order to identify this lover as Thomas Hardy, Miss Davidow interprets a number of allusions in the poems as veiled references to Hardy and Max Gate. Despite the possibility that the conclusions reached by Miss Davidow could be true, the evidence offered is too circumstantial to be convincing, especially when evidence to the contrary is readily available.

Accordingly, the validity of Miss Davidow's account of a Mew-Hardy relationship must be questioned, for the scholarship on Hardy offers no substantial evidence that might give credence to either of Miss Davidow's contentions: that Hardy had an affair with Mew or that Hardy created Sue Bridehead in the image of Mew. There is, however, no question that Hardy was in and about London in the early nineties,
or that he was aware of an incompatibility that existed between himself and his wife, who at this time was Emma Lavinia Gifford. Both his letters to his wife during this period and Mrs. Florence Hardy's account of his activities at this time bear ample testimony to the fact that Hardy was frequently in London for extended periods from 1890-1895. But there are no references to any involvement with another woman, nor any suggestions that Hardy desired such a relationship. Moreover, there is no question that Hardy's marital situation at this time was less than harmonious, and Mrs. Emma Hardy's correspondence lends support to the claim that an incompatibility existed. In addition, David Cecil states that Hardy was "at odds" with Emma, and he also suggests that this situation may account, in large part, for Hardy's indictment of British divorce laws in Jude the Obscure. Also, Carl Weber notes that Hardy became estranged from his wife because of her sexual reticence, her snobbish social attitudes, and her rigid moral code. But there is no indication that Hardy's dissatisfaction was so pronounced that he sought compensation through a liaison. In fact, the contention that Hardy had an affair with Charlotte Mew in the early nineties cannot be corroborated by existing scholarship.

Furthermore, whether or not Hardy was ever introduced to Mew at any time during this period in question cannot be substantiated, much less a liaison. There is no known data
relating to Hardy or to Mew that suggests that any kind of relationship occurred, at least, not before 1918, at which time it is certain that Mew visited Max Gate at Hardy's request.\textsuperscript{35} According to correspondence among Florence Hardy, Charlotte Mew, and Sydney Cockerell, this meeting in 1918 was the first encounter between Hardy and Mew, and as far as can be discerned, this particular meeting came about as the result of Hardy's enthusiasm for Mew's poetry. As an established man of letters, he wished to make the acquaintance of this relatively unknown but deserving poet in an effort to encourage her to develop further her talent. Consequently, if one accepts the evidence that Hardy did not know Charlotte Mew before 1918, then the claim that Mew was the prototype of Sue Bridehead must be ignored. Moreover, the traits exhibited by Sue Bridehead are not any more those of Mew than they are the characteristics of Mrs. Emma Hardy, or Bathesheba Everdene in \textit{Far From the Madding Crowd} (1874) or Grace Melbury in \textit{The Woodlanders} (1887), for all these women are alike, to use Weber's phrase, in their "fastidious aloofness," or as Hardy said of them, exclusive of Mew, they are women "who had more of Artemis than of Aphrodite in [their] constitution."\textsuperscript{36} Furthermore, these women are not unlike the "emancipated" woman that was beginning to emerge during the last quarter of the nineteenth century as a result of the feminist movement. This "new" woman, or "bachelor girl," as she was sometimes called, was not an
altogether unknown figure to Hardy since his characterizations of Everdene and Melbury bear a certain resemblance to this type woman and also since Mrs. Emma Hardy showed similar traits. In addition, Hardy, who had seen Hedda Gabler in 1893, had been impressed by Ibsen's independent woman. In fact, it is with the emancipated woman that critics tend to associate Sue Bridehead. In general, Hardy's biographers and literary critics view Sue Bridehead as an example of the emancipated woman transmuted into a literary heroine. In passing, though, it should be noted that David Cecil identifies Sue Bridehead with Ibsen's Rebecca West, and Richard Purdy suggests that Hardy drew upon his acquaintance with Mrs. Florence Henniker; however, neither critic offers substantial evidence since both depend solely upon the similarity of character traits. What is significant is that the name of Charlotte Mew is not mentioned in any connection with Hardy before 1918. Thus, again, the scholarship on Hardy fails to lend support for Miss Davidow's suggestion that Mew may have been the prototype for Sue Bridehead, and until less conjectural evidence can be brought to bear upon the case, Miss Davidow's thesis cannot be taken seriously.

Although Miss Davidow provides an interesting explanation for Mew's activities in the early nineties, nothing substantial can be documented with any degree of certainty before her association with the Yellow Book began in 1894. At this time, Charlotte Mew began her literary career as a
writer of fiction. In July, 1894, her short story "Passed" appeared in Yellow Book. Henry Harland, as editor of the journal, gladly accepted the story from Mew and referred to it as "a highly remarkable piece of literature; and, for that reason, I think it is destined to meet with scant recognition from the newspaper reviewers; I think it is destined to be violently abused; and the Yellow Book will be abused for printing it." Some time later Mew submitted a second story to Harland. After reading "The China Bowl," he wrote Mew: "The humor, the wit, the supreme emotion, the grasp of life, of life in its tragedy, its relentlessness, and the rich, beautiful 'cello-voice in which it is intoned . . . lift it above all praise." Although Harland's praise is somewhat extravagant, this story, set in Cornwall and written in the Cornish dialect, is probably Mew's best fictional work. The length of the tale, however, posed a serious problem for Harland, and he was forced to return the manuscript to Mew. It was then subsequently published in two installments in Temple Bar in 1899. Some time later, Mew re-wrote the story for the theater. Violet Vanbrugh was enraptured by the work and set out to produce it; however, her plans were never realized. From various remarks Mew made from time to time, it seems that she regarded this incident as one of the great disappointments of her life. Thereupon, she threw the manuscript into a drawer, and there it remained until her death, at which
time Mrs. Monro came into possession of the play. This version of "The China Bowl" has never been published, but in 1953, the merit of the play was finally recognized when the BBC presented it as a part of its West of England Home Service program.

During these first stages of her career, Mew continued to write short stories. Her work often appeared in Temple Bar, but she also published in The Englishwoman, The Nation, The Egoist, and The Chapbook, as well as other journals. As her publications increased in number, so did her acquaintances. From all indications, she moved in and out of various literary and theatrical circles about London. She was a frequent guest at Harland's Saturday evening gatherings, where numerous celebrities dropped in for "coffee and cigarettes. One might hear Kenneth Grahame, Max Beerbohm, Hubert Crackanthorpe, Evelyn Sharp, Netta Syrett, Ethel Colburn Mayne, the Marriott-Watsons, Victoria Cross, Charlotte Mew, George Moore, Richard Le Gallienne, Arthur Symons, occasionally Edmund Gosse, and Henry James." Whether or not Mew ever became acquainted with any of these people on more than a casual social basis is not known, but from letters to friends during these years, she gives indications that her social activities and contacts were numerous. During this same period, she also made frequent visits to Brighton and Paris, where her aunt, Mary Kendall, knew virtually everyone of importance, including Princess...
Mathilde Bonaparte. Even after her aunt's death in 1902, Mew continued to visit France often, especially Brittany, for which she felt a special attraction.45

Even while traveling about through France, Charlotte Mew was still writing short stories. From about 1900 to 1914, she devoted herself, for the most part, to prose. She published eleven short stories,46 almost all of which are on themes of death, unrequited love, or defeat. Also, there are several literary essays--"The Governess in Fiction" (1899), "The Poems of Emily Brontë" (1904), and "Mary Stuart in Fiction" (1912). There is a possibility that Mew may have written other critical essays, but if so, under an assumed name, as she sometimes did. If there are other essays, these have yet to be uncovered.47 In addition to the fiction and the critical essays, Mew wrote a number of personal essays. In this vein, Mew gives an account of her excursions through the French countryside, or she describes the sights and sounds of London, or she re-creates the excitement of an evening at Princess Mathilde Bonaparte's salon, or she reminisces about her childhood experiences during the reign of Nurse Goodman.

Sometime during this period of creative activity, Mew seems to have altered her outlook on life. Ever since childhood she had known the frustrations stemming from a divided psyche. Experiences which raised her to the zenith or pummeled her into an abyss were not uncommon, for hers
was an intense, passionate nature. She knew what it was to be pulled in two directions at once. As she states in "Madeleine in Church," she has experienced the heights of ecstasy and the depths of despair:

Oh! there was nothing, nothing that did not sweep to the high seat of laughing gods, and then blow down and beat my soul into the highway dust, as hoofs do the dropped roses of the street, I think my body was my soul, And when we are made thus Who shall control our hands, our eyes, the wandering passion of our feet.

This battle between her innate pagan sensuality and her spiritual gropings toward redemption is reflected again and again in her poems. Apparently, in her youth, she was able to suppress the Christian ideal of abnegation, but as she grew older, she found it increasingly more difficult to maintain this stance. Eventually, it was the pagan qualities which she came to suppress. Even though her spiritual aspirations controlled her responses to experience, behind that opaque masque of serenity she suffered from an inexorable desire to express her sensuous nature. Clearly, the forces of restraint imbued in childhood had triumphed over natural instinct, but the victory was never absolutely complete, for Mew fought the battle time and time again.

Just as this duality affected her emotional stability, it also affected her relationship with other people. For herself, she adhered to a strict moral code, but she was
fully aware of the difficulties of conducting a life in accordance with the strait and narrow path demanded by the "muscular Christianity" of the nineteenth-century evangelical spirit. Nevertheless, she was especially censorious of other people's conduct, particularly in regard to sex relationships, and as Mrs. Monro says, "absolutely cut out from her friendship anyone on whom a breath of scandal blew." Accordingly, when Mew learned of some remarks circulating about May Sinclair, with whom she had developed a warm friendship in 1913, she abruptly cut Miss Sinclair out of her life.

Although little is known about Mew's friendship with May Sinclair, the correspondence that remains is quite significant to the biographer, for from their exchange of letters, it becomes apparent that while Mew was making a reputation as a prose writer, she was also busily engaged in writing poetry. Also, from the letters, it is evident that the bulk of Mew's poetry was written before 1916. A number of the poems mentioned in the letters were written before 1913, and Mew's major poem, "Madeleine in Church," was begun sometime near the end of 1914 and completed early in 1915. After 1916, Mew wrote no more stories or essays, and few poems. In fact, few of the poems which appeared in the posthumous volume, The Rambling Sailor (1929), were written after 1916.

Up until the time Charlotte Mew published "The
Farmer's Bride" in *The Nation* in 1912, she had published only seven poems, presumably two of which appeared in *Yellow Book* in 1896 under the name Charles Catty. She had an established reputation as a prose writer when she embarked upon a new career as poet. This career, however, did not catch fire until after Alida Klemantaski used her influence to persuade Harold Monro to publish some of her poems. Mew, however, was reluctant to publish her poems separately and eventually succeeded in getting Monro to promise to issue a volume of poems. After several unexpected delays, Monro issued *The Farmer's Bride* (1916), a collection of seventeen poems. Although the book did not sell so well as Monro and Klemantaski had anticipated, the volume served to introduce Charlotte Mew to the public. Moreover, it succeeded in attracting to Mew a number of influential admirers, such as Sydney Cockerell and Siegfried Sassoon.

But the volume also came to the attention of another poet--Thomas Hardy, who expressed a desire to meet this new poet. Carrying out her husband's wishes, on September 24, 1918, Mrs. Florence Hardy extended Mew an invitation to Max Gate:

> I believe that you have heard from our friend Mr. Sydney Cockerell of the immense pleasure your poems have given my husband. It is long since I have known him so engrossed by a book, as by *The Farmer's Bride*. It now lies by him on his study table and I have read all the poems to him--some of them many times--and shall probably read them to him many more times.

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He is, as you know, not a young man and he cares to see but few people now-a-days, but he has expressed a wish to meet you if that should be possible.\textsuperscript{55}

Overwhelmed by the honor of such an invitation, Mew expressed her gratitude and accepted the offer; however, because of a bout with neuritis, Hardy asked Mew to postpone her visit until December. The long-awaited meeting finally occurred on December 4, 1918, and from all available correspondence and documents, this was Mew's first time to meet Hardy.\textsuperscript{56} Originally set up as a two-day visit, it quickly turned into a three-day visit, as Mrs. Hardy explained to Cockerell:

What a pathetic little creature! One longed to be kind to her and look after her. And she was not silent--talked all the time. We never have had anyone here who talked so much. . . . T. H. talked very kindly to her, and read her some of his poems. But she is not his type of woman at all. He prefers women like Mrs. Inglis--whom he declares he likes best of all my friends, and whose departure he is always lamenting (as I do). But poor Miss Mew is so pathetic. I made her stay two nights instead of one when I found how she liked being here--and would gladly have kept her a month had it been possible. She has genius, I think.\textsuperscript{57}

Almost three years after this visit to Max Gate, Charlotte Mew added eleven new poems to \textit{The Farmer's Bride} and put out a second edition. Like its predecessor, this volume received warm critical acclaim. In \textit{The Daily Herald}, Edith Sitwell wrote: "In each poem we find the record of some great and terrible emotional experience, some ardent spirituality, controlled and made understandable by intellect and by an infallible certainty for the right expression."\textsuperscript{58}
The reviews in the Southpost Guardian and The Sheffield Telegraph were also complimentary, and from America came the praises of Louis Untermeyer, who reviewed the American edition, which went under the title Saturday Market (1921).

To judge from the critical acclaim accorded both editions of The Farmer's Bride, one would assume that success came easily for Mew, a success that must have given her a great deal of self-satisfaction. But her sense of accomplishment was not so pronounced as one would expect, for no one in the family, except Anne, took her work seriously. Mew herself even took a certain dilettante outlook toward her poetry, and clearly, Mrs. Mew was not overjoyed at having a daughter with a literary career. Furthermore, Mew had few hours to devote to literary endeavors, for by now family problems required her undivided attention. In September, 1921, their house at 9 Gordon Street was condemned, and unable to finance the necessary repairs, they were forced to find new quarters. To satisfy Mrs. Mew, who now was a semi-invalid and required almost constant care, Charlotte and Anne had to locate rooms to which their mother "could be removed and which would not be so small as to cause her distress in giving up what had been quite a large house with spacious rooms." 59 Shortly after the notice of condemnation was served, the Mews moved to Delancey Street, Regent's Park. Here, they occupied the upper part of a house, and two-thirds of Charlotte's income went out in
rent, which she paid reluctantly, but then she had to con­cede to Mrs. Mew's idea that appearances must be maintained regardless of expense. At the time of the move, Anne was in poor health, and she subsequently collapsed from exhaus­tion. Then in December, 1922, Mrs. Mew fell and fractured her thigh, an injury from which she never recovered. On May 12, 1923, she died, at the age of eighty-six. Worn down by the burden of caring for her mother and Anne, Charlotte gave up the house, stored the furniture, and moved into Anne's studio in Fitzroy Square. Neither of the girls had ever considered living here, but now financial matters made it a necessity.

In the meantime, friends initiated a move to secure a pension on the Civil List for Charlotte Mew. With Sydney Cockerell and Siegfried Sassoon acting as agents, Thomas Hardy enlisted the aid of Walter de la Mare, and in the summer of 1923, an appeal was drawn up. Written by John Masefield and signed by Hardy and De la Mare, the petition was also supposed to be signed by Edmund Gosse, but as Sassoon wrote Cockerell, Gosse had some reservations: "My visit to Mr. Gosse was satisfactory & he will sign the pe­tition. I did not tell him that John Masefield is writing the petition; Gosse seemed a little afraid lest he might be asked to sign some (to him) extravagant praise of Miss Mew whose work he accepts with reservations. He strongly urged that the signatures be limited to 'the big four'
As the matter turned out, the recommendation went to Prime Minister Stanley Baldwin without Gosse's endorsement. Upon learning of the appeal through Sassoon, Mew expressed her amazement that "one should go to Downing Street on my account." Later that winter, Cockerell arranged a luncheon in order that Mew might meet her benefactors, notably Masefield and De la Mare. Masefield was, however, unable to attend, but De la Mare was present, and he later confessed to Cockerell that he found Mew a rare individual. Also present at the dinner were Anne Mew, Alida Monro, and Florence Hardy. Three weeks after this luncheon engagement, R. Gower, acting for the Prime Minister, informed Mew that the appeal had been granted and that she was to receive a stipend of £75 per annum.

Despite this new source of income, Charlotte Mew's way of life showed no noticeable changes. She continued to live in the studio with her sister, Anne, who worked for an antique dealer specializing in the restoration of seventeenth-century furniture and who showed an unusual skill at this kind of restoration. Here in the studio, though, their lives went on as usual. Occasionally, they visited friends around London, or made a sojourn to the Monros in Chichester or the Cockerells in Cambridge, or even an occasional trip to Newport to visit with relatives. By 1926 it was apparent that Anne was seriously ill, and
upon the advice of friends, she entered a nursing home where she could get the necessary medical attention. That was in December, 1926, and after a month in the home, she returned to the studio with the understanding that in a short time, she would be able to return to work. For the next six months, Charlotte assumed the role of nurse, and on June 18, 1927, Anne died of cancer. Charlotte was deeply affected by this loss, but in writing to the Cockerells, she seemed reconciled: "Yes, it was over at midnight on Saturday, and now she can never be old, or not properly taken care of, or alone." Yet in attending to the disposition of Anne's belongings, she endured great torment. As the weeks went on, her grief deepened, and she became inconsolable. She divided her time between the studio and Isleworth, where she stayed with an old school friend. By January, 1928, disconsolate and alone, she returned to London; then, on the sixteenth, she was called to Westminster Abbey to attend the funeral of Thomas Hardy, an experience which served only to deepen her already growing sense of despair.

A few weeks later, when Cockerell was going through Hardy's papers, he happened upon a copy of Mew's "Fin de Fête," which Hardy had copied by hand on the back of a piece of note paper bearing the letterhead of the Royal Society of Literature. Thinking that Mew might like to have this copy of the poem in Hardy's handwriting, Cockerell
sent it to her, and apparently, Mew regarded the slip of paper as a priceless possession. Not long after she received this memento, Mew fell into a state of depression, brought on perhaps by the recent deaths of her sister and literary benefactor. Mrs. Monro, who often saw Mew during this time, says that she was near a nervous collapse.

"She was unable to sleep," Mrs. Monro reports, "and so tortured herself with the idea that as she had not had a vein opened in Anne's wrist her sister might have been buried alive, that medical help had to be sought." Thereupon, Mew entered a nursing home on Beaumont Street; the surroundings offered no aid in alleviating her depression. Her bedroom looked out onto a brick wall, and the furnishings were shabby. Light was poor, and no sun or trees were within sight, only the grey bricks of the adjoining building. On one occasion when Mrs. Monro went to the home for a brief visit, Mew handed her the Hardy transcription of "Fin de Fête" and said she would like for Mrs. Monro to have it. The next morning, March 24, 1928, Charlotte Mew went out into the city, bought a bottle of lysol, and returned to the room, where she took her own life by drinking the disinfectant. In a final lucid moment, while doctors struggled to revive her, she pleaded with them: "Don't keep me, let me go." Her body was buried beside her sister, Anne, in Fortune Green Cemetery, Hampstead.

At her death, Charlotte Mew left an estate estimated
at £8,608. According to the dictates of her will, she re-
quested that the bulk of the estate be placed in trust for
Freda Mew, a patient at Whitecroft Hospital, Isle of Wight.
She also specified that a headstone, not to exceed £40,
should mark the site of her grave, as well as that of Anne
Mew. In addition, she included the inscription which was
then engraved upon the marker: "TO/ THE BELOVED MEMORY/ OF/
CAROLINE FRANCES ANNE MEW/ WHO DEPARTED THIS LIFE/ ON
JUNE 18th, 1927/ 'CAST DOWN THE SEED OF WEEPING AND ATTEND'/
HERE ALSO LIES HER SISTER/ CHARLOTTE MARY MEW/ WHO DEPARTED
THIS LIFE/ ON MARCH 24th, 1928." For one who vacillated
between the sensuality of an unbridled spirit and the as-
pirations of the soul, Charlotte Mew seems to have ended
her life in resolution.68 By including in the epitaph the
line from Dante's Purgatory (Canto XXXI), she perhaps wanted
to suggest that the duality of her nature had at long last
resolved itself into an affirmation that death brings a
peaceful dissolution.

Shortly after Mew's death, Mrs. Monro came into pos-
session of all the Mew papers. She had, however, expected
to find a great deal of unpublished material, for Mew had
often mentioned "stacks of MSS. salted away in trunks."69
Actually, little was found, and there may have been some
truth in a statement Mew once made to Mrs. Monro during an
afternoon tea. At that time, Mew was making spills, which
she used to light her cigarettes, and seeing some writing

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on one of these bits of paper, Mrs. Monro asked if this was her way of disposing of old letters, to which Mew replied: "I'm burning up my work. I don't know what else to do with it." Whether or not Mew was in reality destroying some of her work, no one knows. At any rate, what remained at her death was insufficient to be referred to as "stacks of MSS. salted away in trunks." And while sifting through this material, Mrs. Monro found a number of unpublished poems. She promptly undertook the task of editing these poems, and in 1929, issued posthumously The Rambling Sailor, as a final testimony to a poet whose work reflects the agonized struggles of a tortured restless spirit.

As John Freeman notes in his review of The Rambling Sailor, Charlotte Mew's poetry is of a confessional nature, and unless the reader holds some clues to the biography of the poet, he cannot recognize fully the personal nature of the confessions revealed in the poems. Admittedly, Mew's poetry is of a personal nature, in that the poems are a reflection of the emotions, the attitudes, the moral and spiritual crises experienced by the poet. The frustrations stemming from childhood, which were undoubtedly brought on by the conflict between Mew's vibrant personality and her mother's fastidious observance of social and religious codes of behavior, certainly were instrumental in creating the emotional and intellectual anxieties that later plagued
the poet. For reasons unknown, Mew, as an adult, became aware of the nature of her spirited personality; she recognized it as an aspect of an innate pagan sensuality, and she attempted to harness her passionate response to experience. To suppress this vital energy, Mew had to impose a rigid discipline upon herself. And yet, intellectually, she could not justify such a renunciation of life, for like many of her contemporaries, she was fully aware of the sterility of social forms; these offered her no solace. And she was also acutely aware of the loss of religious values, a loss that tormented many a poet during this period. With such an outlook, there was no logical reason why Mew should not, like Huysmans' Des Esseintes, indulge her hedonistic inclinations and "burn with a hard, gem-like flame," as Pater described the intense response to emotional experience. And yet, despite her rational and social views, Mew could never abandon completely the old orthodox assumptions, for to one who regarded herself as a person dispossessed from the world, the old assumptions offered security to an anxious mind and, at the same time, gave order to an unpredictable universe of process and flux. Thus, pulled in two directions at once, pulled toward spiritual aspirations on the one side and toward a pagan sensuality on the other side, Mew was tormented by the anxieties and frustrations inherent in a dual personality. Throughout her life she vacillated between pagan and evangelical stances, and
a resolution never seemed forthcoming. Near the end of her life, though, it seems that Mew had finally come to view death as the only force that could release her from the torment of her restless spirit.

Accordingly, these are the experiences that form the basis for Mew's poetry; these are the experiences she transmuted into art. How accurately the content of the poems mirrors Mew's life, of course, cannot be determined absolutely since the available biographical material is less than complete. Moreover, the poems cannot be taken literally as autobiographical. After all, art is not life; it only feeds on life and draws its sustenance from life. Even though autobiographical poems cannot be taken as a factual portrait of a poet, there is no question that Mew's poems reflect the struggles and emotions inherent in her own life. Her poems, however, may be read intelligently without any knowledge of her biography, but on the other hand, even an imperfect knowledge of the broad outline of Mew's life will make the reading of the poetry a more meaningful experience, and, in turn, the reader will become aware of Charlotte Mew's ability to transfigure a private agony into an enduring, universal art.
Notes


4Davidow, p. 49.


6Cockerell, p. 21.

7Letter of Walter de la Mare to Sydney Cockerell, December 11, 1923, in Best of Friends, p. 33.

8Davidow, p. 40.

9Ibid., p. 31.


12Ibid., p. 49.


14See "A Reminiscence of Princess Mathilde Bonaparte," Temple Bar, CXXIX (1904), 541-548.

15Davidow, pp. 1-21 passim.


18Davidow, pp. 1-3. The poem "Christmas 1880" is still in the possession of Mrs. Harold Monro.


20Charlotte Mew, "Song," Living Age, CCXXXIV (September 20, 1902), 768; also appeared in Temple Bar, CXXVI (1902), 230.


22Davidow, p. 30.

23Ibid., pp. 3-4.

24Ibid., pp. 36-40.


26Davidow, p. 85.

27Ibid., pp. 44-49.

28For further details, see Davidow, pp. 195-225.


30Florence Emily Hardy, The Later Years of Thomas Hardy 1892-1928 (New York, 1930), pp. 3-45.


34Ibid., pp. 154-175.

35See letter of Florence Hardy to Charlotte Mew, December 3, 1918, in Davidow, p. 329.


37Florence Hardy, pp. 20-21.
38 See Cecil, p. 120; also see Florence Hardy, p. 42.

39 Cecil, p. 189.


44 J. Lewis May, John Lane and the Nineties (London, 1936), p. 78.

45 Davidow, pp. 58-59, 67-75 passim.


47 Davidow, p. 257.


49 Davidow, p. 62.


51 Ibid., p. xv.

52 Davidow, p. 76.


54 Davidow, p. 66.

55 Ibid., p. 325.

56 Ibid., p. vii.
57 Ibid., p. 92.
58 Ibid., pp. 93-94.
60 Ibid., pp. ix, xi.
61 Letter of Siegfried Sassoon to Sydney Cockerell, July 7, 1923, in Best of Friends, p. 31.
62 Davidow, p. 100.
63 Ibid., pp. 101-103.
65 Davidow, pp. 104-107.
67 Ibid., pp. xi-xii.
68 Davidow, pp. 108-111.
70 Ibid.
71 John Freeman, "Charlotte Mew," The Bookman, LXXVI (June, 1929), 145.
CHAPTER IV

POETRY: A VIEW OF THE VOID

Abwärts wend' ich mich
Zu der heiligen, unaussprechlichen
Geheimnissvollen Nacht--
Fernab leigt die Welt,
Wie versenkt in eine tiefe Gruft,
Wie wüst und einsam ihre Stelle!

- Novalis

The passion and abnegation that tempered Charlotte Mew's life also matured her distinct personality and ultimately gave rise to her poetic impulse. Undoubtedly, the poems grew directly out of her personal experiences and served as an outlet for frustrated emotions. Accordingly, she transformed introspective meditations into intense lyrics of self-exploitation. So much of her inner turmoil is exposed in the anguished cries of her personae that it is virtually impossible to accept Mew's work as something other than a spiritual biography, despite the fact that the recorded events may not reflect accurately the experiences that form the basis for the emotions described in the poems. Because these poems give expression to a passionate response to experience, so passionate as to be voluptuous, at times, even erotic, Charlotte Mew was not widely read in her own day, and for that matter, she is still not read widely at
the present time. To the pre-World War I mind, Mew's poetry lacked the strong bite characteristic of the realistic verse of the first-generation Georgians; to the post-war mind, the intimacies revealed, the intensity of the passions felt, and the irregular verse patterns employed were disruptive elements that impinged upon the Neo-Georgian quest for idyllic serenity. Today, even, the poignancy of Mew's poetry disturbs some readers; they view the poems as too confessional in nature. Conditioned perhaps by Eliot and other waste land poets who disguise their emotions behind various ironic and intellectual masks, the contemporary reader has a tendency to shy away from any contact with unveiled emotion. The temperament of the Georgian period and also that of the present time only attest to Masefield's evaluation of Mew's work, when he wrote in 1923 that as a poet "writing poetry of a rare kind, she may not be widely known for many years."  

Today, Charlotte Mew is known primarily for a few poems which are occasionally anthologized, namely "The Farmer's Bride," which is indeed a representative work. From this single poem, a person becomes attuned to Mew's poetic style and the emotional tensions inherent in her work. Like "The Farmer's Bride," Mew's other poems are cast in a dramatic mode. Actually, this form is ideal for Mew's purposes; it gave her the freedom she needed to play out the internal conflicts that she felt impelled to
express in poetic form. Also, the dramatic lyric demands a less rigid stanzaic pattern, and in this way, Mew could make the cadence and movement of her lines compatible with the emotions which shape the foci of the poems. By thus setting herself free from the strictures of the traditional patterns and rhythms established by poets like Housman and Hardy, not to mention the Georgians, Charlotte Mew could give full vent to the crushing experiences that life imposed upon her. From a study of her poetry, one comes to see the world as she envisioned it—the emptiness, the sterility of institutions, the absence of meaningful values, the personal frustrations, the passionate longing for some sense of individual fulfillment.

Since these poems cannot be dated with any degree of accuracy, the development and growth of Mew's internal conflicts and her views of the world cannot be traced chronologically. Moreover, since she returned to various themes again and again, her vacillation would indicate that there was no steady progression in her thought. Furthermore, even in the few early poems which remain, those which can definitely be said to have been written in the 1890's, all the major themes are already fully developed, for she arrived at a view of the world very early in life and then attempted to come to terms with that world. Even though it may not be possible to state with precision the chronology of Charlotte Mew's poetic and philosophic development, it
is possible to define important concurrent attitudes revealed by her poetry.

To Mew, the world is a Void, that "unreal city" of Eliot where man encounters the gaze of hollow eyes and endures the meaningless rituals of tradition. The old solidarities of the Christian world are gone, it seems, for good. At least, if they are ever re-established, it will only be provisionally. As Mew envisions the universe in her work, she describes the Void as an immense empty space, silent and indifferent. It is a negative energy that infuses thought and emotion, and, consequently, the structure of established values collapses. As a philosophical concept, this astral Void is a featureless, timeless space that dwarfs and crushes the human actor ("The Narrow Door"). Once the astral, or cosmic, Void is perceived, another void develops internally. The individual experiences a kind of inner emptying, and he becomes a hollow shell, a vacant, paralyzed being ("On the Road to Kerity"). On other occasions, though, the Void is embraced with ecstasy. Instead of acting as a negative force, the Void becomes a desirable goal. By freeing himself from earthly associations, the individual can transcend the physical world and surrender his will to the infinite dimensions of the Void ("'There Shall Be No Night There'"). Thus, as Mew uses the Void in her poems, she broaches the silent cosmos at various times with ecstasy and at other times with despair.
Whatever attitude Mew takes toward the Void, she, nonetheless, searches for an undetermined element which will give her life value, an element which will serve as a new focal point by which experience can be evaluated and thus bring her Unity of Being. This quest for fulfillment, of harmony between body and soul, appears in several recurring motifs. At one point, the Unknown seems to be love, a love somewhat Platonic in concept ("The Fête"). At another, it seems to be the Christian mystical idea of unity with Christ ("Ne Me Tangito"), and yet at another point, this idealized quality seems inherent in nature ("Moorland Night"). None of these, though, provides the ultimate satisfaction for her internal longings, and the lure of fulfillment continues to tug at her soul, pulling her on toward union with an unknown element. Ultimately, the conflict is resolved by an embracing of death ("Not for That City").

Behind this driving impulse to end the anguish of a restless mind lies the vacancy of the Void, that featureless, timeless Nothing which removes meaning from man's existence. As the concept of the Void manifests itself in literature, it is a "series of possible equivalents for what we all know to be Nothing in nature--an indescribable sense that from the limited quota of our experience everything has been taken away." Ordinarily, when a concept of the Void enters into a poet's work, it is usually the result of
some subtraction, the disappearance or destruction of a cosmic force, such as God, or it may come about as the result of some personal disaster. At any rate, the presence of the Void sterilizes experience, and by manifesting itself as corrosive and corrupting, it diminishes traditional values. For Charlotte Mew, the Void was an ambivalent force; it could bring her exaltation, or it could bring despair. To live in a universe devoid of traditional moral schemes, Mew thought, reduced man to a "lot of carbon molecules responsive in the main to Newton's three laws of motion," and she succumbed with shuddering horror to the concept of man as a superfluous being at the mercy of an indifferent cosmic process.

This view of a cosmic Void is explained in "The Narrow Door." Mew imagines herself, irrelevant, standing outside the life process occurring about her. As she observes the scene, she feels a sense of inner cancellation, a kind of inner emptying, in which as a person, she recedes into an infinitesimal speck swamped by the immense indifference of the soulless, mechanized Void. At the outset, Mew simply describes the activities of children playing at shop before a narrow door that leads to a second-floor apartment:

The narrow door, the narrow door
On the three steps of which the café children play

Mostly at shop with pebbles from the shore,
It is always shut this narrow door
But open for a little while to-day.
And round it, each with pebbles in his hand,  
A silenced crowd the café children stand  
To see the long box jerking down the bend  
Of twisted stair; then set on end,  
Quite filling up the narrow door  
Till it comes out and does not go in any more.  

When the gay, carefree children playing at life fall silent,  
the focus of the poem shifts to the coffin being brought  
down the stairs. The uneasy rhythm of the line contributes  
to the already irreverent atmosphere, but the final indig­nity occurs when the deceased is brought through the door  
in an upright position, as though the coffin were only a  
piece of furniture being moved out of the house. The fi­nality of the present action and the indifferent manner in  
which it is performed are emphasized by a sudden change in  
the cadence of the last line of the stanza. But the con­cluding stanza points up even more poignantly the insig­nificance of man and the absence of values in man's estab­lished rituals:

    Along the quay you see it wind,  
    The slow black line. Someone pulls up the blind  
    Of the small window just above the narrow door--  
    "Tiens! que veux-tu acheter?" Renée cries,  
    "Mais, pour quat'sous, des oignons," Jean replies,  
    And one pays down with pebbles from the shore.

The long vowels of the second line in combination with the  
liquid "l's" contribute to make the image of the funeral  
procession seem unreal, almost dreamlike, as it passes out  
of the scene. Then life returns to normal; the disruptive  
element has gone. The window shade is raised, and the  
children return to their game, unaware that they are a part
of this panorama. They play at "buying and selling" and pay "down with pebbles," unaware that man also plays at insignificant games. But ultimately, man also "pays down with pebbles," his life, which is no more significant than a single pebble on the beach, and his games are no more meaningful than the children's game, where Jean can buy only onions; man, too, buys little more than "onions" during his lifetime. From this brief dramatic incident, Mew depicts the world as a place where all gestures and acts are nullified by death, which is a terminal act, for beyond death lies Nothing, or the Void.

Mew's awareness of the Void underlies almost all her poems. When played off against the vitality of youth and innocence, as in "The Narrow Door," the Void has a radical deflationary effect, and it becomes a backdrop against which reality is made tangible. It may be said, then, that the Void backlights the primary event by serving as a curtain against which earthly events can be evaluated. More important, though, it is a descriptive term for the "out there," or infinity. Another illustration of this double function of the Void appears in "The Road to Kerity." Here, Mew reverses the point of view by presenting the material through the eyes of a young couple. Apparently, the speaker is the young girl, who, in the security of her lover's arms, remembers the appearance of an old couple she passed on the road:
Do you remember the two old people we passed on the road to Kerity, Resting their sack on the stones, by the drenched wayside, Looking at us with their lightless eyes through the driving rain, and then out again To the rocks, and the long white line of tide; Frozen ghosts that were children once, husband and wife, father and mother, Looking at us with those frozen eyes; have you ever seen anything quite so chilled or so old?

But we--with our arms about each other, We did not feel the cold!10

Again, it is the absence of meaning that gives the poem its meaning. The primary event centers upon the warm, secure world of the young couple, whose presence is needed in order to witness, or to point at, something, namely the Void, which Mew is intent on giving no name or physical body. To carry out her purpose, Mew disturbs their serene world by introducing the memory of the old couple, who are symbolic of the Void. Although this old couple has been reduced to a state of penury by forces beyond their control, their status results from no specified cause; they make no plea for pathos; they are simply two enigmatic faces. Now, weary from their labor and soaked by the rain, they pause by the roadside for a moment, and with vacant eyes they look upon the young couple. But the image fails to register, and they then turn their gaze toward the immense vacancy beyond the rocks. As Mew uses the image of eyes here, it represents an inner void, the cause of which cannot be determined. By suggesting that a void lies within the couple, however, Mew is able to indicate that the Void is not only
a featureless, timeless space; but it is also within the confines of nature, within man himself. The old couple, once vibrant, sentient beings, the tissue of life, are now only "frozen ghosts" staring out of "frozen eyes." Their immobility and blank gaze echo the indifferent landscape, with its stolid rocks and "long white line of tide." On the other hand, the young couple appear unaware of the presence of the Void, or else they think that because of their love they can counteract the vacancy that is reflected in the eyes of the old couple. Despite their apparent naivete, the difference between the young couple living in nature and the old couple "dead" in nature is less than one might think. Through counterpoint, Mew plays off the warmth of the young couple against the frozen state of the old couple, who are a manifestation of the Void, both the inner void and the cosmic Void. By implication, then, the Void takes away meaning from all human activities, and thereby negates the warmth and security of the young couple's world, whether they realize it or not. In effect, Mew presents a philosophic point of view, and at the same time, she uses the Void as a backdrop against which reality, as she conceives it, is made tangible.

Accordingly, it is this concept of the Void which permeates Mew's world. This sterile vacancy is like a hound that follows man everywhere he goes; he is unable to escape it; it cancels the validity of his acts and nullifies
his emotional responses by depriving them of their customary connotations. This negative power, however, is a concomitant of a cosmic Void, but there are other kinds of voids. These hollows and vacancies develop in human circumstances quite independently of any disappearance or destruction of God. These voids appear, though, when some personal disaster, or traumatic experience cancels a particular relationship or value which the individual esteems highly. This kind of void is especially evident in those poems in which Mew describes the absence of love, or the death of love, in a human relationship, as she does in "Rooms." Here, Mew concentrates upon the expressive loneliness and isolation that results when love is subtracted from the relationship. The empty space that is created by the departure of love is then taken over by Nothing. The terrifying vacancy of this inner void, once present, renders all human endeavors meaningless. It is easy to feel the presence of such vacancy, but it is difficult to convey it through language. Mew, however, through various connotative values associated with rooms, creates an objective correlative for this oppressive sense of empty and sterile loneliness:

I remember rooms that have had their part
In the steady slowing down of the heart.
The room in Paris, the room at Geneva,
The little damp room with the seaweed smell,
And that ceaseless maddening sound of the tide--
Rooms where for good or ill--things died.
But there is the room where we (two) lie dead,  
Though every morning we seem to wake and might just as well seem to sleep again  
As we shall somewhere in the other quieter, dustier bed  
Out there in the sun--in the rain.11

The impersonal, indifferent quality associated with rooms becomes an objective equivalent for the vacancy and isolation felt during various crises, crises which stem, in one way or another, from the death of love. The dampness, the smell of seaweed, and the insistent pounding of the waves have all become associated with loneliness, and are sense impressions powerful enough to evoke the emotional state produced by an inner void. The stasis of the final scene, in its matter-of-fact presentation, recalls the stultified appearance of the old couple in "The Road to Kerity," but in "Rooms" the parallel between physical death and death-in-life, a result of the inner void, is made even more apparent, for Mew indicates that death-in-life is equivalent to the physical dissolution that occurs in that "room" hollowed out in the ground. Death, then, is viewed as an ultimate nullity of existence; the solitude, the sun, and rain all attest to the indifference of infinity, that immense emptiness of the Void. There is no terror, nor is there any sign of remorse or bitterness. Mew merely submits to the authenticity of the Void. And only with the immense vacancy of the Void as a backdrop can she evoke the sense of loneliness that comes when love dies.
Another instance of a void created by the subtraction of love occurs in "Péri en Mer," a modified English sonnet. This time, though, the absence of love is the result of a death at sea, and the girl, the persona who experiences the ensuing void, describes her years of silent agony:

One day the friends who stand about my bed
Will slowly turn from it to speak of me
Indulgently, as of the newly dead,
Not knowing how I perished by the sea,
That night in summer when the gulls topped white
The crowded masts cut black against the sky
Of fading rose--where suddenly the light
Of youth went out, and I, no longer I,
Climbed home, the homeless ghost I was to be.
Yet as I passed, they sped me up the heights--
Old seamen round the door of the Abri
De la Tempête. Even on quiet nights
So may some ship go down with all her lights
Beyond the sight of watchers on the quai!12

Again, despair and an immobility of spirit accompany the loss of love. There is a slight suggestion that an intense silence, a facade behind which the girl hides her emotions, is maintained because for some unspecified reason she cannot reveal her love or her grief. In any event, the imposed silence only intensifies the loneliness and the isolation that follow the loss of love. Although this poem attempts to convey the same emotion as that described in "Rooms," it fails to evoke the same response because it leans too heavily toward direct statement.

While Mew is aware of the presence of inner voids, at the same time she is also acutely cognizant of the void created by the absence of God from her world. Thus far, in
the poems discussed, Mew has depicted Nothing as a negative energy that corrupts experience. She never gives it a name, and its presence is only implied by the anguished cries of the personae. The presence of this intangible force, however, is felt deeply by those who experience the silence of the Void and those who experience the anguish and loneliness resulting from an inner void. Apparently, Charlotte Mew knew from personal experience the turmoil and frustrations caused by the disappearance or destruction of traditional values, and in her poetry she describes the appearance of the Void as a sudden, terrifying cessation of meaning. She senses the vacancy and emptiness of the cosmos, and she graphically notes the grotesque faces and hollow eyes. She sees the Void as a force that freezes the emotions and nullifies existence. It appears when love is removed from a human relationship, and it also appears when God recedes from the world. Up to this point, however, Mew has not specifically mentioned the disappearance of God, but in "The Fête" she states that religion is no longer a living force: "Mother of Christ, no one has seen your eyes: how can men pray/ Even unto you?" And again in "Le Sacré-Coeur," she speaks of the death of Christ: "'On ne peut pas toujours pleurer les morts," And this One--He has been dead so long!" "Requiescat" also comments upon the absence of God in the world, but the subject is approached in an indirect manner. At the outset, the
speaker addresses herself to Christ and then comments upon what is customarily taken to be the manifestation of God in nature:

Your birds that call from tree to tree
   Just overhead, and whirl and dart,
Your breeze fresh-blowing from the sea,
   And your sea singing on, Sweetheart.

Your salt scene on the thin sharp air
   Of this grey dawn's drowsy hours,
While on the grass shines everywhere
   The yellow starlight of your flowers.

At the road's end your strip of blue
   Beyond that line of naked trees--.16

Mew regards these scenes as signs of the presence of Christ in the world. "The little whirr of wings, the clear/ Gay notes, the wind, the golden bed/ Of the daffodil"17--these are the creations by which she remembers Christ. By implication, though, she suggests that Christ has forgotten her:

Strange that we should remember you
   As if you would remember these!
As if your spirit, swaying yet
   To the old passions, were not free
Of Spring's wild magic, and the fret
   Of the wilder wooing of the sea!

What threat of old imaginings,
   Half-haunted joy, enchanted pain,
Or dread of unfamiliar things
   Should ever trouble you again?18

But Christ's spirit is no longer attuned to the sensuous aspects of the world; His death and resurrection freed Him from such associations. Mew, however, responds to nature with an intense passion, and she would like to respond to Christ in the same manner. This desire is indicated in
her use of the word *Sweetheart*. Moreover, it is beyond her comprehension that Christ could ever become so detached from earthly existence that He no longer senses the "wild magic" of spring or the "wilder wooing of the sea." Furthermore, these are experiences Mew is not willing to give up; she is not willing to let go of the "half-haunted joy" or the "enchanted pain." Clearly, she reveals a decided preference for an earthly existence. If she must renounce sensuous pleasures to gain immortality, then she has no desire to follow Christ to eternity; instead, she wants Christ to return to her world, to give renewed meaning to her life. Accordingly, she openly laments the absence of Christ. But nowhere is He evident, and by virtue of His disappearance from the phenomenal world, she senses a disapproval of her actions; she feels guilty that she should be so attached to earthly things. Her concluding remark--"Strange if you should remember these/ As we, ah! God! remember you!"--notes the discrepancy between her intense passion and Christ's apathy. Undoubtedly, she feels her reaction to God's creations should correspond to God's reaction. Evidently, because Christ has transcended earthly passion, Mew feels that she too should forego passion. Consequently, her passionate nature is made to appear lustful. The inner void created by Christ's departure, then, diminishes her joy in nature by stripping it of spiritual values. This nullification of meaning may perhaps account for the
sarcasm implied in the title. Mew suggests that perhaps Christ can rest in peace, but by returning to His Father, He has shattered her relation with the earth. Such a note of bitterness seldom appears in Mew's poetry. It is not often that she assigns blame for the absence of values. Usually, she accepts the meaningless Void created by the loss of values as a matter of course.

Hence, in the poems discussed, Mew explicitly acknowledges the presence of the cosmic Void and its concomitant inner voids. In a number of other poems, she records the effect that a recognition of the Void may have upon an individual. Sometimes the persona appears rather apathetic, perhaps a result of the stultification produced by the sense of isolation which he feels ("The Sunlit House"). Occasionally, the anguish occurring from an awareness of the Void causes the individual to experience a psychic disorientation ("An Ending"). Generally, though, Mew concentrates upon the sense of isolation that the persona experiences. Thus, speaking through her various personae, Mew acknowledges the oppressive silence of vacancy. During these moments, she is cut off from any communication with sentient beings; she becomes an isolato, and the weight of loneliness and isolation presses deeply on her consciousness. From the perspective of an isolato, she views life from a distance. Detached from any active participation in life, she observes the workings of the Void. In "The Sunlit House,"
Mew, or her persona, stands outside the scene, acutely aware of the barrier that separates her from the world:

White through the gate it gleamed and slept
In shuttered sunshine: the parched garden flowers,
Their fallen petals from the beds unswept,
Like children unloved and ill-kept
Dreamed through the hours.
Two blue hydrangeas by the blistered door, burned brown.
Watched there and no one in the town
Cared to go past it night or day,
Though why this was they wouldn't say.
But I, the stranger, knew that I must stay,
Pace up the weed-grown paths and down,
Till one afternoon--there is just a doubt--
But I fancy I heard a tiny shout--
From an upper window a bird flew out--
And I went my way.19

This poem may well be a description of Mew's response to Henry Mew's confinement at Peckham Hospital, and his subsequent death in 1901. If so, the biographical element is of little concern; it serves only to provide a framework on which to hang the primary event—a depiction of the supreme loneliness, as well as the social and spiritual isolation, that accompanies the cessation of meaning induced by the Void. Again, Mew uses a landscape to suggest the vacancy of the Void. The sun becomes the agent by which the Void is made manifest. Its blazing, indifferent splendor bathes the scene in strong, white light, which is ominous and oppressive and vacant. In addition, the heat parches the flowers and blisters the door, turning the area into a wasteless desert; the flower petals cover the ground like "children unloved and ill-kept." By this comparison, Mew indicates that the objects in the scene are to be taken
emblematically. The ominous presence of strong light, the sleeping house, and the untended flowers are a reflection of man's relationship with the cosmic Void, an inverse representation of a benevolent deity. Despite the statement that she "must stay,/ Pace up the weed-grown paths and down," an escape from the sterility of the Void is suggested by the image of ascendance that appears in the concluding lines.

Although "The Sunlit House" illustrates amply the state of isolation that accompanies a recognition of the Void, the individual's emotional involvement is seldom expressed so stoically. More often, the person's reaction is characterized by anguished cries, and occasionally the individual suffers from a psychic disorientation, as does the speaker in "An Ending." This early, unpublished poem, presumably written in the 1890's, is significant for the treatment of the Void and Mew's handling of the dramatic monologue. The first stanza presents the expository material:

You know that road beside the sea,
   Walled by the wavin' wheat,
Which winds down to the little town,
   Wind-blown and gray and up the crooked street?
   We'd used to meet
Just at the top, and when the grass was trodden down
   'Twas by our feet.
   We'd used to stand
And watch the clouds like a great fleet
   Sail over sea and over land,
   And the gull's dart
Above our heads: and by the gate
   At the road's end, when et was late
And all the ships was showing lights on quiet nights,
   We'd used to part.20
Speaking in the West Country dialect, the narrator pours out his confession to an unknown bystander. Like Coleridge's mariner, he stops someone and forces the person to listen to his tale. Distraught over the loss of his loved one, he describes their trysts amid the tranquil setting of a seascape. The fields of yellow wheat, the fleecy clouds, and the soaring gulls all combine to produce an idyllic scene. And then at night, when the lights begin to appear on the ships, the lovers part. The sonority of the language and the undulating rhythms give the stanza a kind of nostalgic meditative quality, and cadence catches the balance between thought and feeling. It is not until the second stanza that the nature of the trysts becomes clear. The inference in the first line suggests an illicit love affair:

So, Sir, you think I've missed my way, 
There's nothing but the Judgment Seat--
But if I pray perhaps I may--what's that you say--
A golden street?

Give me the yellow wheat! 
Et edn't there we'm goin' to meet!
No, I'm not mazed, I make no doubt 
That if we don't my soul goes out
'Most like a candle in the everlasting dark.
And what's the odds? 'Twas just a spark
Alight for her.
I tell you, Sir,
That God He made et brave and plain,
Sin' He knows better than yon Book
What's in a look
You'd go to Hell to get again.21

Suddenly it becomes apparent that the narrator's conscience is hurting him; he feels the weight of his sin, the result of his disobedience to Christian moral codes. Yet, when the
listener urges repentance as a way of soothing his con-science and of preparing his soul for eternity, the narra-tor says he wants no part of those golden streets. He prefers the "yellow wheat." He prefers this life, and he approaches it with what seems to be complete abandon. He knows the penalties for his sin, but he also knows the ec-stasy in "a look/ You'd go to Hell to get again." After all, as he says, his soul will die anyway if he cannot be reunited with his love. So what has he to lose; what dif-ference does it make whether he loses his soul here or in an afterlife. If he repents and goes to eternity without her, his soul will surely die, and if he loses her here, his soul will die; it is all the same to him. She is the force that gives his life the only meaning that it has:

"'Twas just a spark/ Alight for her." But as he continues the confession, his anguish increases, and he loses control of his rational faculty:

Another hour? An hour to wait--!
I sim I'll meet her at the gate--
You know that road beside the sea--
The crooked street--the wavin' wheat--?
(What's that? A lamp! Et made me start--)
That's where our feet--we'd used to meet--on quiet nights--

My God! the ships es showing lights!--
We'd used--to part.22

This sudden disorientation indicates a severe psychic distur-bance. The narrator loses his sense of time and space and imagines he is waiting for the arrival of his love. His eyes scrutinize the panorama, but the texture of the scene
reveals only the emptiness of the Void. He turns to the gate, the road, the street, the wheat fields; only vacancy awaits him. Unaware of the time that has elapsed since the separation occurred, he is suddenly startled by a lamp, which now stands on the site where they used to meet; then, he notices the ship lights. He has missed his rendezvous. The last line perhaps signals a return to the present. This line, though, is ambiguous. If the concluding statement is intended to fulfill the function of the denouement, then the line is insufficient to carry that burden. But if the remark is a continuation of the narrator's psychic disturbance, then there is no denouement, and the poem cuts off at the height of the climax. From the content and structure of the poem, there are no indications as to how Mew wanted the last line interpreted. Perhaps she wanted to forego any sense of resolution, and thereby heighten the impact the Void has upon the narrator. Certainly, such a reading would make the poem more dramatic. In any event, the elliptical thought and the increasing mental disorientation dramatize the psychotic state produced by the presence of an inner void which is created when sacred objects are subtracted from an individual's experiences.

A similar situation is depicted in "Monsieur qui Passe." This time, instead of using a mask as she has done in "An Ending," Mew filters the material through a screen. She uses an observer who fails to comprehend the desperate
state of the prostitute he encounters on the quai Voltaire. After their eyes meet, she follows him to a "bench beside the kiosk on the quay." There, she begins to unburden her soul because she thinks she has recognized in his eyes a sympathetic soul. She feels that here at last is someone with whom she can communicate and thereby escape the loneliness and emptiness of her existence, that she can free herself from her alienated state. But monsieur is so locked in his own cell of isolation that her confession falls on inattentive ears:

God knows precisely what she said--
I left to her the twisted skein,
Though here and there I caught a thread,--
Something, at first, about "the lamps along the Seine,
And Paris, with that witching card of Spring
Kept up her sleeve,--why you could see
The trick done on these freezing winter nights!
While half the kisses of the Quay--
Youth, hope,--the whole enchanted string
Of dreams hung on the Seine's long line of lights."23

From the jumbled phrases he hears, it is evident that the girl has, with complete abandon, given in to her sensual nature. During the glaring light of day, however, she can control the pressure her senses exert upon her, but when Paris comes alive at night, she follows suit, only to be reminded of her folly once she "gets to bed." Then, she feels the shame and degradation of her life. But she has no anchor for her life, nothing that will sustain her, nothing that will end the inner void that plagues her:

"One speaks to Christ--one tries to catch His garment's
hem." She exposes her soul to monsieur, but his only response is one of amazement or perhaps embarrassment: "Then suddenly she stripped, the very skin/ Came off her soul,--
a mere girl clings/ Longer to some last rag, however thin,/ When she has shown you--well--all sorts of things." Her behavior repulses him. Finally, though, when the prostitute realizes that his eyes have deceived her, that they belie the inner void that is present within him also, she flees and carries with her another mortal wound. At this point, monsieur finally sees the girl's anguish, but he casually notes that she will end up "in some walled house upon a hill." There, at least, his eyes "won't play such havoc."

Then, he admits that he is attracted by her eyes; beneath the garish make-up, he notices a beauty: "But she had hair!--blood dipped in gold;/ ...Some sort of beauty once." This awareness, though, is shortlived, for he soon disdainfully dismisses her from his thoughts: "Pouah! These women and their nerves!/ God! but the night is cold!" Without realizing it, monsieur acknowledges his own isolated state and his own need to establish some kind of relationship with fellow beings in an effort to keep from succumbing to the meaninglessness of the Void. The negating force of the Void, however, is stronger, and monsieur remains locked in his own prison, unaware of his alienated state and devoid of sympathy. His isolated position corresponds to man's answer to the Thunder's command.
Dayadhvam in The Waste Land, and like Eliot's man in the waste land, monsieur and the prostitute are objective equivalents for the emotional sterility created by the presence of the Void.

In a number of other poems, however, Charlotte Mew's response to the Void is not always presented so dramatically or emotionally as it is in "Monsieur qui Passe" and "An Ending." Occasionally, she seems rather reserved, or, at least, she reveals an outward calm. Nevertheless, the Void has a decided effect upon her; it increases her capacity for sensuous experiences and exalts these experiences to such a degree that they have a correspondence with erotic experience. To attain this "elevating excitement of the Soul," as Poe writes, "we struggle by multiform combinations among the things and thoughts of Time, to attain a portion of that Loveliness whose very elements, perhaps, appertain to eternity alone[;] . . . we find ourselves melted to tears--we weep then--not . . . through excess of pleasure, but through a certain, petulant, impatient sorrow at our inability to grasp now, wholly, here on earth, at once and forever, those divine and rapturous joys, of which . . . we attain to but brief and indeterminate glimpses." 29 Thus, the transitory nature of earthly things has the effect of hardening and sharpening the values associated with sensuous experiences. Moreover, the intensity of the individual's passionate response has an undeniable relation to the
transcendent state inherent in erotic surrender. A description of this sensual response to transient things is found in the short poem "In the Fields":

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 old 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 the 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.

Here, Mew specifically indicates those objects which elevate her soul—the dancing shadows of leaves on the grass, the gold light of August shining on harvested grain. Both images are especially effective in contributing to the lush, serene quality that Mew seeks, and the heavy employment of the sibilant "s's" and "sh's," along with the liquid "l's," "m's," "n's," and "r's," in combination with the long vowels and the slow undulating rhythm creates a kind of transcendent solitude. These images, however, appear to be an earthly manifestation of the noumenon. In actuality, though, they have no essence, for behind them lies Nothing. Accordingly, then, Mew attaches greater meaning to the elation she feels. She goes on, however, to speculate upon the possibility of eternity. She leaps over the Void to a presumed transcendent state, "a heavenlier world than this."

Even here, she doubts that anything eternal could possibly
evokes the transport experienced at the sight of "home-flying rooks" or the "scent of hay," those transitory experiences of human existence. This view of eternity as a spiritual state devoid of passion may reflect Mew's evangelical orientation which regarded sensuality as a mortal sin. Yet, because of her recognition of the Void, these experiences are the only ones she is ever likely to know. She must, therefore, imbue these experiences with meaning as her desires are the only meaning she will ever have. In effect, the absence of meaning elevates sensuous experiences to a transcendental plane.

Normally, the Void creates a sterile atmosphere; it paralyzes man's will; it forces him into the role of an isolato; it reduces him to a defenseless creature at the mercy of an immense silent vacancy. It constricts and tortures man, and to this anguished state, man succumbs with cries of protest, or else quiet indignation. The Void, however, need not destroy the structure of the cosmos. It is not necessary that man sink into an abyss of despair. It is possible for man to approach the Void with exaltation. By purging himself of all earthly associations, he can annihilate the physical world around him and reshape it to his own desire. To make this process tangible, a poet usually follows the metaphoric description of transcendence employed in the Liebestod of Wagner's Tristan und Isolde (1865). Such a voluptuous abandonment, whether to love or
death or both, as in the Liebestod, is described in terms of erotic surrender. As the perception of the phenomenal world recedes from consciousness, the inner world expands into infinite dimensions. Accordingly, the lovers plunge into this illimitable void with ecstasy and surrender to it with orgiastic delight. Here, the mind frees itself completely from the bondage of traditional moral and ethical codes. The mind, however, does not actually escape the physical world; it only transcends it by transfiguring and interiorizing it. Thus, through the imagination, an individual can create his own reality and thereby embrace the Void with rapture.

To a certain extent, this transcendent erotic surrender is evident in Mew's response to sensuous experiences in "In the Fields" and "Requiescat," but the process is developed more fully in one of Mew's unpublished sonnets, "'There Shall Be No Night There': In the Fields." In the octave, the poet comments on love in the phenomenal world:

Across these wind-blown meadows I can see
The far off glimmer of the little town,
And feel the darkness slowly shutting down
To lock from day's long glare my soul and me.
Then through my blood the coming mystery
Of night steals to my heart and turns my feet
Toward that chamber in the lamp-lit street,
Where waits the pillow of thy breast and thee.

Because the lines describe love as a night-time ritual that must be hidden from the glaring light of day, there is a suggestion that the speaker is involved in an illicit love
affair, and the images of day and light connote a hostility toward the lovers and their love. The forceful verbs shut and lock emphasize the distinctions between the hostile day and the mysterious night. Once the light of day is shut out, the sensuality of evening becomes apparent in the play of lights in the town and in the awakening of the instinctual "blood consciousness," as Lawrence termed the irrational sexual impulse, that occurs in the narrator. The speaker then leaves the fields and goes into town to consummate his love. By implication, Mew suggests that the lovers are aware of social and moral strictures against their kind of relationship, but in their own minds, their love transcends all Christian connotations of good or bad; the mysterious, or irrational, nature of their love places them outside the world of thought and orthodox values. Their dissociation from the phenomenal world and the exclusiveness of their relationship project them into an infinite dimension, inaccessible to other earthly beings and earthly mores. This transcendent state is then compared to the phenomenal world in the concluding sestet:

'There shall be no night there!'--no curtained pane
To shroud love's speechlessness and loose thy hair
For kisses swift and sweet as falling rain.
No soft release of life--no evening prayer.
Nor shall we waking greet the dawn, aware
That with the darkness we may sleep again. 34

Although the quotation from the Book of Revelation 35 is a description of the transcendent city of New Jerusalem, Mew
uses the line to denote the apotheosis of her lovers. Thus, through the agency of night, which suggests the creative consciousness, the lovers have attained infinity, free of all concepts of time and space. There is no longer any need for a curtain of darkness to hide their "speechlessness," nor are there any restrictions placed upon their love. Here, they are united forever. They feel no shame or remorse, no need to justify their love to others; they are in perfect instinctual rapport, and they "simply sink into it, as into a dark, luxurious, naked infinity," as do Tristan and Isolde. Paradoxical as it is, they achieve self-fulfillment through self-annihilation, and by ecstatically embracing the Void, they, in effect, transfigure Nothing into Everything.

When a poem like "'There Shall Be No Night There'" is placed alongside "Monsieur qui Passe" or "The Road to Kerity," it becomes obvious that Mew vacillated between the Void as apotheosis and the Void as negation, between ecstasy and despair. In response to the Void, the individual who experiences the terror of vacancy may rebel against it with anguished cries, or he may simply appear apathetic, or he—may even become a grotesque, passive being as he succumbs to the nullification of values. But if there is a Void outside man and a void within man, as Mew's poetry indicates there is, then, to escape entrapment by these forces, one has great need for an imaginative mobility, and this Mew has.
Through an imaginative reshaping of the phenomenal world, she can transcend to a higher plane of experience and there ecstatically embrace the Void, for at this level, she is removed from time and space, and the ecstasy of the moment becomes eternal. In this manner, the attainment of the Void is an act of fulfillment, not a surrender to negation.

In any event, as Charlotte Mew uses the Void in her poetry, it fulfills two functions. It provides a means for explaining her philosophic views of the cosmos and man's relation to society and the universe, and it fulfills the role of a metaphor, through which Mew can convey extreme passion. By expanding the emotional element to gigantic proportions, in which the emotional response is compared to a transcendent erotic experience, Mew succeeds in indicating the intensity of her sensual nature. Why Mew chose to use the Void metaphorically, or why she perceived the presence of an astral Void cannot be determined with any degree of assurance. All that can be proposed with certainty is that something of value was subtracted from her world, perhaps a death in her immediate family, perhaps a guilt complex from some sexual indiscretion, or maybe the loss of religious faith. For whatever reason, the Void settled upon Mew's world and dominated it, and she spent her life seeking a means of escape, sometimes through human relationships, sometimes through a sensual rapport with nature, or through spiritual aspiration, and sometimes through a kind of rapturous dissolution at death.
Notes

1 Novalis' "Hymn to Night": "I turn away/ to the holy inexpressible/ mysterious Night--/ Far off lies the world,/ as if sunk in a deep abyss,/ how desolate and solitary its place!"

2 Davidow, p. 345.


4 Ibid., pp. 239-241.

5 Ibid., p. 13.

6 "The Narrow Door," Collected Poems, p. 27.

7 "Well, what do you want to buy?"

8 "But, for four pennies, onions."

9 "The Narrow Door," p. 27.

10 "The Road to Kerity," Collected Poems, p. 54.


12 "pêri en Mer," The Englishwoman, XX (November, 1913), 138.


14 "One cannot cry always for the dead."


17 Ibid., p. 22.

18 Ibid.


21 Ibid.
Although the argument cannot be supported with concrete evidence, Miss Davidow contends that an unhappy affair with Thomas Hardy served as the initial incident which gave shape to Mew's love poetry. Undeniably, the poems illustrate the psychic disturbance created by the loss of love. At the same time, they reveal an intense passion that cannot find expression. Certainly, the details of the poems are a transfiguration of autobiographical material. Either transfiguration was necessary to create art, or it was necessary to obscure the actual origin of the emotions described in the poems. It has also been suggested by Virginia Moore that the love portrayed in the poems is in actuality an inverted expression of a homosexual love thwarted by social and moral codes. This interpretation of Mew's poetry, however, cannot be substantiated by existing biographical data. Furthermore, this view can be regarded as nothing more than a suggested reading of the poems. (See Jeannette H. Foster, Sex Variant
Women in Literature: A Historical and Quantitative Survey (New York, 1956), p. 179. Also see Virginia Moore, The Life and Eager Death of Emily Brontë (London, 1936). It is in this book that Miss Moore says that Mew was definitely variant, but the unavailability of the work has made it impossible to find out what evidence she offers in support of her thesis.)
CHAPTER V

POETRY: A SEARCH FOR FULFILLMENT

Throughout the nineteenth century and the early twentieth century, the idea of the Void exerted a considerable influence upon modern poetry. Tennyson and Arnold confronted the enigmatic face of vacancy, and Yeats turned to the occult in an effort to re-shape reality to his own making. The Decadent poets attempted to counteract the Void through a cultivation of the senses, and the "Waste Landers," poets like Eliot, Pound, and Stevens, took an inordinate pride in the intellectual rigor with which they confirmed the presence of the Void. They tend to be artists of a long perspective; they see the Void as it affects humanity at large. During the decade of the Georgian period, few poems, outside of Eliot's "The Love Song of J. Alfred Prufrock," register an attempt to record the individual man's response to an awareness of the Void, to show from within the anguish and frustration of a restless mind, to reveal the yearning and loneliness of an isolated being. Unlike her contemporaries, Charlotte Mew elected to view the Void from within the mind of man. Rather than imagine the probable reactions of mankind or filter her thoughts through impersonal screens, Mew records the events as she
knew them from personal experience. Her sights are trained on the individual psyche, not the psyche of a nation or an age. Thus, through the voices of various personae, she presents the torment of her own soul, a soul tortured and torn by her awareness of the Void. And yet, despite the emotional and intellectual paralysis that occurs, Mew continues to search for some means to escape the alienation she experiences. Even though she is thwarted at every turn, she longs for an unknown force which will cancel the negative field of the Void and bring her Unity of Being.

This quest for a sense of fulfillment, or harmony between body and soul, runs throughout the body of Mew's poetry. In a frantic effort to flee the vacancy of the Void, she turns, at various times, to human relationships, to religious aspirations, and to nature, trusting that she may find a stabilizing force which can give meaningful values to phenomenal existence. None of these, though, provides the ultimate satisfaction for her internal longings, and the lure of fulfillment continues to tug at her soul, pulling her on to new endeavors. The principal expression of the intensity of this lure occurs in "The Call." Using a mask, Mew captures the powerful attraction of the Unknown, that mysterious element which will end her restlessness and mental anguish:

From our low seat beside the fire
Where we have dozed and dreamed and watched the glow
Or raked the ashes, stopping so
We scarcely saw the sun or rain
Above, or looked much higher
Then this same quiet red or burned-out fire,
To-night we heard a call,
A rattle on the window-pane,
A voice on the sharp air,
And felt a breath stirring our hair,
A flame within us: Something swift and tall
Swept in and out and that was all.
Was it a bright or a dark angel? Who can know?
It left no mark upon the snow,
But suddenly it snapped the chain,
Unbarred, flung wide the door
Which will not shut again;
And so we cannot sit here any more.
We must arise and go:
The world is cold without
And dark and hedged about
With mystery and enmity and doubt
But we must go
Though yet we do not know
Who called, or what marks we shall leave upon the snow.¹

Mew has here given expression to a feeling essentially inexpressible. To effect this sensation, she has converted an emotion into terms of a human experience. In the process, she employs a framework which at first seems irrelevant to the mental state depicted. Nevertheless, she achieves the sense of powerful emotion which she wants. The opening lines provide an objective description of a person's response to the Void. His somnambulistic state is indicative of the hollowness of his life; his gaze has seldom gone beyond the fire and ashes in the grate. He has "dozed and dreamed and watched" while life goes on outside. On this particular evening, though, he is shaken from his lethargy when an unknown force enters the house. Somewhat like a poltergeist, this invisible power rattles the windows, blows

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his hair, calls to him, and throws open the locked door. Actually, this mysterious force is an objectification of his instinctive yearning for self-fulfillment. Accordingly, then, what seems to be a brief drama with two principal actors, the protagonist and the strange force, is really an interior dialogue between the protagonist and his inner self. The conflict portrayed then is whether he should succumb to his rational faculty which supports the authenticity of the Void, or whether he should follow his emotional impulse which seeks to establish some lasting values. By thus depicting the inner conflict in a dramatic mode, Mew has made use of the Doppelgänger motif, in which a buried self desires expression but is frustrated by the superiority of the outer self. In this case, however, the inner self comes to the surface and dominates the outer self, for once the door is open, it "will not shut again." Thus, the individual commits himself to a course of action. He leaves the enclosed room, which is symbolic of his isolated state, and confronts the Void, "dark and hedged about/ With mystery and enmity and doubt." Uncertain of the course that lies ahead, he listens to the inner voice and pushes on. Uncertain about the mysterious stranger, whether it be "a bright or a dark angel," a positive or a negative force, the protagonist sets out on his quest, not knowing "what marks we shall leave on the snow." Perhaps he will achieve his goal and make a place for himself, or perhaps he will quietly

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disappear as will his footsteps when the snow melts. Whatever the outcome, Mew has depicted here the internal conflict of an individual torn between a personal need for aspiration and an intellectual acceptance of the Void. By thus dramatizing the conflict in terms of the Doppelgänger motif, Mew conveys the intensity of her desire to seek self-fulfillment despite the nihilistic philosophic stance urged by a recognition of the Void.

"The Forest Road" describes again this impelling force as it manifests itself in a young lover who feels the call of the forest road. Not finding in love the fulfillment which he yearns for, the lover is tormented by the mysterious, vague lure that nags at him:

The forest road,  
The infinite straight road stretching away  
World without end: the breathless road between the walls  
Of the black listening trees: the hushed, grey road  
Beyond the window . . .  
There is a shadow there that sings and calls. . . .

Troubled by the pain his departure will cause, he tells the girl, sleeping by his side, of his remorse at leaving her. He then notices the hair about her face and the way in which it "clings like the brown weed/ To drowned, delivered things, tossed by the tired sea/ Back to the beaches." Aware that in rejecting her he tosses her upon the beach a "drowned, delivered thing," he nonetheless must desert her, for his double—that inner self, that hidden Doppelgänger—will give him no peace:
What is this singing on the road
That makes all other music like the music in a dream--
Dumb to the dancing and the marching feet; you know, in dreams, you see
Old pipers playing that you cannot hear,
And ghostly drums that only seem to beat. This seems to climb:
Is it the music of a large place? It makes our room too small: it is like a stair,
A calling stair that climbs up to a smile you scarcely see,
Dim but so waited for; and you know what a smile is, how it calls. . . .
The road! the road!

There is a shadow there: I see my soul,
I hear my soul, singing among the trees!

Again, as in "The Call," the buried inner self comes to the surface. It will not permit the outer self to accept false security; it will break through the shell and reveal the discontentment that lies underneath. Evidently, the protagonist here has lulled himself into accepting the deception of love, but the inner voice prods him on toward his ultimate goal. In its persistence, the inner self resembles one of Francis Thompson's hounds of heaven, which pursues its prey until it is captured. In this poem, too, Mew's "hound" pushes the protagonist on until he finds the ultimate satisfaction that his soul craves. When the forest road beckons, he deserts the girl and goes into the "black listening trees," searching for the Unknown, that which will end the yearning of the inner self, that which will terminate the conflict between body and soul and thus bring the Unity of Being he longs for.

This intense yearning, Mew indicates, is the destiny
of man; he becomes aware of his incompleteness when he intel­ lectually accepts the authenticity of the Void. At that point, the rational faculty comes into conflict with the instinctual emotional longing for a harmonious relationship with the cosmos. Once the outer man is set off against the inner man, he can find no sense of contentment until the conflict is resolved. As long as that Doppelgänger tugs and nags at him, he cannot find rest. Furthermore, half-way measures will not silence the Doppelgänger. If at times, man thinks he has conquered his adversary, the illusion is soon destroyed, for by virtue of the Void, all endeavors are destined to ultimate failure. Nevertheless, he endures and continues the search. In this way, Mew never allows her characters to relax into pessimism. Perhaps unknown to them on the conscious level, their relentless plodding and grappling with despair stem from a fundamentally romantic idealism, a hope that somewhere a harmony of flesh and spirit is obtainable. Moreover, it is this agonized quest for harmony, or Unity of Being, that pervades Mew's poetry. It pulsates through the being of the characters; an innate emotional craving starts them on the endless search while weak faith refuses relaxation until either fulfillment is achieved or else until annihilation silences them. These personae are instilled with a desire to find, impose, or establish order and something akin to Pythagorean harmony upon a world offering no answers. Although this quest will
end in failure, the characters still undertake the search. Again and again, this quest appears in the poems. In a number of them, the ultimate satisfaction seems to be love, especially a love that parallels Plato's concept of twin souls, in which the individual cannot know contentment until he has found and been reunited with the complement to his soul.

In "The Fête" a sixteen-year-old boy pursues this course; he goes on the journey to find his sister soul. While at a boarding school, he hears, at night, the call, a call to life. Suddenly, he awakens to the sensuous earth, to love. For a moment he seems to possess "the Enchanted Thing":

To-night the splendour and the sting
Blows back and catches at your breath,
The smell of beasts, the smell of dust, the scent of all the roses in the world, the sea, the Spring,
The beat of drums, the pad of hoofs, music, the dream, the dream, the Enchanted Thing!4

Awakened to the rapture of life, the boy notes the shallow, empty people about him: the market women dozing in the sun, the hump-backed barber, and "Old Madame Michel in her three-wheeled chair."5 But he also sees the young girls from a boarding school. Their eyes reveal a lust for life, but the nuns transmit to the girls their own sterile patterns of existence:

And filing past to Vespers, two and two,
The demoiselles of the pensionnet
Towed like a ship through the harbour bar,
Safe into port, where le petit Jésus

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Perhaps makes nothing of the look they shot at you:
         Si, c'est défendu, mais que voulez-vous?6
It was the sun. The sunshine weaves
A pattern on dull stones: the sunshine leaves
 The portraiture of dreams upon the eyes
 Before it dies. . . .7

Thus, the dreams of the *demoiselles* are destined to be stifled by their cultural heritage; they will never feel
the ecstacy of the "Enchanted Thing," as does the boy.
Shortly, however, the boy comes to realize that rapture is short-lived; he becomes aware that the Dream is not for his possessing. He feels that union is imminent, but when the moment comes, the Dream vanishes:

The path into the wood was almost white,
The trees were very still and seemed to stare:
   Not far before your soul the Dream flits on,
   But when you touch it, it is gone
 And quite alone your soul stands there.8

Even though he comes to regard the Dream, or Enchanted Thing, as unattainable, he must go on longing for it, for he can never rest as long as fulfillment is denied him:

   Nothing will be the same again. . .
   There is something new in the old heavenly air of
   *Spring-*
   The smell of beasts, the smell of dust---*The Enchanted Thing!9*

The boy, who is typical of Mew's tragic characters, shows a strong sense of the necessity to find fulfillment if he is to survive the Void. Unfortunately, his inability to achieve the goal results in tragedy.

Another illustration of this powerful call to seek a personal fulfillment through love appears in "Absence."
Again, it is the voice of the Doppelgänger that speaks. Starved for love, the inner self desires union with its twin soul, but the sister soul is lodged within the body of an individual who deliberately erects a defense against the reunion of the two souls:

In sheltered beds, the heart of every rose
Serenely sleeps to-night. As shut as those
Your guarded heart; as safe as they from the beat, beat
Of hooves that tread dropped roses in the streets.¹⁰

Through the imagery here, Mew suggests that the man has retreated from love, that he is not willing to take a chance on being hurt; he shuns the dangerous privileges of love. The girl, however, wants to break through the intolerable steel of loneliness. Her internal longing is so great that regardless of the consequences, even if religious principles must be trampled upon, she will answer should he call:

But call, call, and though Christ stands
Still with scarred hands
Over my mouth, I must answer. So,
I will come--He shall let me go!¹¹

Thus, the inner self knows that the passion for fulfillment must be satisfied, but no means of expression is possible. Even so, the anxiety and anguish are not diminished. They remain fully operative, and the emotional tension remains unresolved.

Just as the passion is held in check here, so is the language of the poem. In order to indicate the intensity of emotions, a poet occasionally allows passion to run

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rampant, but Mew holds the emotion in check. She avoids the standard exaggerated exclamations and long-winded sighs, punctuated by numerous dashes and elliptical expressions. The casual manner, the regular iambic beat, and the soft images in the opening stanza create a light, melancholy tone:

Sometimes I know the way
You walk, up over the bay;
It is a wind from that far sea
That blows the fragrance of your hair to me.12

Also, the liquid consonants of the second stanza and the soft sounds of "s" and "z" contribute to the sense of quietness that pervades these opening stanzas:

Or in this garden when the breeze
   Touches my trees
To stir their dreaming shadows on the grass
   I see you pass.13

In the third stanza, though, there is a shift in tone; the air of serenity disappears, and wild passion comes to the surface. The comparison of love to the violence of a rain storm and the sudden change in cadence, through the use of stressed syllables, indicate the intensity of the emotion:

Turn never again
   On these eyes blind with a wild rain
Your eyes. . . .14

These lines are pregnant with emotion, an emotion ready to explode, but Mew restrains it. The following lines--"they were stars to me.--/ There are things stars may not see--"15
return to simple, direct statements. The casual beat and the introduction of an image that connotes distance and silence ("stars") check the emotional outburst. The final stanza also follows a similar pattern, though the emotion here is somewhat more restrained to begin with. The repetition of call creates a resurgence of powerful feeling, but again Mew returns to simple, direct statements, which suggest a sense of control, and in this manner, she prevents the emotion from running rampant. Just because the passion is held in check does not mean that the intensity of the emotion is lessened. Quite the contrary, by understating the emotional tension created by unrequited love, Mew gains an intensity of feeling that unbridled emotion cannot effect. Thus, through a language stripped bare, Mew captures the intensity of frustration, and at the same time, she reveals the deep-seated psychological need for self-fulfillment.

Although Mew, through her personae, expresses a need to satisfy internal yearnings for a harmonious relationship between flesh and soul, like the girl in "Absence," she shows her characters thwarted by forces beyond their control: family ties, psychological blocks, sociological factors, religious conflicts, emotional instability. Of these conflicts, the psychological factor is by far the strongest. It is the impelling force which draws the individual on in his search, and it is also the force which frequently blocks
ultimate satisfaction. This interplay between psychological forces can be seen in "My Heart Is Lame." In this brief monologue, a young girl feels that she has found her fulfillment in physical love. But the man still hears the call. Her love has not been able to still his yearning. Hoping to resolve her longing as well as his, she continues to follow him until she grows weary of his endeavors:

My heart is lame with running after yours so fast
Such a long way
Shall we walk slowly home, looking at all the things we passed
Perhaps to-day?

Home down the quiet evening roads under the quiet skies,
Not saying much,
You for a moment giving me your eyes
When you could not bear my touch.16

As they walk slowly home one evening, she expresses her desire to look at the common sights they have passed along the way. Because he pursues his journey relentlessly, he has let life pass him by; he has missed what life has to offer. She, however, longs for a home "down the quiet evening roads under the quiet skies," where she can rest at last, assured that she has attained her goal. But she notices that he can hardly bear her touch. She then makes a resolution: she cannot follow him any more; the pace is too great and the pursuit unrewarding:

But not to-morrow. This has taken all my breath;
Then, though you look the same,
There may be something lovelier in Love's face in death
As your heart sees it, running back the way we came;
My heart is lame.17
Contact for these two is not possible. Each must go his separate way, searching for fulfillment according to his own dictates. It is the psychological factor which drives the girl on her quest, and it is also the psychological factor which impels the man onward. But the two forces conflict; each person's desires are thwarted, and neither can attain the ultimate satisfaction he craves.

A similar situation occurs in "At the Convent Gate." This time the restraining force is not only psychological but also religious. A girl, having substituted physical love for spiritual love, now feels constrained to pursue a religious life. As she prepares to enter the convent, the young man pleads with her to re-consider:

"Why do you shrink away, and start and stare?
Life frowns to see you leaning at death's gate--
Not back, but on. Ah! sweet, it is too late:
You cannot cast these kisses from your hair.
Will God's cold breath blow kindly anywhere
Upon such burning gold? Oh! lips worn white
With waiting! Love will blossom in a night
And you shall wake to find roses there!"  

The girl shrinks from him, perhaps afraid of her own emotional response at his touch. She moves toward the gate, which to him is symbolic of the barren life that awaits her within. He regards her decision as a retreat from life, a denial of her own spirit. According to his understanding of her personality, he knows she will not find the fulfillment she seeks behind the convent walls, for a person of her sensuous nature can find solace only in the
arms of a lover; there, he asserts, she "shall wake to find
the roses." Faithful to her resolve, though, the girl re­
jects the physical world of love, that which seems so much
a part of her. To the lover's pleas she urges silence:

"Oh hush! He seems to stir, He lifts His Head.
He smiles. Look where He hangs against the sky-
He never smiled nor stirred, that God of pain
With tired eyes and limbs above my bed--
But loose me, this is death, I will not die--
Not while He smiles. Oh! Christ, Thine own again!"19

Undoubtedly, the girl's desire to pursue the religious life
is so great that she imagines that Christ smiles at her
from the crucifix in the courtyard. Here at the convent
she thinks that she can be close to Christ, and through her
devotion to the rigors of a secluded life, she will attain
the apotheosis she seeks. But only here at the convent is
such possible, for, at home, the crucifix over her bed hung
in silence. There, she was never aware of anything but
Christ's absence, and to fill that void, she perhaps turned
to earthly love. Now, though, safe within the gate, amid
the solemnity of the convent and the disciplines of a holy
community, she succumbs passionately to the redemptive power
of Christ. Once again the conflict in goals thwarts the
desires of these lovers. Clearly, the young man must con­
tinue his search, but for the time being the girl has
found fulfillment; however, there is every indication that
her endeavor is just another pose destined to end in
failure.
To find inner security and peace through spirituality, the girl in "At the Convent Gate" renounces the sensuous world. On the other hand, in "Fin de Fête," the attainment of an innocent, sensual world is the prime objective; however, that objective is denied by an adherence to social conventions, those "mind-forged manacles," as Blake termed them, of a suspicious society. The love depicted here is, from all appearances, outside the bonds of marriage:

Sweetheart, for such a day
One mustn't grudge the score;
Here, then, it's all to pay,
It's Good-night at the door.

Good-night and good dreams to you,--
Do you remember the picture-book thieves
Who left two children sleeping in a wood the long night through,
And how the birds came down and covered them with leaves?

So you and I should have slept,--But now,
Oh, what a lonely head!
With just the shadow of a waving bough
In the moonlight over your bed.20

As the young man indicates, the events of the day are incomplete since social restrictions force them to restrain their emotions, and when the day is over, they must part at the door. Although their love is free of all taints of lust, they cannot complete the love ritual. The young man, however, is not bitter about the situation; he is frustrated by it, but he is grateful that they at least have the day together. The purity of their love is then revealed in the idyllic image of the "picture-book thieves/
Who left two children sleeping in a wood the long night through,/ And how the birds came down and covered them with leaves." This is the manner in which they should sleep, but society will not permit it. Thus, the couple's love is thwarted by the suspicious minds of a society preoccupied with sin. This conflict with society recalls Blake's "The Garden of Love," where he sees "priests in black gowns . . . walking their rounds,/ And binding with briars my joys and desires." Mew, also, in a less direct manner, contends that the mandates of the clergy are a contravention to man's natural tendency toward love. Nevertheless, the couple, out of fear of reprisal, falls prey to these social codes; in turn, both are destined to loneliness, as is indicated by the image in the final lines. The sense of isolation and emptiness the girl experiences is made apparent when she exchanges her companion for "the shadow of a waving bough." Accordingly, society along with its "mind-forged manacles," becomes a culprit that prevents the lovers from escaping the Void.

Sometimes, however, the forces which stifle the impulse to seek fulfillment through love are neither social nor religious. Occasionally, family relationships withhold the attainment of the desired goal, as is evident in "The Quiet House." In this poem a girl awakens to love and to the sensuous world around her, but circumstances within the family thwart her quest, and in turn, she is subjected
to a life of ennui. Compelled to care for her father, whose spirit has been broken by a series of traumatic occurrences, her chance to silence the inner voice that gnaws at her soul is withdrawn. Thus, she must endure the boredom that settles about the house. The sensuous world, however, continues to excite her. Although she is resigned to the dull routine of the house, the emotion stirred by the outside world is not lessened:

The colours of the world have turned
To flame, the blue, the gold has burned
In what used to be such a leaden sky.
When you are burned quite through you die.21

She acknowledges the fact that she has been awakened to life, for the "leaden sky" has changed to brilliant colors that burn her through. Red, though, the symbol for intense passion, is the one color that stimulates every nerve in her body:

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 have spilt your life.22

The emotive quality evoked by these love images, the rose across the street and the "shafts of sunlight" as "ghosts of reddened swords," successfully conveys the intensity of the girl's desire to experience life. As she says, "I think that my soul is red/ Like the soul of a sword or a
scarlet flower." Indeed, her soul is red, but family circumstances make it impossible for her to give expression to her inner yearnings. Frustrated by the situation, she longs for an escape from the Void; the intolerable loneliness tears at her soul and intensifies the elation she feels at the sight of crimson. Because of the tension that tugs at her, she becomes an apostate and even comes to express a desire for death, for annihilation seems to be the only way she can resolve the internal conflict that destroys her.

While in "The Quiet House" Mew shows the search for fulfillment thwarted by family ties, in "The Pedlar" she comments upon another obstacle that may contribute to the anguished pleas of the alienated individual. In this instance, the chance for fulfillment is withdrawn because of emotional instability. As the situation develops, a pedlar comes upon an apparently older woman. Aware of the buried self that is pleading for release, he offers her a chance to permit her internal longings to find expression; he gives her an opportunity to escape the inner void that plagues her:

Lend me, a little while, the key
That locks your heavy heart, and I'll give you back--
Rarer than books and ribbons and beads bright to see,
This little Key of Dreams out of my pack.

The Road, the road, beyond men's bolted doors,
There shall I walk and you go free of me,
For yours lies North across the moors,
And mine South. To what sea?24
Aware that the woman has never experienced life, the pedlar offers her the Key of Dreams whereby she can overcome the vacancy of the Void and know the rapture that accompanies the attainment of self-fulfillment. He wants to lead her from the turbulence of life to the calm serenity which denotes Unity of Being:

How if we stopped and let our solemn selves go by,
While my gay ghost caught and kissed yours, as ghosts don't do,
And by the wayside this forgotten you and I
Sat, and were twenty-two?

Give me the key that locks your tired eyes,
And I will lend you this one from my pack,
Brighter than coloured beads and painted books that make men wise:
Take it. No, give it back!25

The pedlar knows that he offers her only momentary happiness, for her way "lies North across the moors" while his leads to the south. He feels, though, that even a momentary release from the Void may be sufficient to bring her out of her prison of isolation. It may even be sufficient to give her the stamina she needs to pursue a course whereby she can counteract the inner void. Just as he lends her the key, though, he suddenly demands its return. Almost too late to rectify his error, he comes to the realization that the double pain fostered by a love lost and the restoration of inner longings is more than she can bear. Fortunately, he recognizes her emotional instability in time. Had he brought her to life and then abandoned her, she would certainly have been permanently maimed by the
traumatic experience. In any event, the pedlar is compelled to leave her in her cell of loneliness. For her own mental stability, he must withhold the key that would unlock her hidden yearnings. As pathetic as this woman is, her situation only attests again to man's inability to free himself from the hold of the Void, for at every turn his search for fulfillment is thwarted by some agent either outside or inside himself.

Perhaps the most poignant testament to man's permanent state of loneliness occurs in "The Farmer's Bride." By far the best known of Mew's poems, "The Farmer's Bride" reveals the plight of a West Country farmer and his young bride, who is too emotionally immature to assume the role of a farmer's wife. The opening stanza describes the fateful event that precipitates the ensuing impasse that develops in their lives:

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.26

Admittedly, the farmer is not a romantic man; he is one who knows the exigencies of farm work, and during the harvesting season, he cannot ignore or shirk his duties in order to court a girl. His choice of the word chose suggests that the marriage may have, in large measure, been a
marriage of convenience; however, he is not devoid of affection for his wife. His sympathetic telling of their plight is clearly an indication of his love. Nevertheless, the wife is incapable of reciprocating his love, for as the man now realizes, she was too young to undertake the duties of a farmer's wife. And after the wedding ceremony, she turns afraid of her husband. Her fear of consummation is so great that her smile goes out like the sudden closing of a winter day; her fear is so pronounced that she loses all semblance of a woman. She takes on the appearance of the youth and innocence of a frightened fay, and eventually, her fear drives her away. But she is hunted down like a wild animal:

"Out 'mong the sheep, her be," they said,
'Should properly have been abed;
But sure enough she wasn'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.17

During the search, the farmer recalls the restless nights he has spent, aware that she lies beside him, staring into space. The two cannot communicate with each other, and neither knows how to break through the barrier that separates them. But on this particular evening, she has fled the house to find refuge out in the fields among the animals. The farmer compares her flight to that of a hare.
It may be a trite comparison, but it connotes the nervous tension, the fear, and the innocence that characterize the bride. Moreover, through the irregular positioning of spondaic and pyrrhic feet, the cadence of the lines describing the chase catches the swift movement of a hare and suggests the arduous labor of the men:

So over seven-acre field and up-along across the down
We chased her, flying like a hare
Before our lanterns.

Nonetheless, the girl is captured, taken home, and locked in a room. The hiatus in the last line, followed by the heavy accent on fast suggests that her room is sealed as securely as is a prison cell. This action, however, commands sympathy for the girl. She is treated as though she were insane; the men of the village fail to understand that her peculiar behavior stems not from a psychic disorder but from an emotional immaturity. The farmer, though, seems to understand, but he does not know what else to do. His description of her about the house after this incident shows the depth of his understanding and at the same time provides an insight into the bride's personality:

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.
Again, the rhythm of the lines is suggestive. The monotonous iambic beat parallels the inanimate, mechanical movements of the bride as she performs her household duties. Also, the imagery here reveals the natural affection that she possesses, and in addition, it indicates an ethereal quality, a quality which is developed more fully in the succeeding stanza:

Shy as a levert, 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?29

Up to this point, the farmer has remained in the background. Primarily, he has fulfilled the function of a narrator. He has described the series of events pertaining to his marriage; he has given a characterization of the bride, and he has revealed himself as a man of understanding and patience. But he has never revealed his own emotional involvement; he has not indicated how the situation affects him. There is, however, a hint of loneliness in his earlier line "I've hardly heard her speak at all," but the position of the statement keeps the emotion muted. Now with "But what to me?" the focus of the poem begins to shift toward the farmer. His loneliness as well as his awareness of his situation and of his wife's anxiety is pointed up in the description of the household at Christmas time: 

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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! 30

Here the long vowels and the abundant use of spondees combine to produce a somber picture of winter. The desolation and barrenness of the scene, the drab colors of winter and the short days suggest the end of a cycle; the year has had its time, and now the close is imminent. The only sign of fertility remaining appears in the red berries. In effect, it is a death image, but the death image of a season that has fulfilled its functions. Juxtaposed against the farmer's frustration, which results from the tension between the enforced continence and his recognition that his life will close without having attained fruition, this winter image heightens the meaninglessness of the farmer's life. The sense of barrenness is especially intense in the farmer's lament that he has no children to give his life a sense of completion: "What's Christmas-time without there be/ Some other in the house than we!" The vacancy of the house coincides with the inner void the farmer experiences. Although he has within grasp the unattainable solution to his inner longings, his quest for self-fulfillment is thwarted by his wife's emotional immaturity. Despite his understanding of the situation, he
remains a man torn by anguish and love, and the impassioned words of the concluding lines attest to the depth of his affection:

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!31

Without doubt he could force himself upon her and take the love he craves, and perhaps at times he thinks of it, but because of the love he feels for his wife, he is absolutely unwilling to do anything that might harm her. Furthermore, he knows that such an action would certainly push her into an irremediable psychotic state. Instead, unable to end the impasse, he endures the agony of a life deprived of love.

With the impasses Mew's protagonists confront, it appears that she regards loneliness as the permanent condition of man, that from birth he is doomed to isolation. Since in his effort to find love he is thwarted at every turn, it seems then that he must remain an incomplete being, that he can never attain the self-fulfillment required to silence the voice of his inner yearning, that he cannot escape the vacancy of the Void. Although this theme runs throughout Mew's poetry, there are a few instances in which the personae succeed in finding the ideal companion. At first they think that the quest is over, that the tugging of the call will cease. Unfortunately, their joy is

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short-lived, for they soon discover that love is not the solution. Once they realize that love provides only a momentary release from the Void, the old turmoil returns, and the search starts all over again, that is, after the initial pain of disillusionment subsides. In "I Have Been Through the Gates," the woman attains her goal, only to discover that it is insufficient to quell her longings. At the beginning, she comments upon the ecstasy of love. Using the metaphor of a city, Mew compares the woman's rapture to the splendor of ancient Jerusalem:

His heart, to me, was a place of palaces and pinnacles
and shining towers;
I saw it then as we see things in dreams,—I do not remember how long I slept;
I remember the trees, and high, white walls, and how the sun was always on the towers. . . .32

From this description, her love resembles the transcendent love depicted in "'There Shall Be No Night There.'" Also, the splendor of the city echoes the view of New Jerusalem in Revelation. The ecstasy of transcendence, however, does not last, and the woman returns to the reality of the phenomenal world. Something happened to destroy her love, and in the concluding lines, she expresses her bitterness and disappointment through an image of violent change:

The walls are standing to-day, and the gates: I have been through the gates, I have groped, I have crept back, back. There is dust in the streets, and blood; they are empty; darkness is over them;
His heart is a place with the lights gone out, forsaken by great winds and the heavenly rain, unclean and unswept,
Like the heart of the holy city, old, blind, beautiful Jerusalem,
Over which Christ wept.33

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Here, the imagery changes from the magnificence, the nobility, the summit of consummation to decay and violence. The deserted city stands in ruins. The streets are empty, and there are signs that strife has torn the city apart. An ominous darkness covers the desolation; the dust of decay and ruin and the blood of violence have not been washed away by "heavenly rain." Just as Christ wept over the ultimate havoc that was to reduce Jerusalem to ruins, the woman here weeps over the destruction of her city, which is the symbolic manifestation of her love. Through the vivid imagery, Mew has depicted the ecstasy and collapse of love, notably the love contained within the heart of the man. With the references to heart and gates, Mew makes it clear that this action is strictly an internal action, for all the beauty and destruction are kept within the gates, that is, inside the man's heart. At any rate, through these objective equivalents to inner action, Mew has in eight lines compressed the soul's quest for fulfillment, the attainment, and the eventual disillusionment.

By way of contrast, "Pécheresse" presents a different attitude toward the loss of love. The woman here does not resort to despair as does the woman in "I Have Been Through the Gates." Instead, she looks upon the incident without regret or remorse. She is the unrepentant sinner who regards her one night "warmed too well" worth the price. As she stands on the quay waiting for her lover
to return from a sea voyage, she recalls how she lost Paradise because of him:

... The foreign ships
Bring many a one of face and name
As strange as his, to buy our lips,
A gold piece for a scarlet shame
Like mine. But mine was not the same.

One night was ours, one short grey day
Of sudden sin, unshrived, untold.
He found me, and I lost the way
To Paradise for him. I sold
My soul for love and not for gold.

He bought my soul, but even so,
My face is all that he has seen,
His is the only face I know,
And in the dark church, like a screen,
It shuts God out; it comes between...

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.

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 [sic] Doué! the nights of Hell!34

Using the quintain here, with tetrameter lines of ababb, Mew follows a definite stanzaic pattern, a practice she seldom adheres to. In this instance, the form leans more toward the narrative poem, especially the ballad. There is little dependence upon suggestive imagery or emotional tension. Instead, Mew tends to develop the fabric of the poem through direct statement. Regardless of the form, though, the center of the poem is la pêcheresse, literally the sinner, though the word is also suggestive of her
profession. As Mew has developed the tale, this woman has known the bliss of fulfillment. Even though love has brought only a momentary release from the turbulence of living in the Void, she has the memory to cling to in times of crisis.

Unlike la pécheresse who remains unrepentant and considers her love worth damnation and unlike the protagonist of "I Have Been Through the Gates" who is embittered by her experience, the woman speaking in "Sea Love" comes to regard her loss with resignation and to accept transience as a matter of course:

Tide be runnin' the great world over: 'Twas 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.35

Again, love is a momentary experience. As the woman stands here on the beach, separated from the breast of her lover, she uses the sea as a yardstick to measure the duration of human love. Earlier she and her lover had declared their love as "everlastin' as the sea." Love, though, has deteriorated into a memory, but the tide still rolls in, pounding the beach as it has done for countless ages. The same fishes "sputter and swim," and the moonlight continues to shine on the wet sand. Nothing in nature has changed;
the sea has not lost its vigor or beauty. It shows no signs of age or wear. Only human love has withered. At the present time, that once sacred object, her lover, is no more to her than "the wind goin' over my hand." The restraint with which the woman discusses the loss of love might give the impression that she is rather apathetic toward the situation, but nothing could be farther from the truth. She feels deeply the absence of love and laments its passing, but she does not indulge in a sentimental display of overwrought emotions and impassioned outcries. Instead, she accepts with resignation the transitory nature of human relationships. As loneliness invades and occupies the void left by the departure of love, of course, she becomes melancholy. Moreover, the poem itself, in the images and rhythms, attests to this sense of melancholy which she experiences. The scene itself is the epitome of melancholy, or loneliness—a vacant beach bathed in moonlight, the roar of the sea, and the insistent lashing of the waves against the shore. Also, the predominantly anapestic rhythm of the first stanza, especially the third line—"Was thinkin' the toss and the call in the breast of the lover"—picks up the cadence of the waves beating on the beach. The rhythm then echoes the mood of the scene, but this balance between thought and rhythm is made even more effective in the second stanza. The liquid consonants, the long vowels, and the heavy use of stressed
syllables all combine to produce a melancholy atmosphere:

    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.

Accordingly, then, in "Sea Love" Mew has created a harmonious relationship between content and form, and theme does not take precedence over form, nor form over theme. Both elements combine to depict another of Mew's attitudes toward the loss of love.

The theme of "Sea Love" is picked up again in "Song: Love Love To-day." Reminiscent of Herrick's "To the Virgins, to Make Much of Time," the song is an explicit statement upon the transience of love:

    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
       Whither 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.36

Because of the archaic diction and the commonplace images, the song appears to be an imitation of seventeenth-century Cavalier songs. Although this song is little more than an airy trifle, Mew pursues the theme that love is a momentary
experience; love simply does not offer the permanent sense of fulfillment which the inner soul longs for.

According to the treatment of the theme of love in poems like "Song: Love Love To-day" and "The Farmer's Bride," Mew views the agonized quest for fulfillment through love as a search destined to fail. Either love is never attained because of insurmountable obstacles, such as psychological blocks, social codes, and religious principles, or else it offers only a provisional release from the loneliness and isolation created by an awareness of the Void. This ultimate failure to silence the inner voice of the Doppelgänger then leads Mew to take refuge in the idea that the attainment of serenity can be achieved only by the suppression of emotion. Thus, the speaker in "Saturday Market" resolves that suppression is the only way to maintain her sanity; her only recourse is to murder her heart:

Bury your heart in some deep green hollow
Or hide it up in a kind old tree;
Better still, give it the swallow
When she goes over the sea. 37

Just as the people go to Saturday market to buy and sell the commodities they need for maintaining their existence, the speaker also goes to the market square to trade her heart for the love she requires if she is to retain her sanity, but when she exposes her heart, when she pleads for someone to take it, for someone to return her
affection, the "grey gaffers and boys of twenty" are set to grinning:

In Saturday Market there's eggs a 'plenty
And dead-alive ducks with their legs tied down,
Grey old gaffers and boys of twenty--
Girls and the women of the town--
Pitchers and sugar-sticks, ribbons and laces,
Posies and whips and dicky-birds' seed,
Silver pieces and smiling faces,
In Saturday Market they've all they need.

What were you showing in Saturday Market
That set it grinning from end to end
Girls and gaffers and boys of twenty--?
Cover it close with your shawl, my friend--
Hasten you home with the laugh behind you,
Over the down--, out of sight,
Fasten your door, though no one will find you,
No one will look on a Market night.38

This action in the market square reveals the girl's frantic state. Like the prostitute in "Monsieur qui Passe," she exposes her naked soul to the glaring but uncomprehending eyes of the public. The humiliation then sends her home with the resolve to silence once and for all that troublesome nuisance called a heart, that insistent voice that causes her restlessness:

See, you, the shawl is wet, take out from under
The red dead thing--. In the white of the moon
On the flags does it stir again? Well, and no wonder!
Best make an end of it; bury it soon.
If there is blood on the hearth who'll know it?
Or blood on the stairs,
When a murder is over and done why show it?
In Saturday Market nobody cares.

Then lie you straight on your bed for a short, short weeping
And still, for a long, long rest,
There's never a one in the town so sure of sleeping
As you, in the house on the down with a hole in your breast.
Think no more of the swallow,
Forget, you, the sea,
Never again remember the deep green hollow
Or the top of the kind old tree!

Even though this action may end the restlessness of her spirit, it in turn gives her a vegetable life. To renounce so completely love and the sensuous experiences of the world is to destroy the tissue of life. At this point, however, it offers Mew a means of ending the yearning that gnaws at her soul. It does not, however, in any manner, counteract the negation of the Void.

Although a renunciation of love and sensuous experience might end the lure of the call, it is an action that would be virtually impossible for Mew to achieve. Because of her innate pagan sensuality, she could never dull her senses to the point that they would fail to respond to the stimuli acting upon them. For her, it seems the senses stimulate the emotions, and the emotions in turn become the dominant force in her life. If she could not respond to experience in a passionate manner, she could not continue to exist. She could perhaps renounce love, but only if she could replace it with something which could induce an elevation of soul. And this process is precisely the course she follows when the search for love fails to satisfy her longing for fulfillment. She abandons the pursuit of an idealized human relationship and turns to nature in the hope that here she can at last find an escape.
from the meaninglessness of existence. In her great desire to overcome the barrenness of the Void, she attributes to nature a transcendent power through which she can rise above the turbulence of her life. By transcending to a noumenal plane, she can end, for the moment, the restlessness of her spirit. Since she finds in nature a transcendent source that will terminate the lure of the call to fulfillment, Mew accepts a sacramental view of nature. Consequently, any defilement of nature, through any act of wilful destruction by man, diminishes her. In "The Trees Are Down" and "Domus Caedet Arborem," Mew views man's encroachment upon nature as a criminal and immoral act. In "Domus Caedet Arborem," which is almost an Imagistic poem, she cites the city, or rather man, as a culprit who willingly defiles the plane trees:

Ever since the great planes were murdered at the end of the gardens
The city, to me, at night has the look of a Spirit brooding crime;
As if the dark houses watching the trees from dark windows
Were simply biding their time.40

As Mew views the scene, the gardens, those cultivated manifestations of society, separate the territory of man's domain from the holy plane trees. But now that man has murdered the trees, the houses, at night, are ominous and foreboding; they give the appearance of an evil force, crouching, waiting to snare its prey. According to Mew's intentions, the houses then are symbolic of insensitive,
callous beings, who, having accepted the meaninglessness of
the Void, view nature with a utilitarian eye.

This reverence for nature and its concomitant dis­
regard for common man are developed more fully in "The
Trees Are Down." Based upon the same incident that gave
rise to "Domus Caedet Arborem," this poem describes the
actual cutting of the trees, the noisy activities of the
men, and their complete disregard for the sacred objects
they are destroying:

They are cutting down the great plane trees at the end
of the gardens.
For days there has been the grate of the saw, the swish
of branches as they fall,
The crash of trunks, the rustle of trodden leaves,
With the "Whoops" and the "Whoas," the loud common talk,
the loud common laughs of the men, above it all.41

Suddenly, the second stanza shifts to what at first seems an
irrelevant train of thought:

I remember one evening of a long past Spring
Turning in at a gate, getting out of a cart, and finding
a large dead rat in the mud of the drive.
I remember thinking: alive or dead, a rat was a god­
forsaken thing,
But at least, in May, that even a rat should be alive.42

This jarring image of the rat is, indirectly, a lament for
the destruction of the planes. Mew considers a rat "a
god-forsaken thing" whether it is "alive or dead," but even
in the spring, a rat should have the privilege of life.
Inversely, she means that since trees are the tissue of her
life, under no circumstances should they be cut down. As
she adds, for a moment the rat unmade the spring; it was a
stain upon the beauty of nature, and its dead body was in
violent contrast to the vigor of new growth; however, the
rat unmade the spring for only a moment. The trees, though,
are not god-forsaken things, and their loss will leave an
internal scar:

It is not for a moment the Spring is unmade to-day;
These were great trees, it was in them from root to stem:
When the men with the "Whoops" and the "Whoas" have
carted the whole of the whispering loveliness away
Half the Spring, for me, will have gone with them.
It is going now, and my heart has been struck with the
hearts of the planes;
Half my life it has beat with these, in the sun, in the

rain,

In the March wind, the May breeze,
In the great gales that came to them across the roofs
from great seas.
There was only a quiet rain when they were
dying;
They must have heard the sparrows flying,
And the small creeping creatures in the earth where
they were lying--
But I, all day, I heard an angel crying:
"Hurt not the trees."43

Just as the hearts of the planes have been felled, so has
Mew's heart been struck down. Having watched these trees
grow over the years, she feels diminished by their death.
To indicate that she regards the felling of the trees as an
immoral act, Mew employs a line from Revelation, in which
by Divine commandment, an angel cries: "Hurt not the earth,
neither the sea, nor the trees."44 The voice of the angel,
however, is heard only by Mew; the workmen's ears are stopped
to transcendent voices. Only to Mew are the trees sacred;
only to her are they an agency whereby she can find the ful-
fillment she desires.
To what extent nature fulfills the tug of Mew's inner voice, neither "The Trees Are Down" nor "Domus Caedet Arborem" gives any indication. In "Moorland Night," however, Mew attributes to nature the power to quell the inner turmoil and frustrations. Here, she finds in nature a sanctuary for her heart. Lying with her face against the wet moorland grass, her lips against the grass blades, the curlews' call overhead, the night wind in her hair, she has a sudden feeling of beatitude; her heart grows still, at last:

My eyes are shut against the grass--the moorland grass is wet--
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.

This is the end of all the roads...
The Thing is found and I am quiet with the earth.45

But again, as with the search for love, this sense of peace, this oneness with nature, is momentary:

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 to all these to give away;
Or, if I come and ask for it again,
Oh! then, to me.46
Again, the rapture of fulfillment is impermanent. The bliss of attainment is present, but it cannot remain. As Mew says, the supreme joy "cannot stay,/ Not now, not yet, not in a dying world." But at least in nature, she has found a sanctuary for her heart. She may have to leave it here with the "quiet earth," but she can return and reclaim it anytime she wishes. Moreover, as Mew relates the feelings of rapture that come when she reaches rapport with nature, the experience has an affinity with the transcendent erotic surrender described in the *Liebestod*. Unlike the transcendence of "'There Shall Be No Night There,'" however, the sense of fulfillment through nature provides only a temporary release from the Void.

By thus turning to nature, Mew attempts to satisfy the yearning of her inner voice, that voice which urges her to seek self-fulfillment. Aware that the Void makes all human endeavors meaningless, Mew nevertheless strives to create her own reality, to imbue human experiences with meaning. Thus, she turns to nature, and there she finds the elevation of soul and the emotional release needed to end the internal craving. The experience, however, is only provisional. Once Mew recognizes that a temporary transcendence will not silence the Doppelgänger residing within her, she encounters her old enemies--fear, loneliness, vacancy, alienation. The frustration and anxiety return; the inner voice stirs up her restless spirit.
Undaunted by failure, though, Mew attempts to find contentment through love also. Once again, her endeavors are thwarted by factors beyond her control. Emotional immaturity, family ties, religious principles, social codes of behavior, psychological problems--these obstacles confront her at every turn, and a harmonious relationship is never attained. Nonetheless, Mew steadfastly refuses to knuckle under to the idea that human existence is meaningless, that the only certainty is the assurance that the Void nullifies all experience.
Notes

1"The Call," Collected Poems, p. 78.
3Ibid., p. 51.
5Ibid., p. 28.
6Yes, it's forbidden, but what do you expect?
7"The Fête," p. 28.
8Ibid., p. 31.
9Ibid.
11Ibid.
12Ibid., p. 58.
13Ibid.
14Ibid., p. 59.
15Ibid.
17Ibid.
18"At the Convent Gate," Collected Poems, p. 21.
19Ibid.
22Ibid.
23Ibid., p. 49.

25Ibid.


27Ibid.

28Ibid., pp. 42-43.

29Ibid., p. 43.

30Ibid.

31Ibid.


33Ibid.


35"Sea Love," *Collected Poems*, p. 44.

36"Song: Love Love To-day," *Collected Poems*, p. 75.


38Ibid.

39Ibid., pp. 63-64.

40"Domus Caedet Arborem," *Collected Poems*, p. 75.


42Ibid.

43Ibid., p. 58.

44See Revelation 7:3.


46Ibid., pp. 59-60.
CHAPTER VI

POETRY: THE LOSS OF PARADISE

Although Mew fails to find the harmony of flesh and spirit, or the Unity of Being, in human relationships or in nature, the desire for self-fulfillment continues to pulsate through her being, and she tries to counteract the loneliness and vacancy that pervade her life. Concurrent with her explorations of human relationships and nature is a search for harmony through the supernatural, through religious aspiration. Since it is impossible to date the poems, the progression of Mew's thought cannot be ascertained with any certainty. It can, however, be assumed that the religious conflict was felt most acutely toward the end of her writing career. As Mrs. Monro notes, most of Mew's poems were written by 1916, and it is certain that "Madeleine in Church," which is Mew's ultimate statement upon spirituality, was not completed before 1915. In fact, May Sinclair says that Mew was working on "Madeleine in Church" in 1915, but when Mew completed the poem is uncertain. In any event, "Madeleine in Church" and a few other poems which are related in theme show Mew's attempt to end her agonized search for fulfillment through a religious experience. For her, this religious experience
could not be just an abstract philosophical consideration. Because she was passionately human and because she was brought up within the traditional Christian orientation, Mew focuses upon Christ as the embodiment of both man and God. To her, a spiritual relationship with Christ must be made tangible. It cannot be an abstract relationship. She must feel His presence; she must witness divinity in an anthropomorphic state. For Mew, then, Christ seemed to fulfill these qualifications. Because He once lived a human life, she turned to Him at various times in her need. He seemed to be the ideal companion, one who could give the satisfaction she craved, one who could offer the inner security, or serenity, that the old orthodox assumptions once gave to man's existence.

Mew's attitude toward Christ, however, is ambivalent. While she is attracted to Him as a savior from the Void, she also rejects Him since she cannot find the means by which she can establish the kind of bond she must have in order to quell her longing. Although Mew is never able to find fulfillment through spiritual love, or to realize in Christ the ideal companion for whom she yearns, in "Ne Me Tangito" she considers the possibility of fulfillment through spiritual love. Here, a prostitute, undoubtedly Mary Magdalene, though she is not positively identified, finds in Christ a sense of fulfillment that gives her life direction and meaning. At first, she looks upon Him with
scorn, and when she attempts to touch Him, He shies away, fearful of the touch:

Odd, You should fear the touch,  
The first that I was ever ready to let go,  
I, that have not cared much  
For any toy I could not break and throw  
To the four winds when I had done with it. You need  
not fear the touch,  
Blindest of all the things that I have cared for very much  
In the whole gay, unbearable, amazing show.  

Undoubtedly, the opening line alludes to the passage in St. John when Christ warns Magdalene not to touch Him as He has not yet ascended to His Father. Clearly, though, Mew is using the allusion in a different context, as is indicated by the headnote from St. Luke: "This man . . . would have known who and what manner of woman this is: for she is a sinner." These lines refer to the well-known incident of the sinful woman who washes Christ's feet with her tears and then wipes them with her hair. As a repentant sinner, she humbles herself before Christ, and He, in turn, absolves her of her sins. Although in St. Luke she is simply referred to as a sinful woman, traditionally she is taken to be Magdalene. Nevertheless, Mew's sinner is not so humble. although she has already decided to follow Christ and devote her life to His cause, she looks upon Him as a rather puny substitute for the virile men she is forsaking. She is even scornful of Him. At one point, she calls Him "dull heart," and there is mockery in her voice when she speaks of Christ's fear of her touch. Strangely enough, it is the
first time that the cynical Magdalene has ever cared to show any sign of affection for anyone. Ordinarily, she cares for nothing that she cannot "break and throw/ To the four winds when I have done with it." But now, in this carnival side show called life, she has found something that truly appeals to her, something that sees the shadow of sin that lies behind the paint, something that is even repulsed by her sinful ways:

True--for a moment--no, dull heart, you were too small, Thinking to hide the ugly doubt behind that hurried puzzled little smile.
Only the shade, was it, you saw? but still the shade of something vile. . . .8

When the prostitute realizes that Christ's reaction to her presence is one of revulsion, she decides to tell Him of her dream, a dream in which He came to her in the night and raped her:

So I will tell you this. Last night, in sleep, Walking through April fields I heard the far-off bleat of sheep And from the trees about the farm, not very high, A flight of pigeons fluttered up into an early evening mackerel sky. Someone stood by and it was you: About us both a great wind blew. My breast was bared But sheltered by my hair I found you, suddenly, lying there, Tugging with tiny fingers at my heart, no more afraid. . . .9

As it should be, the dream is marked by the use of sensual detail. The sensuous setting in the April fields, with the lonely sound of sheep in the distance and the red twilight sky, gives way to the wild rapture of erotic surrender.
To the sinner, or Magdalene, this experience brings to an end the long search for self-fulfillment, for she finds in Christ the ideal love that can give her life a sense of completion, as she reveals in the concluding lines:

The weakest thing, the most divine
That ever yet was mine,
Something that I had strangely made,
So then it seemed--
The child for which I had not looked or ever cared,
Of whom, before, I had never dreamed.10

The image of the child as it is used here is an image that connotes fulfillment. Thus, by giving herself to Christ, the prostitute attains the inner security that comes when sister souls are joined together. Although Mew develops the poem in terms of sexual union, she is not attempting to suggest that Christ literally raped Magdalene. Instead, Mew is using the metaphor of erotic surrender symbolically. In this manner, she can suggest the ecstasy, the harmony, the Unity of Being, that accompany an acceptance of a spiritual bond with Christ. In any event, for this woman, the Void has been negated; she has found the ideal companion through spiritual love, a love which silences for once and all the inner voice of the Doppelgänger.

From the tenor of Mew's poetry, the attainment of fulfillment in "Ne Me Tangito" is exceptional; failure to establish any meaningful relationship is the general rule. As Mew interprets the incident, though, the prostitute's achievement has been easily attained; she has few obstacles...
to overcome. All she has to do is transfigure her passionate longing for physical love into a passionate acceptance of spiritual love. After all, Christ is a part of her world; "here, He walks the streets and speaks to the people. He is tangible, and she has no difficulty in perceiving His presence. On the other hand, contemporary man is aware only of Christ's absence. He cannot sense His presence, or detect any manifestation of His Being in the phenomenal world. For him, fulfillment through spiritual love is virtually unattainable. And yet, the longing for a spiritual bond with Christ is still present, and man continually laments his inability to establish a meaningful relationship which could end his yearning.

Working, then, within the framework of contemporary society, Mew traces this search for a spiritual relationship with Christ in "Le Sacré-Coeur." Here, une jolie fille à vendre strolls about Montmartre near the Basilique du Sacré-Coeur, the "crowded lights" of Paris glowing below. She thinks of the Man who bought her first, who died of an "immortal smart," who, while she feasts and drinks, calls to her of His thirst, but her impassioned cry falls dead upon the silence of the cosmos:

It is dark up here on the heights,  
Between the dome and the stars it is quiet too,  
While down there under the crowded lights  
Flares the importunate face of you,  
Dear Paris of the hot white hands, the scarlet lips, the scented hair,  
Une jolie fille à vendre, très cher;
A thing of gaiety, a thing of sorrow,
Bought to-night, possessed, and tossed
Back to the mart again to-morrow,
Worth and over, what you cost;
While half your charm is that you are,
Withal, like some unpurchaseable star,
So old, so young and infinite and lost.12

From her perspective on the heights of Montmartre, the protagonist, a prostitute, sees before her the two opposing forces that tug at her soul. On one side is the Basilique du Sacré-Coeur, the symbol of her spiritual aspirations; below is the sensuous city of Paris, the symbol of her sensuality. As she meditates upon her situation, the darkness of vacancy surrounds her, and even the infinite space between the dome of Sacré-Coeur and the stars is silent. Aware of the emptiness of space, she is deeply affected by the absence of Christ. With the glare of brilliant lights below and the silence from above, it is difficult for her to regard the lure of the call to spiritual aspiration. Indeed, the sensuous city appeals to her far more strongly. As the woman describes Paris, she compares the city to a tinsel whore, "une jolie fille à vendre, très cher." The painted lips, the perfumed hair, the sensual hands—these attest to the vacancy that lies underneath the gaudy, superficial surface. And yet, like a superannuated madame, the city has its charm, "so old, so young and infinite and lost." By implication, this description of Paris also applies to the protagonist, for like the great sensuous city, she too is "bought to-night, possessed, and tossed/
Back to the mart again to-morrow." But the sensuous world offers only a provisional escape, and eventually, her inner voice will yearn again for a security that only spiritual aspiration can bring. Once more, then, the woman returns to her lament over the absence of Christ, her Lover:

It is dark on the dome-capped hill,  
Serenely dark, divinely still,  
Yet here is the Man who bought you first  
Dying of his immortal smart,  
Your Lover, the King with the broken heart,  
Who while you, feasting, drink your fill,  
Pass round the cup  
Not looking up,  
Calls down to you, "I thirst."

Even though the woman is surrounded by the darkness of vacancy, Christ, who died for the atonement of her sins, continues to call to her, but since she senses only His silence, she fails to respond to His pleas. After all, how can she acknowledge Him if she cannot perceive His presence:

"A King with a broken heart! Mon Dieu!  
One breaks so many, cela peut se croire,  
To remember all c'est la mer à boire,  
And the first, mais comme c'est vieux.  
Perhaps there is still some keepsake--or  
One has possibly sold it for a song:  
On ne peut toujours pleurer les morts,  
And this One--He has been dead so long!"

As the woman observes here, her life, devoted to sensuality, breaks Christ's heart, but then, she has broken so many hearts she cannot remember the first one. In any event, she cannot cry always for the dead; after all, Christ ascended two thousand years ago. Moreover, since His departure, the world has known only silence; how can she, then,
find in Him the spiritual love she seeks. Thus, unable to sense the presence of Christ, the prostitute's quest for fulfillment ends in failure, and she remains trapped in the Void. Unable to escape the vacancy and the isolation, she has nothing to turn to but her "Dear Paris of the hot white hands," the old world of pagan sensuality which cannot assuage the inner longing that only the old orthodox assumptions can satisfy.

The emotional tensions which plague the prostitute in "Le Sacré-Coeur" occur again in "Madeleine in Church," the longest of Mew's dramatic monologues and, as Louis Untermeyer, in 1921, called it, "one of the few 'great' poems of our day--I am tempted to write after due deliberation and a fifth re-reading, that it is among the finest poems published in the last forty years." As a study in loneliness, the poem shows Mew grappling with the problems of the Void. Organized according to an association of ideas, it is the passionate meditation of the distraught Madeleine, another of Mew's anguished prostitutes. Evidently, Madeleine has long felt a desire to renounce the world of sensual pleasures and accept Christ, but she has never been able to find in Him the ideal companion that she seeks.

Then one evening while "making her rounds," she stops off at a church along the way. Kneeling before a small plaster saint, she finds prayer impossible since she cannot see any paradise beyond this earth. She then debates with herself...
about her inability to accept Christ and comes to realize that her sensual nature is the obstruction. Torn with guilt for her hedonistic life, she turns to Christ, nonetheless, in the hope that she can escape the enervating love of man. But because of her religious scepticism, she finds herself in a dilemma, as is evident in the opening lines:

Here, in the darkness, where this plaster saint
Stands nearer than God stands to our distress,
And one small candle shines, but not so faint
As the far lights of everlastingness,
I'd rather kneel than over there, in open day
Where Christ is hanging, rather pray
To something more like my own clay,
Not too divine;
For, once, perhaps my little saint
Before he got his niche and crown,
Had one short stroll about the town;
It brings him closer, just that taint--
And anyone can wash the paint
Off our poor faces, his and mine!10

The self-deprecatory attitude evinced here indicates the tension between Madeleine's spiritual aspiration and her lack of religious faith. She shuns the image of divinity since it seems so far away that the lights of eternity are by far fainter than the light from the votive candle near her plaster saint. And yet, she wants to pray to a saint, who perhaps had "one short stroll about the town" before he earned his "niche and crown."

Suddenly, by way of stream of consciousness, Madeleine associates the plaster saint with her first husband, Monty, who, in his own way, was a spiritual being. This
memory leads her on to recall the various men who have played a part in her life, both husbands and lovers. But first, she says, there was Monty, the "first" and the "best," who seemed to have the qualities that could satisfy her longing. He had "just the proper trace/ Of earthliness on his shining wedding face." Evidently, that "proper trace/ Of earthliness" belied the spirituality that lay beneath, for the relationship ended in failure. On the day of the divorce, Monty's face was "blank and old." Shortly afterwards, though, Stuart replaced Monty. According to the description of Stuart on the day of his divorce from Madeleine, he was undoubtedly the epitome of animalistic sexuality. "Crowing like twenty cocks and grinning like a horse," Stuart, unlike Monty, obtained his divorce without any feelings of regret. After failing twice to find fulfillment through marriage, Madeleine tried a third time. Once again, she chose a man with a strong spiritual nature. Although she does not specifically say it, apparently this marriage also ended in divorce, for like Monty, Redge also kept his soul "afloat" while Madeleine went "down like scuttled ships."

Fully aware that her sensual nature is the cause of her downfall, Madeleine comments upon her life of sensuality:

It's funny too, how easily we sink,
One might put on a monument, I think
To half the world and cut across it "Lost at Sea!"

As Madeleine uses the phrase, "lost at sea" is a metaphoric expression for sexuality, and admittedly, she has given her
whole being to the pursuit of erotic experience. In the succeeding line, she implies that sexuality is the only life she knows; it is the only way in which she can cope with the meaninglessness of the Void. Within this frame of mind, kneeling before the plaster saint and recalling these past experiences, she suddenly thinks of Jim, an occasional patron of hers: "I should drown Jim, poor little sparrow, if I netted him to-night--."23 Again, she uses the death imagery which connotes the bliss of erotic surrender. With Jim, though, she can surrender to the elevating power of the senses, a transcendence which she cannot achieve through Christ. Thus, her efforts at prayer and her longing for a spiritual union with Christ are fruitless:

No, it's no use this penny light--
Or my poor saint with his tin-pot crown--
The trees of Calvary are where they were,
When we are sure that we can spare
The tallest, let us go and strike it down
And leave the other two still standing there.24

By cutting down the center tree, that is, Christ, Madeleine acknowledges the silence of infinity, and thus only the earthly remains available to her. In keeping with Madeleine's thoughts, it is conceivable that the trees are phallic symbols. After all, Madeleine is seeking a perfect transcendent union, and in "Ne Me Tangito," spiritual union is expressed in the terms of sexual experience. Moreover, the two remaining trees are clearly symbolic of the earthly
life, and for Madeleine the earthly life is sexuality. But in any event, since a transcendent union with Christ is not forthcoming, Madeleine ceases her prayer. There is no need to address Christ, nor any need to ask that He remember her, for as she concludes, there is no "Paradise beyond this earth that I could see."25

Turning away from her failure to communicate with Christ, Madeleine next contrasts her life of suffering with the apparent serenity of Christ's eternal state:

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!26

According to Madeleine, when Christ ascended to His Father, He deserted man. From His station in eternity, He offers man no counsel. Since He is not subject to earthly temptations, He is uncomprehending of man's problems. Furthermore, He knows nothing about Madeleine's soul, and He can do nothing to release her from the guilt she feels, nor can He assuage her failure to attain the spiritual union which she yearns for. Accordingly, Madeleine offers a justification for her sensual life and also for her rejection of Christ:
We are what we are: when I was half a child
I could not sit
Watching black shadows on green lawns and red carnations
burning in the sun,
Without paying so heavily for it
That joy and pain, like any mother and her un-
born child were almost one.
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 hands about me anywhere--
The sight of my own face (for it was lovely then) even the scent of my own hair,
Oh! there was nothing, nothing that did not sweep to the high seat
Of laughing gods, and then blow down and beat
My soul into the highway dust, as hoofs to the dropped roses in the street.
I think my body was my soul. . . .

With such a highly developed sensibility, it is scarcely any wonder that Christ seems so removed from the world of men. Moreover, with a temperament that responds rapturously to the sights, colors, and smells of nature, Madeleine knows the ecstasy and nadir of joy. Moved by the play of shadows upon the grass, the red carnations in the bright sunlight, she experiences an admixture of pleasure and pain, which is frequently intensified by the sensations of synesthesia evoked by the night air: "the thick, close voice of musk,/ The jessamine music on the thin night air." Even the touch of her hands about her, or the scent of her hair is sufficient to sweep her up to rapturous heights, but once the
emotion subsides, she drops into the depths of depression; she feels that her soul has been trod upon as "hoof do the dropped roses in the street." Thus, as a soul that thrives upon sensuousness, Madeleine lacks the stamina to renounce the phenomenal world, to reject those things which give her pleasure in order to gain an eternal life:

And when we are made thus
Who shall control
Our hands, our eyes, the wandering passion of our feet,
Who shall teach us
To thrust the world out of our heart: to say, till perhaps in death,
When the race is run,
And it is forced from us with our last breath
"Thy will be done"?
If it is Your will that we should be content with the tame, bloodless things.28

Since Christ demands that she renounce all the sensuousness which gives her life what little meaning it has and "be content with tame, bloodless things," Madeleine finds orthodox religion intolerable. It enervates man; it produces beings "as pale as angels smirking by, with folded wings."29 It does not bring the serenity that it promises. As Madeleine exclaims, "Oh! I know Virtue, and the peace it brings! The temperate, well-worn smile/ The one man gives you, when you are evermore his own:/ And afterwards the child's, for a little while,/ With its unknowing and all-seeing eyes/ So soon to change, and make you feel how quick/ The clock goes round."30 To Madeleine, then, virtue is sexual fidelity to one man, a faithfulness which causes her to become just
another of his possessions. Furthermore, such a relationship will eventually burden her with children, who will constantly remind her that her youthfulness is a thing of the past. As she says, had she learned early "the trick...
Of long green pastures under placid skies," that is, had she learned to accept the sensuous aspects of nature as a manifestation of the presence of God, she "might be walking now with patient truth" and not fear the transitory nature of existence.

Unfortunately for her, Madeleine did not learn "the trick," and now she is preoccupied with thoughts of old age. By an association of ideas, the memory of her mother now floods in on her consciousness. She recalls her mother's "mask..., shrunk and small,/ Sapless and lines like a dead leaf,/ All that was left of oh! the loveliest face, by time and grief," how unlike the portrait of her at nineteen, "standing by the garden seat,/ The dainty head held high against the painted green/ And throwing out the youngest smile, shy, but half haughty and half sweet." Madeleine, too, shows signs of age despite all the paint and powder. Often, the boys remind her that she is "not precisely twenty-two," and she comments, "I know what this means, old, old, old:/ Et avec ça--mais on a vécu, tout se paie." Madeleine tries to rationalize away the lines of age by saying at least she has lived, that anything can be bought.
This last statement suddenly brings her up short; anything cannot be bought. Her mother "yoked to the man that Father was" could not buy the inner security that her marriage lacked, nor could Monty buy the self-fulfillment that he could not find in Madeleine. Also the portress at the convent school, "stewing in hell so patiently," could not buy the spirituality she sought. Then Madeleine thinks of herself. Indeed, she considers herself fortunate; she has paid with her soul for the sensual life she has had. The price may be high, but at least she has been amply rewarded. On the other hand, the others—her mother, Monty, and the portress—have paid with abnegation and received nothing in return: "No, one cannot see/ How it shall be made up to them in some serene eternity./ If there were fifty heavens God could not give us back the child who went or never came." To Madeleine, abnegation is simply abnegation; things forsaken cannot be compensated for in eternity. No eternal blessing can make up for the sensuous pleasures forsaken here.

Continuing in this vein, Madeleine scornfully exclaims "'Find rest in Him!'" Clearly, she cannot find rest in Him, for to submit to His will is to submit to degradation:

One knows the parson's tags—
Back to the fold, across the evening fields, like any flock of baa-ing sheep:
Yes, it may be, when He has shorn, led us to slaughter,
torn the bleating soul in us to rags,
For so He giveth His belovèd sleep.
Oh! He will take us stripped and done,
Driven into His heart. So we are won:
Then safe, safe are we? in the shelter of His
everlasting wings--.38

The sterility of religious conformity described and the
violent images used here reflect Mew's view of the effect
that orthodox religion has upon humanity. Like Nietzsche,
she sees Christianity as a force that reduces and degrades
the stature and dignity of the human being. Man is com-
pelled to follow blindly the "parson's tags," the enervat-
ing, sterilized codes of behavior, and like sheep, which
are noted for their supreme lack of intelligence, man sub-
mits to the clergy's demands for acts of abnegation and con-
trition. When he has been "shorn," "torn," and "stripped,"
when he has been made a spiritual and physical invalid,
then the Master will receive him. As Madeleine meditates
upon the humiliation that accompanies religious aspiration,
she decries the sadistic nature inherent in His manifesta-
tion of power: "I do not envy Him his victories, His arms
are full of broken things."39 Not willing then to deny the
elevation of soul experienced in the sensual world for the
degradation required by spiritual aspiration, and also
recognizing that her sensibility is stronger than the de-
sire for spirituality, Madeleine declares her independence
from Christ:

    But I shall not be in them [His arms]. Let
    Him take
    The finer ones, the easier to break.
    And they are not gone, yet, for me, the lights, the
    colours, the perfumes,
Though now they speak rather in sumptuous rooms,
    In silks and in gem-like wines;
Here, even, in this corner where my little candle shines
    And overhead the lancet-window glows
With golds and crimsons you could almost drink
To know how jewels taste, just as I used to think
There was the scent in every red and yellow rose
    Of all the sunsets. 40

Still alive to sensuous experience, especially brilliant colors, the odors of sumptuous perfume, the texture and sound of silk, the taste of wine, Madeleine knows even here in the church the sensations that excite her. She knows the hedonistic pleasures present in synesthesia; the colors in the stained glass window evoke her sense of taste, and the reds and yellows of sunsets excite the olfactory nerves.

For a person with Madeleine's heightened sensibilities, the austerity of spirituality is hardly attractive, and the vacancy of the church here oppresses Madeleine. Aware of the infinite silence that pervades the building, as well as the silence of the cosmos, she is besieged with fear: "Nothing to see, no face,/ Nothing to hear except your heart beating in space/ As if the world was ended." 41

Now, she feels that her body is dead; her soul too is dead; yet, the two are yoked together to go on "to the slow end." Isolated from the world and eternity, she expresses the depression of solitude and the despair of alienation:

No one to sit with, really, or to speak to, friend to friend:
    Out of the long procession, black or white or red
Not one left now to say "Still I am here, then see you, dear, lay here your head."

Only the doll's house looking on the Park
To-night, all nights, I know, when the man puts the lights out, very dark.
With, upstairs, in the blue and gold box of a room, just the maid's footsteps overhead,
Then utter silence and the empty world--the room--the bed--.42

With only the barrenness of the brothel to fill the gulf in her life, Madeleine is tormented by the sterility of love amid the superficial gaiety. The images connoting the absence of affection, the darkness of the inner soul, and the emptiness of the cosmos, as well as the phenomenal world symbolized by the room and the bed, poignantly portray the intensity of Madeleine's sense of isolation.

Even though she occasionally gives in to despair, Madeleine has an undaunted spirit, for as long as she cries out, she is not quite "dead," not yet "a handful of forgotten dust." And in desperation she turns again to Christ. Aware that some form of love, either physical or spiritual, is absolutely necessary if she is ever to experience the serenity of fulfillment, Madeleine exclaims:

There must be someone. Christ! there must,
Tell me there will be someone. Who?
If there were no one else, could it be You?43

Now her thoughts suddenly shift to Mary Magdalene, who, like herself, led a life of sensual and sensuous pleasure. She imagines Magdalene sitting on the steps of Simeon's house and watching the men and boys as they pass by. Perhaps she
sat there in despair, aware that physical love had not brought the sense of fulfillment she sought. Then one day she saw Christ walk by, and a new passion seized her, a passion "so far from earthly cares and earthly fears/ That in its stillness you can hardly stir/ Or in its nearness, lift your hand,/ So great that you have simply got to stand/ Looking at it through tears, through tears." Like Magdalene, Madeleine knows and understands this transcendent quality present in passion, but she wonders if Christ, with his dispassionate and spiritual nature, was aware of the intensity of Magdalene's love for Him:

I think You must have known by this
The thing, for what it was, that had
come to You:
She did not love You like the rest,
It was in her own way, but at the worst,
the best,
She gave You something altogether new.
And through it all, from her, no word,
She scarcely saw You, scarcely heard:
Surely You knew when she touched You with her hair,
Or by the wet cheek lying there,
And while her perfume clung to You from head to feet all through the day
That You can change the things for which we care,
But even You, unless You kill us, not the way.

The final couplet here gives the key to the nature of Madeleine's religious conflict. She must, by her own temperament, respond to all experiences in a passionate manner, but orthodox religion condemns passion and makes a decided
distinction between physical and spiritual love. Madeleine, on the other hand, sees little difference between these two kinds of love. To her, and to Magdalene, spiritual love brings the same ecstatic sense of fulfillment that is inherent in consummated sexual love. For this reason, Madeleine sees in Magdalene's love for Christ the manifestations of sexuality. The tears shed to wash His feet, the use of her hair to wipe them, and the ointment, a gift of one of her patrons, are, of course, accoutrements of sexual passion. Accordingly, then, Madeleine notes that Christ may "change the things for which we care,/ But ... not the way."

For Magdalene, then, this bond with Christ answered the psychological need for fulfillment, and at the same time, it permitted her to express her devotion with passion. In this way, the tension between the flesh and the body was resolved. Madeleine, though, begins to wonder if spiritual passion really offers the inner peace that follows consummation:

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,
Lost, as I woke, to hear in the strange earthly dawn, his "Are you there?"
And lie still, listening to the wind outside, among the firs. 46

Earlier Madeleine has expressed the idea that the transcendence accompanying sexual climax is identical to the sense of inner peace that is a concomitant of spiritual love. Now, she questions it, primarily because she thinks that physical and spiritual union would not be the same for her. Clearly, they were identical to Magdalene, but then Magdalene had a privileged experience. She knew Christ personally; He was a part of her world, her life. She knew His touch, but Madeleine does not have this experience. As she questions, "if she [Magdalene] had not touched Him in the doorway of the dream could she have cared so much?" 47 From Madeleine's viewpoint, the answer is, of course, no, for Madeleine cannot perceive His presence, and His absence makes it impossible for her to give herself to Him as "He has never shared with me my haunted house beneath the trees/ Of Eden and Calvary." 48

Even in childhood, when her imagination was active, Madeleine could not communicate with Christ; He only hung there on the cross in absolute silence:

I cannot bear to look at this divinely bent and gracious head:
When I was small I never quite believed that He was dead:
And at the Convent school I used to lie awake in bed
Thinking about His hands. It did not matter what they said,
He was alive to me, so hurt, so hurt! And most of all in Holy Week
When there was no one else to see
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.49

At this point, the meditation breaks off, and Madeleine is still unable to sense the presence of Christ. If she could ever in any way perceive Him, she could submit to His will. By thus establishing a spiritual bond with Christ, she could find the fulfillment she needs to end her inner turmoil; however, she cannot find any manifestation of His presence in the world, and thus, her quest ends in failure. And yet, she continues to yearn for a spiritual life. Torn by the tension between her desire to accept Christ and her failure to attain the goal, Madeleine cannot make the final leap of faith that could silence her inner voice, which urges her on toward an ultimate destiny. As Mew develops her character, Madeleine's bonds with the phenomenal world are too pronounced for her to perceive the shadowy transcendent world of eternity. Thus, speaking through Madeleine, Mew too sees only the immobile figure of Christ hanging on the crucifix and observes only the silence between the dome and the stars. The Void created by the absence of Christ has turned her life into a meaningless existence. Intellectually, she accepts this view of the cosmos, but emotionally, she rebels against it. Thus, the inner voice of the Doppelgänger reminds her of the need
for self-fulfillment, but Mew has exhausted the provisional poses she has created. She fails to find inner peace in human relationships, in nature, and in spiritual aspiration. Orthodox religion does not provide the sustenance that will satisfy her hunger for self-fulfillment, and the internal anguish that gnaws at her soul remains.
Notes


2 Davidow, p. 76.

3 Letter of May Sinclair to Charlotte Mew, January 6, 1915, in Davidow, p. 310.

4 "Ne Me Tangito," Collected Poems, p. 56.


6 "Ne Me Tangito," p. 56.


8 "Ne Me Tangito," p. 56.

9 Ibid.

10 Ibid.

11 A pretty girl for sale, very expensive.


13 Ibid.

14 You can count on it.

15 It is like drinking the sea.

16 But how long ago.

17 One cannot cry always for the dead.


20 "Madeleine in Church," Collected Poems, p. 34.

21 Ibid.

22 Ibid.

205

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35 Ibid.,; translation of the last line is as follows: "What else? but one has lived; anything can be bought."
Unable to attain a state of beatitude through spiritual aspiration, through a surrender to nature, and through human relationships, Mew acknowledges the absurdity of the human condition. 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. Unable to find an integrating principle that can end her yearning for fulfillment, her anguished quest reaches an impasse. She cannot break through the steel of isolation. Apparently, she is not willing to accept the nullity of the Void. Caught in a seemingly inescapable dilemma, Mew also reveals an attempt to come to terms with death as the fruition of her strenuous labors, for through death she may be absorbed into the transcendent state of Nothingness, or the Void, and thereby experience the ecstatic serenity of fulfillment. This attitude toward death seems to be a late development in Mew's thought. As previously stated, since the poems cannot be dated with accuracy, it is impossible to trace with any certainty the maturation of her views.
regarding the cosmos and death. Nonetheless, most of the poems which focus upon eternity appear in the posthumous *The Rambling Sailor* (1929). Because of the relative absence of similar themes in the earlier volumes, it is probable that these poems were written late in her career. Even though the acceptance of death appears more prominently in the last volume, it is a theme that runs throughout Mew's work. It is evident in the relatively early poem "Arracombe Wood" (1916). Also, these poems on death reveal an ambivalence. Sometimes Mew expresses a fear of death ("The Rambling Sailor"). At other times, she seems almost indifferent ("From a Window"). Occasionally, she even embraces it ecstatically ("Not for That City"). Admittedly, the ambivalence of Mew's attitude toward death discloses a deep-seated internal conflict, and these variations upon the theme seem to represent concurrent stages in her thought.

For Mew, though, the phenomenal world remains replete with futility. Despite the various endeavors undertaken to counteract the sterility of the Void, her search ends in failure. Accordingly, then, man is forever lonely. Unable to reach his fellow man, he remains locked in his cell of isolation. It seems, then, that Mew accepts isolation and vacancy as the permanent state of man. In "On the Road to the Sea," which acknowledges the impervious nature of isolation, she relates a roadside encounter
between a man and a woman. Apparently, the ages of the two disturbed a number of people when the poem first appeared in The Farmer's Bride (1916), for Mew later said that the poem "represents to me a middle-aged man speaking, in thought, to a middle-aged woman whom he had only met once or twice." She also suggested appending a headnote to the poem in the second edition of The Farmer's Bride (1921), with the idea that it might enhance the work: "La beauté des jeunes femmes est distribuée sur les diverses parties. Quand elles vieillissent, la beauté se fixe sur leur visage." Although the lines do suggest middle-age, as well as the revelatory quality Mew associates with eyes, they seem superfluous, and Mew undoubtedly thought better of the idea as she did not add the note when the poem was reprinted. In any event, the poem shows two people immured in their own prisons of subjectivity and unable to free themselves from this isolated state. Actually, the poem is an interior monologue from the man's point of view. Not once does he utter a word to the woman. At first, the man expresses a desire to communicate with the woman, to establish a meaningful relationship:

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.
But first I want your life:--before I die I want to see
The world that lies behind the strangeness of your eyes,
There is nothing gay or green there for my gathering,
it may be,
Yet on brown fields there lies
A haunting purple bloom: is there not something in
grey skies
And in grey sea?
I want what world there is behind your eyes,
I want your life and you will not give it me.3

As the man pleads, he wants to share his life with her; he
wants to join his soul with hers; he wants to get to know
the reality that lies behind the "strangeness" of her eyes.
Through the use of the spring imagery, used to denote
youthfulness, he acknowledges that the bloom of youth may
have gone from her appearance, but he adds that even autumn
fields have a special "haunting purple bloom." In effect,
he is saying that age may take away physical beauty, but
it leaves the inner beauty untouched. In fact, age seems
to enhance the personality. For this reason, he wants the
world behind her eyes; however, the woman remains adamant
in her indifference to his pleas. Quickly, then, he turns
to thoughts of the past. He imagines her as a young woman,
walking through August fields, or perched on a stile. How
he would have liked to reach out to her and teach her tears,
tears of joy, not grief. But such an event never occurred.
Now, though, he still wants her life:

To-day is not enough or yesterday: God sees it
all--
Your length on sunny lawns, the wakeful rainy nights--;
tell me--(how vain to ask),
but it is not a question--just a call--:
Show me then only your notched inches climbing up the
garden wall,
I like you best when you
were small.4
Not content to want to know her only for today, the man wants to possess her now. He is even envious that God has seen her whole life unfold; He has seen her shadow upon "sunny lawns"; He has observed her on sleepless "rainy nights." The protagonist, however, can only imagine what her days have been like. In an effort to share his life with her, he asks to see the notches that were made in the garden wall to measure her growth when a child. For, despite the body and appearance of a middle-aged woman, he sees in her the personality of a child, the vigor and innocence of youth, not the grave, apathetic mask she shows to the world. And yet, he has met her only once or twice:

Is this a stupid thing to say
Not having spent with you one day?
No matter; I shall never touch your hair
Or hear the little tick behind your breast.
Still it is there,
And as a flying bird
Brushes the branches where it may not rest
I have brushed your hand and heard
The child in you: I like that best.5

Imagining that she is offended at his effrontery, he quickly assures her that he intends no insult by his boldness. After all, he will "never touch her hair," nor will he ever know the love that lies buried in her heart. Nevertheless, love lies there dormant, just waiting to be taken, but he will not be the one to achieve the goal. But just as the bird brushes against the branch where it cannot rest, so he touches a hand that he cannot embrace. And yet, from that momentary touch, he senses the vital personality that
lies hidden within, "so small, so dark, so sweet." Again, he implores her to give her life to him; he will be gentle; he will not "vex or scare" what he loves:

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!)
You know, at dusk, the last bird's cry,
And round the house the flap of the bat's low flight,
Trees that go black against the sky
And then--how soon the night!

The intensity of his desire to escape his own prison of subjectivity is revealed in the death image of his life bleeding away. Moreover, he wants to experience physical passion soon, not spiritual passion. He wants his love now, "this very afternoon," not in some eternal "hereafters."

In an effort to urge her to accept his love, he uses intimidation. He suggests that since he usually gets what he wants, including the moon, he will eventually succeed in attaining this goal too. Then he reminds her that death will soon overtake her, and she will have missed an opportunity to achieve fulfillment, for just as the "last bird's cry" and the "bat's low flight" signal the imminent approach of night, so then night suggests the oblivion of death, the dissolution of passion. His threats, however, elicit no response, and he acknowledges that "It is not I who have walked with you, it will not be I who take away/
Peace, peace, my little handful of the gleaner's grain/
From your reaped fields at the shut of day." Clearly, he
will not be the one who breaks through the shell she has
built around herself, nor will he take away peace from her
"reaped fields," which connote autumn, or middle-age. The
peace he speaks of is the shallow peace that comes with
disengagement, not the inner peace that accompanies fulfill-
ment. Suddenly, he decries her brand of peace:

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.9

Admittedly, he cannot be content with the passive peace
that she seems to have attained. He would rather experience
the serenity that comes with sexual passion. As he uses
die here, he is thinking of sexual climax, which projects
the lovers into a transcendent state where, withdrawing
from the phenomenal world, they reel with ecstasy, "with
all the cannons at your ear." The woman, however, heeds
not his urgent pleas. Finally, the man abandons his pur-
suit and informs the woman that she can keep her life; he
will not take it from her. At this point in his monologue,
she smiles at him. Undoubtedly, after being near one an-
other now for some length of time, she is simply acknowled-
ging his presence. It is only a sign of courtesy. But
when placed into the context of the man's internal mono-
logue, the smile becomes ironic, for earlier in the poem,
the man indicates that he cannot get the woman to give him a smile, which is one of his avowed intentions. And now when he promises not to infringe upon her honor, an honor which he most assuredly cannot infringe upon anyway, she smiles at the audacity of his generosity. Ironically, he achieves his goal; he gets the smile, but the meaning of the gesture is diametrically opposed to his original purpose for wanting the smile.

Nonetheless, as Mew has indicated, the poem is an interior dialogue in which the man imaginatively creates the impasse between his desires and his achievements. Since he plays out the scene as an illustration of his inability to reach out to another human being, he reveals his own philosophical view of human existence. Furthermore, since the entire action of the poem is imagined in the mind of the protagonist, Mew indicates the extent to which man is trapped in a prison of subjectivity, or isolation. As she suggests here, isolation is the permanent state of man's existence; he must forever be lonely. This attitude also occurs in "Again" (1929). Here, Mew projects her characters into heaven. A young man stretches out his hand to a girl he meets while walking down a street. Taking his hand, she notices the scars, but not aware that she caused them nor that the wounds are "sweet" to him, she lets his hand go, thus rejecting him a second time:
One day, not here, you will find a hand
Stretched out to you as you walk down some heavenly street;
You will see a stranger scarred from head to feet;
But when he speaks to you you will not understand,
Nor yet who wounded him nor why his wounds are sweet.
   And saying nothing, letting go his hand,
   You will leave him in the heavenly street--
   So we shall meet!10

At first glance, it appears that Mew is saying not only are isolation and unfulfillment man's destiny on earth but also in heaven. Actually, though, rather than a statement about immortality, the setting in heaven seems only a way of intensifying the idea of man's inability to achieve any kind of satisfaction that may quell his inner yearning.

With this concept of man's existence, there is little for man to do except to wait for the oblivion of death, but even this Mew seems not able to give in to. She steadfastly refuses to knuckle under to the nullification that the Void imposes upon man and his relation with the cosmos. She refuses to welcome death. "The Rambling Sailor," published in The Chapbook in 1922, shows this dogged determination to hold on to life despite the failure to attain fulfillment, despite the winning hand that death holds in the game. From his journey through the back streets of Pimlico to the docks at Monte Video, or to the bar on Plymouth Hoe, the sailor is constantly aware of the presence of Death: "He'm arter me now wheerever I go."11 Like the Hound of Heaven, Death searches out the sailor and will give him no rest until he rests in "him," that is, Death:
An' dirty nights when the wind do blow
I can hear him sing-songin' up from the sea:
Oh! no man nor woman's bin friend to me
An' to-day I'm feared wheer to-morrow I'll be,
Sin' the night the moon lay whist and white
On the road goin' down to the Lizard Light
When I heard him hummin' behind me.\textsuperscript{12}

After observing the ill omen, signified by the strange light, on the same night when he first heard the song of Death, the sailor is deeply affected by the experience. His faith in humanity is shaken by Death's cynical attitude. At one point, Death cautions him about the infidelity of woman:

"Oh! look, boy, look in your sweetheart's eyes
So deep as sea an' so blue as skies;
An' 'tis better to kiss than to chide her.
If they tell'ee no tales, they'll tell'ee no lies
Of the little brown mouse
That creeps into the house
To lie sleepin' so quiet beside her."\textsuperscript{13}

After warning the sailor simply to accept love and never question the sweetheart, Death cautions girls about the deceitfulness of men:

"Oh! hold'ee long, but hold'ee light
Your true man's hand when you find him,
He'll help'ee home on a darksome night
Wi' a somethin' bright
That he'm holdin' tight
In the hand that he keeps behind him."\textsuperscript{14}

Finally, Death urges him to pursue a hedonistic life, to eat his fill of earthly pleasures, for there is a "passel o' hungry fishes" just waiting to devour the sailor:

"Oh! sit'ee down to your whack o' pies,
So hot's the stew and the brew likewise,
But whiles you'm scrapin' the plates and dishes,
A'gapin' down in the shiversome sea
For the delicate mossels inside o' we
Theer's a passel o' hungry fishes."

The rambling sailor, however, rebels against Death:

At the Halte des Marins at Saint Nazaire
I cussed him, sittin' astride his chair;
An' Christmas Eve on the Mary Clare
I pitched him a'down the hatch-way stair.
But "Shoutin' and cloutin's nothing to me,
Nor the hop nor the skip nor the jump," says he,
"For I be walkin' on every quay--"

"So look, boy, look in the dear maid's eyes
And take the true man's hand
And eat your fill o' your whack o' pies
Till you'm starin' up wheer the sea-crow flies
Wi' your head lyin' soft in the sand."

The sailor cannot brook the song of Death, and yet he cannot escape it. Ramble where he will, Death follows and deflates his efforts to find meaning in life. Eventually, though, like the Hound of Heaven, Death will force the sailor to knuckle under and willingly accept his destiny.

Like the sailor, Mew also realizes that she cannot escape death, nor can she successfully countermand the negation that death imposes upon experience. As Robert Adams notes, when all the provisional poses, or roles, "become exhausted, gestures lose their significance, and the common counters in which experience must be expressed wear down. When all experience is second-hand merchandise, the impulse to withdraw from the market--the sense that everything of authentic value is outside--becomes very strong." Unable to master the tensions tearing at the soul, Mew gives in to despair. She regards death as the ultimate destiny of man,
an attitude expressed in "Arracombe Wood." Working through a sympathetic observer, Mew reveals a desire to withdraw from the entanglements of society. In the poem, Davie, the man who exhibits Mew's point of view, refuses to become involved in the affairs of men. Since love cannot bring a release from the hold of the Void, he refuses to speak to women, and since religion is a meaningless force, he refuses to shake the Parson's hand. As a result, many people think he is demented, but the observer interprets the scene differently:

Some said, because he wud'n spaik  
Any words to women but Yes and No,  
Nor put out his hand for Parson to shake  
He mun be bird-witted. But I do go  
By the lie of the barley that he did sow,  
And I wish no better thing than to hold a rake  
Like Davie, in his time, or to see him mow.18

The observer, however, knows that the sense of order with which Davie approached his farming belies the community's estimate of his mentality. Furthermore, the observer unmistakably senses Davie's fatalistic stance:

Put up in churchyard a month ago,  
"A bitter old soul," they said, but it wadn't so.  
His heart were in Arracombe Wood where he's used to go  
To sit and talk wi' his shadder till sun went low,  
Though what it was all about us'11 never know.  
And there baint no mem'ry in the place  
Of th' old man's footmark, nor his face;  
Arracombe Wood do think more of a crow--  
'Will be violets there in the Spring: in Summer time the spider's lace;  
And come the Fall, the whizzle and race  
Of the dry, dead leaves when the wind gies chase;  
And on the Eve of Christmas, fallin' snow.19

According to the observer's comments, the generally accepted
significance of man is negated by death. Undoubtedly, Davie came to realize the meaninglessness of existence, and he withdrew from the sentient world. He recognized that any attainment in the phenomenal world is only momentary, as was his achievement in laying out the rows in the barley fields. Once Davie accepted a fatalistic view of existence, he encased himself in a shell impregnable to the stimuli of the outside world; he then took to the woods to carry on a philosophical dialogue with what appears to be his inner self. At any rate, Davie refused to get caught up in the meaningless entanglements of human existence, and death has now blotted out all traces of his phenomenal life. The concluding imagery, which follows the cyclical pattern of the seasons and thereby suggests the life cycle of man's existence, connotes that a dissolution occurs at death.

Clearly, all of Davie's marks have been obliterated, and yet there is not a sign of bitterness in the observer's words; they are simply a statement of fact. He can accept the finality of life without any pangs of remorse or, more specifically, regret.

As "Arracombe Wood" indicates, Mew acknowledges the stark reality of the Void. She does not fight it, and yet she does not welcome the ultimate negation, death. In "On Youth Struck Down" (1929), a fragment from an unfinished elegy, Mew, however, discerns beauty in death, for she notices that the dead retain their youthful vigor whereas
the bereaved are forced to endure hopeless suffering. Addressing Death, she demands that he give an account of himself:

Oh! Death what have you to say?
"Like a bride--like a bridegroom they ride away:
You shall go back to make up the fire,
To learn patience--to learn grief,
To learn sleep when the light has quite gone out of your earthly skies,
But they have the light in their eyes
To the end of their day."20

Here, Mew views life as essentially tragic, as full of pain and meaningless gestures. It is a learning process where man must learn patience, where he must "learn sleep," that is, to accept death, when the meaning "has quite gone out of . . . earthly skies." The dead, however, transcend the phenomenal world, and thereby attain inner peace. Through the use of the marriage image, Mew suggests that the dead know the rapture inherent in the love-death relationship, as expressed in the Liebestod. By equating the experience of death with the act of consummation, Mew indicates that as the world of sense falls away, a dark, luxurious, naked infinity opens before them, an infinity which is at once both voluptuous and harmonious.

As evidenced by the poetry, Mew sometimes shows no fear of death; she regards it as a benevolent force, not the unimpassioned, impersonal power that she occasionally imagines. As is illustrated in "From a Window" (1929) she even expresses a desire to know its all-enveloping

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Mew expresses what may almost be a suicidal wish. In any event, she reveals a determination to experience death without fear. Although she will miss the sensuous aspects of nature, the green leaves of the sycamore "whispering" as they rub against the window panes, she indicates that after death she will not care about the world. After her departure, she will not care who shares a life with her "old lover," for envy, sorrow, and joy will be alien emotions to her. There is a suggestion here that death may bring annihilation. This may account for her seeming apathy to the phenomenal world. On the other hand, she perhaps is suggesting that because she will find her rest outside the finite world, she will take no more interest in the earthly life. Or again, perhaps Mew would welcome dissolution and oblivion if death could end the anguish and frustration that tear at her soul.

Even though in "From a Window" Mew indicates a willingness to embrace death, she finds it difficult to cut all ties with sentient life. She wants the inner peace and
serenity that accompany death, but at the same time, she wants to hold on to some of the sensuous pleasures of earth. This dichotomy appears briefly in "Here Lies a Prisoner" (1929). In this poem, Mew comments upon the stillness, both of the body and mind, that death brings:

Leave him: he's quiet enough: and what matter Out of his body or in, you can scatter The frozen breath of his silenced soul, of his outraged soul to the winds that rave Quieter now than he used to be, but listening still to the magpie chatter Over his grave.22

From the elliptical statement at the beginning, it seems that someone apparently wishes to tend to the body in order to give it a more restful posture, but the protagonist protests. For as the protagonist says, he is "quiet enough." Moreover, now that he is dead, what difference does it make whether his anguished soul is still imprisoned in the body or not; his soul is quiet. Such eschatological questions seem of little importance at this point. What does matter, though, is that his soul is at rest, and the absolute stillness of the soul is captured in the static imagery of immobility: "The frozen breath of his silenced soul." Nevertheless, the person hears yet the "magpie chatter/ Over his grave." The will to retain some of the quieter sensuous pleasures of earth indicates a strong desire for an earth-like heaven. Clearly, such a view would resolve the tensions that tug at Mew; she could attain the inner peace that would silence her inner yearning and yet possess the
sensuous aspects of the world that excite her soul.

This desire for an earth-like heaven, however, is scarcely realized in "Here Lies a Prisoner," but in "Old Shepherd's Prayer" (1929), Mew elaborates upon the issue. Through the protagonist, she constructs a view of eternity out of the sights and sounds of a rustic life. As the old shepherd lies upon his death bed, he prays for an eternal life, a life, however, that parallels the simplicity of his own existence. At first, he simply describes the scene below his window:

Up to the bed by the window, where I be lyin',
Comes bells and bleat of the flock wi' they two
children's clack.
Over, from under the eaves there's the starlings flyin',
And down in yard, fit to burst his chain, yapping out
at Sue I do hear young Mac.

Turning around like a falled-over sack
I can see team ploughin' in Whithy-bush field and meal
carts startin' up road to Church-Town;
Saturday afternoon the men goin' back
And the women from market, trapin' home over the down.23

By contrasting the imminent inertness of the old shepherd with the movement of the living, Mew makes the external world seem especially appealing. The normal activities of the day, the ordinary labors, the routine marketing, the seasonal plowing—these all take on an idyllic coloring for the shepherd. Furthermore, the vitality of the scene is enhanced by various onomatopoetic devices. For example, in the word **bells**, the plosive quality of the "b," followed by the glide from the diphthongized "e" into the liquid "1l,"
suggests the sound of bells floating over the countryside. Also, in bleat, the harsh "bl" and "t" along with the long "e" sound, if exaggerated a bit, reproduce the sound associated with sheep. Moreover, the rhythmical beat of the line and the hard "k's" in flock and clack contrast with the flowing rhythm in the next line, the cadence of which catches the smooth flight of the starlings. The flow of the line results from the use of an unusual number of unstressed syllables and from the shifts in metrical feet, from trochaic to iambic to anapestic to amphibrach:

"Óver/ from ún/der the éaves/ there's the star/lings ñyin'".

Following this line is the description of the dog, given in a rhythm that moves forward in spurts as a result of the halting effect produced by the stops after the terminal "d's" and "t's" and the hiatus caused by the two commas. Thus, the movement of the dog's forward lunges, which are in turn suddenly halted by the chain, are echoed in the cadence of the line.

While the rhythm and tone of this first stanza contribute to the content of the lines, the second stanza makes effective use of imagery, particularly the image of the team in the first line. As the horses turn at the end of the row, they resemble a "falled-over sack," a homely but appropriate image. Following this almost telescopic view of the fields, the scene then expands into a panoramic view of the countryside. There is the team turning up the
earth, while over on the road the meal carts are heading into town. Out on the down, the women traipse home from market. The serenity of the scene, along with the implied suggestion that work is joy, makes the shepherd long for an eternal life which will be a continuation of the rapture present in his phenomenal world:

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.\(^{24}\)

Thus, if eternity lacks those things which give her bliss on earth, then she prefers that death bring dissolution of being.

Although in "Old Shepherd's Prayer" Mew expresses a desire for an earth-like eternity, she demonstrates a willingness to accept death as a numbed blankness that overtakes the soul. Instead of retaining a personal identity as is implied by orthodox views of resurrection, Mew suggests that death is a mindless state in which the body is absorbed by infinity. At times, she seems to welcome such oblivion, and at other times, she seems to rebel against this concept of eternity. In "Smile, Death" (1929), however, she seems to desire an annihilation of the subjective self. Certainly, she accepts Death graciously; she even says that she is glad to leave "the road and the moor" behind because there "the eyes were not always kind."\(^{25}\) In
the second stanza, she urges Death to hasten the process:

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. 26

Here, Mew makes it evident that she can leave the world
behind; life has not always been kind to her. There is,
however, no terror of death, for as she says, his "eyes are
kind." In fact, she anticipates a sense of the sublimity
that accompanies death.

If at various times she views death with despair and
fear, on other occasions Mew embraces it for the rest and
peace it brings. Indeed, in "Not for That City" (1902),
Mew expresses a distaste for the traditional view of im-
mortality and notes her preference for oblivion:

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. 27

For Mew, the city of New Jerusalem is an undesirable place.
As she describes it, following the details noted in
Revelations, the white hot light is oppressive. Instead of being an aspect of an ideal kingdom, the light induces restlessness. Like the sun made level, the shadeless city with its "white nights" comforts not man's already weary soul. As Mew says, man strains to see beyond the finite world in order to discover what lies ahead for him in eternity. But she, at least, shuns the "splendour of that everlasting glare,/ The clamour of that never-ending song." After a life of suffering, this kind of immortality would have little to offer man, for it is the "clamour" and the "glare" that man wishes to be free of. After a life of "clamour," he does not want to have an eternity of turmoil. He wants rest. Accordingly, then, Mew states that she wants "some remote and quiet stair/ Which winds to silence and a space of sleep." In effect, Mew wants to take the "stair" of transcendence that winds out into infinity toward the impersonal blank of Nothingness. By embracing the immense vacancy of the Void, Mew can conquer the meaninglessness the Void imposes upon the phenomenal world. Once she is transported bodily into infinity, anguish and frustration disappear, and in ecstatic union with the cosmos, she can realize the fulfillment she could not find in the physical world.

According to Schopenhauer, by resigning from the world and ecstatically embracing the Void, one commits himself to Nothingness. Only in this way can man know
inner peace, for as long as he lives in the world of will, he is doomed to pain. It is the inner voice, or the will, which causes his restlessness. By surrendering the will, he can be liberated from the driving force it exerts upon him, and indeed, "with the free denial, the surrender of the will, all those phenomena [of the earth] are also abolished; that constant strain and effort without end and without rest at all the grades of objectivity, in which and through which the world consists; the multifarious forms succeeding each other in gradation; the whole manifestation of the will; and, finally, also the universal forms of this manifestation, time and space, and also its last fundamental form, subject and object; all are abolished. No will: no idea, no world."²⁸ Thus, when the will is suppressed, the phenomenal world ceases to be important, and a transcendent world, beyond time and space, becomes the only reality. As the world of sense is annihilated, the Void recedes into infinite dimensions. It brings dissolution, but it also brings rest. The anguished soul at last finds stillness. By thus surrendering herself to the silence of the Void, Mew expresses her desire to ascend into Nothingness, and thereby attain the stillness which she has yearned for ever since she first heard the call for self-fulfillment. At last, her quest, she imagines, is ended, and the dual nature of her personality can be resolved. By experiencing the rapture of fulfillment and by attaining the serenity of
soul, she can know the harmony that results from the inte-
gration of body and soul; the long-sought Unity of Being is
found. That Mew regarded death as the ultimate solution to
her intense longing is corroborated in the ending of her
life; she chose death, apparently the only agency which
could give her release from the negations that life imposed
upon her being.
Notes

1 Letter of Charlotte Mew to Mrs. Florence Hardy, April 14, 1919, in Davidow, p. 332.

2 Ibid., p. 333. A translation of the note is as follows: The beauty of young women is distributed over their bodies. When they grow old, beauty settles in the face.


4 Ibid., p. 52.

5 Ibid.

6 Ibid.

7 Ibid., pp. 52-53.

8 Ibid., p. 53.

9 Ibid.


12 Ibid.

13 Ibid.

14 Ibid.

15 Ibid.

16 Ibid., pp. 77-78.

17 Adams, p. 246.


19 Ibid., pp. 43-44.


21 "From a Window," Collected Poems, p. 54.


24 Ibid.


26 Ibid.


28 Quoted in Adams, p. 222.
CONCLUSIONS

There is no universally accepted scale for measuring a poet's achievement, and literary reputations rise, or fall into disfavor, according to the tastes of a given age. Occasionally, poets have had to wait for a long time before academicians consider their verse acceptable, as happened to such writers as John Donne, Emily Dickinson, and Gerard Manley Hopkins. With these poets, however, posthumous fame secured them a place among the major writers in English. In large part, the critical acceptance of their work was delayed because stylistically they were somewhat advanced for their time. The public was not yet prepared to appreciate the innovations that characterized such individualistic styles. Unlike these acknowledged poets, though, Charlotte Mew's poetry has never been accorded the critical acclaim it deserves, not because of a poetic style that was ahead of its time, but because of a biased attitude taken toward the period in which she was writing.

Unquestionably, Georgianism is not one of the great periods of poetry. It certainly cannot rival the age of the Elizabethan lyric, nor the lyric of the Romantic period. On the other hand, the Georgian revolt marks a turning point in the development of British poetry. For this reason alone, the period deserves recognition. In
their revolt against the flaccid poetry of the fin de siècle and the Edwardian period, the Georgian poets wanted to revitalize poetry, for during the reign of the Decadents and the staid Edwardians, the vitality of British poetry disappeared. Poetry had reached an impasse, and its demise seemed imminent. Toward the end of the first decade of the twentieth century, though, a group of dedicated young poets set out to restore poetry to its earlier stature. Although these men did not always agree upon questions of tone and technique, both the experimentalists and the traditionalists, as they came to be known after coteries began to form, attempted to avoid "the dissociation of sensibility" that had hampered their predecessors. Both factions wanted to free poetry from the enervating style currently in practice; they wanted to blend thought and emotion. While the experimentalists worked from behind a veil of cynicism and put up a barrage of verbal pyrotechnics, the traditionalists approached poetry with a mistrust of billowing rhetoric, with an eye of innocence, and the faith of an optimist. Neither approach is more intrinsically poetic than is the other, and each in turn is indicative of a certain state of mind. Thus, the traditionalists, or more properly, the Georgians, like their divergent compatriots, the bold experimenters, contributed to the new surge of poetic activity that erupted shortly before World War I. With the introduction of realistic verse about 1910,
a Georgian poetic came into being, and this new tendency in the first-generation Georgians was, in large part, responsible for rescuing poetry from the nadir to which it had sunk while in the hands of the Watsons and Phillipses. Admittedly, though, during the war years and on into the postwar period, the Georgians failed to maintain their earlier position. Their work deteriorated drastically during these years. They turned away from the realities of their world. Trying to assuage the wounds inflicted by the recent holocaust with Germany, they retreated to an idyllic Arcadia. Instead of coming to grips with the problems of their age, they sought sanctuary in a world filled with moonlight, larks, and baby-faced sheep. Under the reign of the Neo-Georgians, the second-generation Georgians, this tendency toward escapism became even more pronounced. Clearly, much of this work lacks the appropriate marriage of thought and emotion. Some poems are even devoid of thought; they are shallow and trivial. Some poets could not transmute personal experience into art; they lost sight of their art, or else could not control the medium well enough to raise their experiences to the level of artistic creation. As a result, these poets called down upon their heads the scorn and condemnation of rival coteries. Undeserving of much of this censure, which succeeding generations have continued to mouth unquestioningly, the Georgian poets were pushed out of the world of poetry.
But now with a detached, historical view and a better understanding of the struggles that occurred in those years of crisis in the development of poetic principles and techniques, the Georgians should be given recognition for the role they played in helping to shape the poetry of the succeeding decades.

Unfortunately, from a critical standpoint, time has tended to condemn all poets of those years as Georgian. Modern critics continue to attribute the faults of a few to all. Although in recent years some attention has been turned toward correcting the image of Georgian poetry that has descended to the present time, and although a few poets have been gleaned from the morass of Georgian pastoralism, none has come through unscathed. Because of this situation, Charlotte Mew remains an unknown poet today, largely because in the three decades since her death, critics and literary historians have indiscriminately accepted the critical vituperation hurled at the Georgians by rival factions during the postwar years, and also, because few scholars have undertaken a re-examination of the period in an effort to see the poets in relation to the temper of the age. From this vantage point, the quality of Mew's poetry is remarkable, not when it is compared stylistically with the poetry of her more original contemporaries, like Eliot or Pound or Yeats, but when its content and style are viewed in relation to the spiritually anemic verse of the Edwardians.
and Neo-Georgians, and in large part the Georgians. And
yet Mew broke out of the constricting mold of dead poeti-
cism. While she was no prophet, her work is symptomatic
of the new vitality that was to undermine the decadence of
Neo-Georgianism. Writing within the framework of what has
come to be known as the waste land tradition, Mew struggled
against the strictures of style established by Housman,
Bridges, and Hardy. She sought a freer use of harmony and
rhythm. She abandoned rigid verse patterns in favor of
irregular stanzaic forms or free verse, both of which were
fitted to the emotional quality of the content of the
poetry.

Unlike her Georgian compatriots, Charlotte Mew was
attuned to the problems of her age. She knew the agonies
of living in a world where the simple security of the old
orthodox assumptions was no longer tenable. Apparently,
her preoccupation with themes of disillusionment and death
and self-fulfillment originate in the personal frustration
and cosmic chaos created by the temperament of her times--
1869-1928. Certainly, these years were, for Mew, a "Herakl
tian fire": they saw the rise of psychology, behavior-
ism, and Freudianism devitalize the individual; they wit-
nessed the "Sea of Faith" receding down the beaches of the
world; they observed the economic conditions created by
laissez-faire; they beheld the devastation of a world war,
as it affected both religious and philosophical thought.
Moreover, these years exerted a considerable influence upon her personal life: the grief over the loss of her father, her mother, and her sister Anne certainly left its scar; because Freda and Henry Mew were committed to an insane asylum, she suffered from the idea that a streak of insanity perhaps had been inherited by all the Mew children; the frustrations stemming from childhood, which were undoubtedly brought on by the conflict between her vibrant personality and her mother's fastidious observance of social and religious codes of behavior, clearly were instrumental in creating the emotional and intellectual anxieties that later found expression in the poems. It is scarcely any wonder then that beset on all sides by disillusionment and personal tragedy, Charlotte Mew felt isolated from the world.

Like many poets of her time, Mew perceived man as a shattered creature living in a shattered world, desperately seeking some kind of absolute meaning in a relativistic universe. But unlike her Georgian contemporaries, Mew had the courage to mold this view into poetry. Thus, in her poems, she shows an effort to live apart from her culture in order to probe her own self, to find personal fulfillment in spite of the apparent meaninglessness of human experience. With her sights trained on the turmoil of her own life, she presents in her poetry the torment of her soul, a soul tortured and torn by the internal conflict between
her desire for self-fulfillment and her awareness of the Void, along with the ultimate nullification that it imposes upon all human activity. Because of this division between body and soul, Mew's personae suffer from an alienated consciousness, or in other terms, a disintegration of personality. In an effort to bring the two forces into Unity of Being, they try to suppress the rational self in favor of an image of an alter-ego that can countermand the negation of the Void. While the alter-ego, or Doppelgänger, yearns for the serenity and inner peace that come with a sense of fulfillment, the mortal body chains them to the phenomenal world, where things are merely temporal. Also, the senses try to convince them of the reality of the material world; the hungers and needs of the body pull them toward phenomenal objects. Furthermore, the rational faculty urges them to accept the world of fact and to confine thought to logical analyses. On the other hand, the soul is distracted by the sensuous world; it is degraded by the body's submission to passion.

Undoubtedly, this manifestation of the alienated consciousness results from Mew's conflict between her own innate pagan sensuality and spiritual aspiration, for throughout her life she vacillated between pagan and evangelical stances. In any event, these are the conflicts that form the basis for Mew's poetry; these are the experiences she transmuted into art. In large measure, the
poems are allegorical presentations, or symbolic expressions, of these conflicts. Through objective correlatives Mew conveys her emotional responses to the world about her as well as to the presence of the Void, that immense empty space, silent and indifferent, which subtracts all meaning from the cosmos. Although it is not possible to say why Mew felt so acutely the presence of the Void, it, nevertheless, settled upon her world and dominated it, and her poems are a record of her efforts to escape the sterility and meaninglessness imposed by this awareness of the Void. At times, she seeks to find meaning in life through love, to create her own reality, but at every turn, her endeavors are thwarted by factors beyond her control, such as emotional immaturity, religious principles, or psychological blocks. Thus, a harmonious relationship is never attained, or if so, it is only a provisional one. Unable to silence the inner longing, frustration and anxiety return; the inner voice of the Doppelgänger stirs up her restless spirit again. To negate the loneliness and sense of vacancy that then pervades her being, she turns to nature, but again her efforts are fruitless. There she cannot find the lasting elevation of soul and the emotional release needed to end the internal craving.

Nonetheless, Mew steadfastly refuses to give in to the idea that human existence is meaningless, that the only certainty is the assurance that the Void nullifies
all experience. Thus, at times, she turns to spiritual aspirations, but again she cannot establish a spiritual bond with Christ, largely because she cannot find any manifestation of His presence in the world. All she notes is His absence, the silence between the dome and stars. Mew acknowledges that orthodox religion cannot provide the sustenance that will satisfy her hunger for self-fulfillment; she is forced to face up to the reality of the Void. Seemingly, she comes to regard death as a benevolent force that will bring an end to her restless spirit. By embracing Nothingness ecstatically, she hopes to transcend the phenomenal world and experience rapture. By thus surrendering herself to the cosmos, Mew expects to attain the stillness which she has yearned for so long and to know the sense of fulfillment that comes from the harmonious integration of body and soul.

Like a great deal of contemporary poetry, Mew's work stems from a cultural tradition which no longer sustains the poet. For Mew, this tradition is indispensable; she explores and examines her background in terms of immediate experience, even personal revelation to the point of self-exploitation. In this manner she probes the deficiencies of that tradition as it affects her own emotional stability. Thus, she brings contemporary cosmic order down from abstraction to personal sensibility, creating a kind of poetry at the antipode of
intellectualism. It is a poetry that speaks not to society but to the individual experience. It is a poetry that has its meaning not in the content of its expression but in the tension of the dramatic relations of its personae.
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242


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VITA

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