Name of author: Nicola Dolman.

Award: M.A. in Women's Writing and Feminist Theory.

Supervisor: Dr. K. Gramich.

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Abstract: "Feminism, Psychology and the work of Charlotte Mew" is an examination of a poet who is rarely read today yet was held in great esteem by literary figures of her generation. Mew's work has been anthologised over the years. A handful of her poems can be found in contemporary anthologies dedicated to women's writing. She has never figured in the literary canon. My intention is in part to present Mew as a poet who merited the praise bestowed on her by her contemporaries. However, my primary task is to illustrate the relevance of Mew's work to feminism.

Mew's literary output was slim and variable. This dissertation primarily critiques ***The Farmer's Bride (A New Edition With Eleven New Poems)***, (1921) and ***The Rambling Sailor*** (1929). The latter was published posthumously. Through an application of feminist psychoanalytic theory, with specific reference to Luce Irigaray, I shall demonstrate Mew's unequivocal feminism. I shall show how Mew's subversive strategies; her questioning of patriarchal institutions, and her exploration of male and female desire, subtly but significantly, undermine the phallocentric status quo.

I acknowledge the problematic elements of Mew's work, particularly with

reference to her male narrative voice and her preoccupation with unrequited love. However, I will suggest that both stem from the absence of female space within the symbolic order. Principally Mew's work dramatically illustrates the tensions, very apparent in society at the time, between Victorian ideals of womanhood and emerging Modernist aspirations.

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I would like to thank Dr. Katie Gramich for her faith and support. I would also like to thank my daughter Zoe for her love and inspiration.

Feminism, Psychology and the work of Charlotte Mew.

Introduction

The poet Charlotte Mew (1869-1928) is an intriguing figure. Infamous for the manner of her death; she killed herself at the age of fifty-nine by drinking lysol, a corrosive disinfectant. Mew became more widely known for her lesbianism, her transvestism and her eccentricities, than for her literary output. Mew had six siblings, two of whom died in infancy and one who died at five years of age. Of the three that remained, Henry and Freda were institutionalised for "madness". Mew's remaining sibling, Anne, became her confidante and closest friend over the years. It was following the death of Anne that Charlotte decided to end her own life.

Mew appears to have been a determined young woman with passion and drive. A well documented story tells of Mew's passion exploding as a result of an infatuation with her teacher Lucy Harrison. Having been informed of Miss. Harrison's immanent departure, Mew immediately threw herself against a wall and began banging her head against it! Her poem "Left Behind"[1] is said [2]to relate to this formative episode in Mew's life. "Wilst thou have pity? intercede

[1] Warner (1997)p. 66
[2] Fitzgarald (1984); Faderman (1994)

for me./[...] Release this spirit from its tortured clay/[...] I wait thy summons on a swaying floor/ [...] I stand and beat my heart against the door." [3]

Raised in a rather dysfunctional family; torn between her unconventional desires and her upbringing and religion; identifying herself as masculine; and ultimately committing suicide "whilst of unsound mind"[4] Mew herself may have been considered an 'ideal' candidate for Sigmund Freud's couch in an era when psychoanalytic theory was in its infancy. However, Mew's work is much more than a sum total of her sexuality and the manner of her death. Mew did not need to "prove" that she was a poet by committing suicide, as Germaine Greer suggests in ***Slipshod Sibyls*** (1995).

Whilst Mew's literary output was slim, it was certainly varied. In addition to her poetry, which included love poetry and war poetry, Mew also wrote short stories, plays and critical works such as her 1904 essay on the poems of Emily Bronte[5]. Her contemporaries including Virginia Woolf, Siegfried Sassoon, Hilda Dolittle and Thomas Hardy greatly admired her work. Woolf described her as "the greatest living poetess" and H.D. compared her to Elizabeth Barrett Browning[6]. In 1923 Mew was awarded a Civil List pension thanks to Thomas

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[3] Warner (1997) p.66. Lines:1/7/9/14.
[4] Warner (1997)p.xviii
[5] ***The Temple Bar*** (1904) referred to in Warner (1987)
[6] Faderman (1994) p.448

Hardy and Walter de la Mare. However, following her death, Mew's work faded into obscurity although a handful of her poems have been anthologised over the years. It is only in recent years that writers and academics such as Val Warner, Peggy Parris and Penelope Fitzgerald have endeavoured to re-establish Mew's reputation as a distinguished poet and literary figure. References to her work can even be found on the Internet, including several poems dedicated to and about Mew. The poet Elizabeth Bartlett's poem **"Charlotte Mew"** appeared in ***A Lifetime of Dying: Poems 1942-1979*** and was a direct response to an epitaph that read "Charlotte Mew, said to be writer."[7] At its best Mew's work is enchanting, sensual, subjective, accessible, and remarkably vivid.

Mew refused to affiliate herself with specific feminist causes although she had friends and associates such as the novelists May Sinclair and Dame Rebecca West who were passionately involved in politics. In 1953 Alida Monro wrote a memoir of her friend Mew in which she commented "she had a strict moral code in respect of other people's conduct, particularly in regard to their sex relationships, and absolutely cut out from her friendship anyone on whom a breath of scandal blew." [8] A dramatic example of Mew's response to scandal is evident from her actions following the arrest of Oscar Wilde in April 1895. ***The Yellow Book*** , an avant-garde journal that had published a considerable amount

[7] http://www.geocites.com/Paris/Bistro/5711/fishwip.html
[8] Warner (1997) p.xii.

of Mew's work, was tainted by association - not that Wilde had ever written for the journal - but the artist Aubrey Beardsley's name was linked in the public's mind to Wilde's and despite Beardsley's dismissal Mew "felt (...) the faintest breath of scandal as a threat" [9] she therefore decided to cease submitting her work for publication in it. Yet her lifestyle and work convey a rage against the injustices suffered by those marginalised in society including women, the insane, vagabonds and prostitutes. Added to this Mew was also an early environmentalist as "Elinor" [10] and "The trees are down"[11] demonstrates. It is therefore plain that her high moral standards did not prevent a genuine awareness of and concern for social inequalities. It is her vitality and originality that first attracted me to the work of Mew.

This dissertation will discuss Mew's work from a feminist perspective, focusing particularly on psychoanalytical approaches. The two volumes of poems referred to are from ***The Farmer's Bride*** (1921), the second edition containing eleven poems absent from the original (which was first published in 1915) and ***The Rambling Sailor*** (1929) published posthumously. However, most poetical references are from Val Warner's ***Charlotte Mew; Collected Poems and Selected Prose*** (1984) From time to time I shall refer to Mew's other work such

[9] Fitzgerald (1984) p.71
[10] Warner (1997)p.70

[11] op cit. p.53.

as her short stories. I shall suggest that Mew, through her male narrative voice and constant focus on women portrays sexual difference as being both constructed and at the same time essential. I shall examine the recurring themes that combine to reveal the extent of social construction and its relationship to psychoanalysis; images of sexuality (including fetishism), insanity, religion, death and the recurrent use of symbolism.

There are several issues that are fundamental to an examination of Mew's work from a feminist perspective. Firstly, I shall consider feminism and Mew. Secondly, there is Mew's consistent use of a male persona. Thirdly there is her romantic focusing on women and the issue of lesbian encoding and finally the problematic question of whether one should or should not separate the author from the work.

As mentioned previously Mew did not belong to any feminist organisations and does not appear to have been involved in any of the many feminist causes of her time. Whether Mew considered herself a feminist or not one can only hypothesise. Yet, 'feminism' is not (Humm: 1989) and was not, (Jeffreys: 1985) a fixed immobile totality. Definition is problematic. If, by feminist, one means a person who examines the power structures of society in relation to gendered experience, then Mew's writing is feminist.

Mew adopted a male persona because she was aware that in order to achieve 'success' within the symbolic order[12], she had to attempt to do so, on male terms. As a "man" Mew had a freedom that was not associated with women's lives. In a society that had shaped women as 'other', to be male (or perceived as male) created certain advantages and privileges that women were otherwise denied. It was a form of undermining the status quo. Mew was using *the master's tools*, in the form of male attire and countenance, to gain admittance to a society that refused access to woman. It is difficult in the closing months of the twentieth century to comprehend the significance of a woman choosing to wear tailored trousers, mannish jackets, porkpie hats and to always wear her hair cut short. However, Jeffreys[13] refers to the work ***Sexual Inversion*** (1897) by the sexologist Havelock Ellis in which he stereotypes 'New Women' as inverts; women such as Mew, who dressed unconventionally, swore and smoked. Women like Mew were stereotyped as lesbians regardless of their actual sexual orientation. It is an interesting paradox that whilst Mew shied away from scandal she undoubtedly drew attention to herself by daring to stand out from the crowd. Mew did not write under a pen-name, as mentioned previously, she was known to her contemporaries; "many readers would have had little doubt"[14] to her

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[12] Within Lacanian psychoanalytic theory **the symbolic order** follows on from the imaginary. As a child acquires language she/he enters into the symbolic order. The symbolic order is the 'place' of social, cultural and language order. It is where the child becomes a subject.
[13] Jeffreys (1985) p.106
[14] Warner. (1997) p.xi

lesbianism. Ironically in the poem "Fame" Mew wrote "I see myself among the crowd,/ Where no one fits the singer to the song ..."[15] Yet, in dressing and behaving as she did, Mew successfully undermined the androcentric system on a daily basis negotiating a certain amount of 'freedom' for herself that would have been denied many of her contemporaries.

The romantic focusing on women can be read as a simple narrative strategy: the narrator is male and therefore a love-object will be female. That was/is the expectation in a heterosexist culture. However, lesbian encoding has been a starting point for the small amount of critical work that exists on Mew. Generally it is accepted that Mew herself was a lesbian and as a feminist it is necessary to take this into account. Bonnie Zimmerman in "What has never been. An Overview of Lesbian Feminist Criticism"[16] poses the question: "(d)oes a woman's sexual and affectional preference influence the way she writes, reads, and thinks?" Zimmerman writes

> ...one set of assumptions underlies virtually all lesbian criticism: that a woman's identity is not defined only by her relation to a male world and a male literary tradition (as feminist critics have demonstrated), that powerful bonds between women are a crucial factor in women's lives, and that the sexual and emotional orientation of a woman profoundly affects her consciousness and

[15] op cit. p.3 L.3-4
[16] Showalter (1993) p.200

thus her creativity.[17]

Zimmerman examines the heterosexism within the literary establishment including feminist anthologies and women's studies journals, arguing that "(h)eterosexism (...) serves to obliterate lesbian existence and maintain the lie that women have searched for emotional and sexual fulfilment only through men - or not at all." [18] Zimmerman acknowledges the difficulty in defining lesbianism "both today and in less sexually explicit eras."[19] As Faderman states in ***Surpassing the Love of Men: Romantic Friendship and love Between Women from the Renaissance to the Present*** (1991) heterosexuality is assumed without 'proof' whereas there is an expectation of having to 'prove' a lesbian existence before accepting the term. However, definitions of lesbianism can themselves can be problematic as there is the danger of using the label lesbian to apply to all female-centred relationships therefore eradicating "lesbianism as a meaningful category." This is a criticism that can be directed at Adrienne Rich's essay "Compulsory Heterosexuality and Lesbian Existence" (1980) in which Rich argues for a "lesbian continuum"[20] that incorporates all women-identified women and a "lesbian existence" which refers to women who choose same-sex relationships. Problems with definitions have been magnified by silence and the

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[17] Showalter (1993) p.201
[18] op. cit p.202
[19] op.cit. p.205
[20] Gelpi and Gelpi (1993) p.203 - 224

"absence of tradition" [21]. "(W)omen-identified writers, silenced by a homophobic and misogynistic society, have been forced to adopt coded and obscure language and internal censorship." [22] Irigaray in fact argues for a new language:

> If we don't invent a language, if we don't find our body's language, it will have too few gestures to accompany our story. We shall tire of the same ones, and leave our desires unexpressed, unrealised. [23]

Zimmerman refers to Willa Cather's use of a male persona which allowed her to "safely" express her desires for women. This relates directly to the work of Charlotte Mew whose male persona can be problematic for some feminists. Taking into account a writer's lesbianism may allow her work to be more favourably valued suggests Zimmerman. With reference to Emily Dickinson's female "muse" Zimmerman does however acknowledge the dubious nature of "identifying literature with life."[24] These ideas certainly operate with reference to Mew, who can too easily be dismissed as perpetuating patriarchal ideas. A critical approach which takes into account a writers sexuality may be seen to "violate accepted norms of traditional criticism". [25] However, surely one aspect of feminist criticism is to challenge the systems that perpetuate the phallocentric status quo. Through naming-names a lesbian tradition is being established.

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[21] Showalter (1993) p.208
[22] op.cit. p.207
[23] Irigaray (1977) p.214
[24] Showalter (1993) p.210
[25] op.cit.208

Whilst this is problematic in that more attention can be concentrated on biography than craft, "by alternating our awareness of what is *possible* (...) we also can transform our response to the poetry."[26] (p.212) Lesbians who are not necessarily politically correct also provoke controversy. Mew's transvestism and appropriation of a masculine identity in life and her use of a male persona in her art are relevant issues here. However, "butch" lesbianism has been central to lesbian history and remains an element of lesbianism today[27]. Historically the refusal to accept differences within lesbian culture simply recreates prescriptions of female behaviour in a similar fashion to patriarchy.

The French structuralist critic Roland Barthes in ***The death of the author*** (1977) writes "(o)nce the Author is removed, the claim to decipher a text becomes quite futile. To give a text an Author is to impose a limit on that text..." [28] Whilst it is considered essentialist to assume a lesbian experience and aesthetic, my reading of Charlotte Mew's work does not convey 'a *monolithic* lesbian experience and aesthetic'.

My reading of Mew's work is only one reading; it is simply one persons interpretation. By taking into account Mew's lesbianism, the work opens up to

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[26] op.cit.212
[27]Nestles (1992)
[28]Heath (1977) p.63

further possible readings. As Zimmerman acknowledges, embracing authorship, particularly in reference to sexuality, can result in a broader reading. In ***Julia Kristeva: Art, Love, Melancholy, Philosophy, Semiotics and Psychoanalysis*** (1998) Kelly Ives states

> (m)uch of feminist theory is based on 'reading' texts as a woman, a feminist, a lesbian. If the author is 'dead', and the text is primary, then deeply engaging with texts is crucial. Hence the importance, too, of feminist aesthetic and philosophic criticism, which aims to interpret all manner of texts. The reader, at least, is 'real'. The reader, it would seem, is truly flesh and blood, not a linguistic abstraction (...) the personal response is crucial (...) Reading can be, in itself, radical and transformative.[29]

Post-structuralist theory points out that "authorship does not guarantee meaning, though the historical context in which the author is located will produce the discourses of the texts." [30] It is the historical context in which Charlotte Mew's work was born that relates so significantly to female sexuality's.

[29] Ives (1998) p.19-20
[30] Weedon (1996)

Luce Irigaray.

I shall examine the work of Charlotte Mew from the psychoanalytical perspective suggested by Luce Irigaray. As a psychoanalyst and philosopher Irigaray connects subjectivity, sexuality and language in a way that is illuminating to the work of Mew. In ***This Sex Which Is Not One*** (1985) and ***Speculum of the Other Woman*** (1985) Irigaray explores the absence of women from all of the western philosophical traditions. She maintains that western knowledge is formed by men and that women's desires are not portrayed, since the feminine is stifled.

At first glance it may appear somewhat of a contradiction to apply the work of an "essentialist" such as Irigaray to the work of a poet who stove to portray sexual difference whilst retaining a masculine personae for herself. However, it is precisely because of this 'apparent' contradiction that Irigaray and Mew are such appropriate bedfellows. The work of Irigaray will demonstrate the essentialist elements present in Mew's work whilst illustrating the fine line between essentialist discourse and constructionist rhetoric.

Irigaray is described and criticised as an "essentialist" primarily because she conveys the notion that women have an essence/essences that distinguish them from men. However, paradoxically, Irigaray is also described as a

post-structuralist therefore challenging Weedon's point that within post-structuralist theory "authorship does not guarantee meaning"[31]. Whilst Irigaray does not suggest that work penned by women will guarantee one meaning she does maintain that as a result of "convention, or habit"[32] "we're going to reproduce the same history. Begin the same old stories all over again" if women do not develop a language of their own. [33] Women's experience will only alter when women begin challenging "sameness" [34]; the feminine ideal sanctioned by an "alien order"[35] . Irigaray proposes that it is through celebrating 'the feminine' that liberation can occur. Irigaray does not accept the symbolic order's definitions of 'woman' but challenges them. Boundaries are eradicated and the stress is upon women's pleasure; the multiplicity that is 'woman/women'. However, feminists from Simone de Beauvoir(1949) to Monique Wittig(1980) have regarded the deconstruction of essentialist notions of 'woman' as paramount for the advancement of women's liberation arguing that "(o)ne is not born a Woman" [36] and that "woman" is in fact a constructed concept of patriarchy. However, Irigaray maintains that in spite of the suppression of the feminine within the symbolic order an essence of woman/women remains. In ***Writing on the Body: Toward an understanding of***

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[31] op.cit.153
[32] Irigaray (1977) p.206
[33] op.cit. 205
[34] op.cit 205
[35] op.cit 211
[36] Beauvoir (1949) p.295

l'Ecriture Feminine[37] Ann Rosalind Jones discusses feminists' negation of essentialism as verging on a connivance with patriarchy. Accepting essential differences between men and women can be viewed as reactionary. Supplying patriarchy with 'evidence' of women's 'difference' may act to reinforce logocentric arguments for the subjugation of women. However, by definition, 'feminism(s)' acknowledge some form of feminine essence[38]. Feminism is based on an agreement that women are different from men. Diane Fuss in ***Essentially Speaking*** (1993) establishes that there is a fine line between constructionism and essentialism. In fact Fuss goes so far as to suggest that essentialism and constructionism can collapse into each other. Irigaray's work illustrates the fact; 'woman', as perceived within the symbolic order, is a *construction* of patriarchal ideals. What it means to be a woman within contemporary society is a constructed image. Irigaray illustrates the multiplicity of woman in her refusal to prescribe the essence(s) that underlay 'women' on one level, actually disputes essentialism. Meanwhile anti-essentialists such as Wittig deconstruct essentialist rhetoric, ignoring any physiological differences, whilst at the same time formulating further differences, in Wittig's case, with regards to lesbianism. Wittig argues that lesbians are not women because 'woman' is a fabricated concept based on a phallocentric economy that exchanges women. Lesbians, by

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[37]Showalter (1993).
[38]Fuss (1989)

definition, are not part of that exchange. Lesbianism does not fulfil the criteria of what it is to be a woman within phallocentric rhetoric. Therefore by implication a Wittig's concept of lesbianism is in fact essentialist. It is therefore evident that the constructionist/essentialist debate is not clear-cut but overlapping.

Charlotte Mew in Historical Context

The period in which Mew grew up was, according to Sheila Jeffreys in ***The Spinster and Her Enemies*** (1985), "a watershed period in the history of sexuality".[39] The late 1800's and early 1900's was a period of time when medical men were turning their attention to sexuality and particularly to classifying "normal" and "abnormal" sexuality. Sexology and psychology were developing disciplines and femininity became subject to analysis, although lesbianism was generally marginalised by sexologists. It was a period when women's position in society was under much scrutiny, and

> (u)nlike many of their Victorian precursors, literary women no longer felt constrained to write covertly about their rebellion against socially prescribed roles. Rather, many artists were empowered to record both their protests and their pleas... [40]

However, Mew herself seems caught between Victorian ideals and Modernism itself. Her poetry is, at its most sentimental Georgian in style but much of it is Modernist in style.

Whilst, Mew wrote explicitly of male and female sexuality she refused to refer frankly to lesbianism. Moreover, it should be noted that there is some debate as to the actual significance of sexological and psychological writing and its effect on the general public of the time. Emily Hamer in ***Britannia's Glory.***

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[39] Jeffreys (1985)p.1
[40] Gilbert & Gubar (1996) p.978

A History of Twentieth-Century Lesbians (1996) argues that "the history of sexology has only an extremely tangential relevance to the lives and the history of British lesbians". [41] Hamer maintains that little of the work of sexologists would have been available to the general population, being both expensive and inaccessible. (Frequently such work was of continental European origin and therefore both difficult to obtain and difficult to translate.) However, Jeffrey's by contrast, argues that the " 'scientific' descriptions of lesbianism..."[42] served to stereotype, stigmatise and create myths regarding female sexuality's. Jeffreys argues that sexology had a profound affect upon the lives of ordinary British women. In ***The Norton Anthology of Literature by Women*** (1996) Sandra Gilbert and Susan Gubar's "background notes" suggest that in fact "Edward Carpenter, Havelock Ellis and Sigmund Freud were censured for their explicit treatment of desire, subjectivity and sexuality ...[but these very issues] ... would quickly become major topics for poets and novelists."[43] Fitzgerald refers to the novelist May Sinclair[44] who on reading Freud's work in German, as soon as it became available in Britain, applied Freud's theories to the development of her fictional characters. Fundamentally, however, from the writings of Mew's

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[41] Hamer.(1996) p.11
[42] Jeffreys (1985) p.105
[43] Gilbert & Gubar (1996) p.968
[44] The love interest between Charlotte Mew and May Sinclair is much documented and discussed. [Warner (1997); Fitzgerald (1984); Faderman (1994); Davidow (1971); and Boll (1970)]

contemporaries[45], one is aware of an atmosphere of social change, particularly with regards to women's role within society. Furthermore, the focus of the rhetoric was frequently upon women of Mew's own age and class. (Jeffreys (1985); Mason (1994)) One can only hypothesise upon the effect such discourse had on Charlotte herself, but the psychology of female sexuality is extremely relevant to an analysis of her work as changes to women's position were evident throughout society of the time. From the 1880's to the commencement of the First World War women's lives were metamorphosed. The fin~de~siecle was a period of dramatic changes. Gilbert and Gubar (1996), Jeffreys (1985) and Showalter (1993) all portray a society where more and more women were entering the labour market; where there were expanding educational openings for women; a growing suffrage movement; and even women's fashion was becoming less restricting. However, this was not taking place without remonstration: sexologists were using "science" to prove women's biologically determined inferior position; anti-feminism was widespread and decadent artists were "notoriously contemptuous of women"[46]; moral outcries were numerous.

In many ways Charlotte Mew was a product of her time and her poetry reflects this. A 'New Woman' or possibly more accurately what Showalter describes as

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[45] Kate Chopin ***The Awakening*** (1899); Henrik Ibsen ***A Doll's House*** (1879);
[46] Showalter ***Daughters of Decadence*** (1993) p.x

an "Odd woman"[47], Mew smoked, swore and trod the streets of London unchaperoned and dressed as a man. It is evident that Mew experienced much conflict regarding her sexuality and her religious beliefs. Mew was known for her austere high moral outlook. In the introduction to ***The Rambling Sailor*** (1929) Monroe, a friend and colleague speaks of Charlotte's "defiant reserve" [48] whilst Warner in the introduction to the most recent collection of Mew's work maintains that what remains of Charlotte's personal letters "suggest(s) respect for social conventions." [49]

In an era when women were loudly voicing their frustrations regarding their position in society and at a time when psychology was new and radical, the Victorian ideas about sexuality and notions concerning women's second-class position remained prevalent in the minds of the general populace. Jeffreys writes

> Anti feminism before the First World War took the form of an attack upon spinsters and militant feminism combined with the creation of an ideal of motherhood which masqueraded as a 'new' feminism and was beginning to have its converts among women. [50]

Women's roles were being challenged at the same time as anti-feminism flourished. Sexologists and psychoanalysts where developing theories on sexuality that were gradually seeping into the culture. Religion remained a

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[47] Showalter (1990) p.19
[48] Mew (1929) pviii
[49] op.cit.xii
[50] Jeffreys (1985) p.146

dominant factor in people's lives but science was gaining influence. It was a time of conflicting messages. Perhaps, if Charlotte were alive at the end, rather than the beginning, of the twentieth century she would have found it easier to express her sexuality. One can only hypothesise. Nevertheless, it is evident that in a period when there was a developing analysis of sexuality, when tensions regarding gender roles were increasing, as feminism and anti-feminism were at loggerheads, psychology is fundamental in an examination of the work of Mew's.

Psychoanalysis

The engagement between feminism and psychology has always been a dubious one. Accepting principles that set forth a "Law of the Father" within a patriarchal symbolic order based on privileging the phallus is problematic to say the least. Some feminists like Juliet Mitchell in ***Psychoanalysis and Feminism*** (1975) have chosen to justify Freud and Lacan, arguing that socialism will overthrow capitalism but psychoanalytic change is necessary in order to defeat patriarchy. Mitchell argues that "a rejection of psychoanalysis and of Freud's works is fatal to feminism... psychoanalysis is not a recommendation *for* a patriarchal society but an analysis *of* one." () This was an argument that Freud himself maintained. Other feminists such as Karen Horney [51], Melanie Klein[52], Sarah Kofman[53] as well as Luce Irigaray have been instrumental in deconstructing 'classical' Freudian and Lacanian psychological discourse and appropriating it for a feminist purpose. Kofman and Irigaray have developed their deconstructive theories by presenting 'alternatives' that depict feminine identities in positive terms. However, it should be noted that Irigaray herself goes to some length to denounce the labelling of her work as *an alternative*, suggesting that to do so is to construct yet another set of laws in the same way that Freud and Lacan have.

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[51] Horney, K. ***Feminine Psychology*** (1967) referred to in Irigaray (1985)
[52] Klein M referred to op.cit.
[53] Kofman (1980)

"French Feminisms", a broad term that usually incorporates the ideas of theorists Helene Cixous, Julia Kristeva and Luce Irigaray (amongst others), are principally concerned with sexual differences. "French feminism(s)" is also concerned with challenging the phallocentric thinking and genocentric language structures that serve to dominate, oppress and negate female identities. Whilst the 'theorists' subsumed within the expression "French Feminism's" have some things in common, each theorist's work is quite different from the next. In her work ***This Sex Which is not One*** (1985/77) Luce Irigaray presents both a celebration of the female body and also, according to Margaret Whitford, "a psychoanalytically informed argument, intended to counter the centrality of the penis in psychical differentiation"[54]. In "The Blind Spot of an Old Dream of Symmetry" in ***Speculum of the Other Woman*** (1985) Irigaray interprets Freudian works on femininity and locates

> property systems, philosophical, mythological, or religious systems (and) the theory and practice of psychoanalysis itself (as) prescrib(ing) and defin(ing) that destiny laid down for woman's sexuality (...) without her sexuality ever being accounted for. [55]

In other words what it means to be a "woman" in Western society is constructed and defined by masculine ideology via patriarchal institutions and "allows" woman no standing of her own. Throughout her work Irigaray has challenged the importance of the phallus implicit in Freudian and Lacanian symbolic law.

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[54]Brennan(1989) p.5
[55]Irigaray (1974) p.129

Symbolic law positions one in relation to others, distinguishing one from another and formulating a connection to language. "Outside the symbolic law, there is psychosis" [56] Lacanian theory is "about a patriarchal theory of language... (and) psychical organisation: it is an argument that the symbolic is the condition of sanity." [57] Therefore, the semiotic, feminine state, is always - within the patriarchal symbolic order - considered a condition of Otherness: insanity. Whilst insanity and sexuality are intrinsically linked within psychoanalytical theory I shall initially endeavour to examine them separately.

[56]Brennan (1989) p.2
[57]op.cit.2

Charlotte Mew - Sexuality and Desire.

> 'Sexuality' encompasses a vast range of issues, from the most private to the most public, the most violent to the most tender. [58]

> (W)omen's desire has doubtless been submerged by the logic that has dominated the West since the time of the Greeks. [59]

Desire is central to the work of Charlotte Mew. Desire is also central to the work of psychologists from Freud to Irigaray. In ***Female Desire*** (1984) Rosalind Coward describes 'female desire' as being "about pleasure: about things women enjoy; about things women are said to enjoy; and about things women are said to enjoy but don't." [60] Mew covers all of these possibilities in her writing. She journeys through private, public, violent and tender images of male and female sexuality in an age when such depiction's were "surprising"[61]. However, Mew repeatedly presents desire as involving "loneliness, disillusionment, sexual longing and fear". Mew expresses desire in largely negative terms. This connects directly with Irigaray's premise that female desire is repressed by the patriarchal symbolic order. In "When Our Lips Speak Together" from ***This Sex Which is Not One*** (1977, translation 1985) Irigaray writes "(t)hey've left us only lacks, deficiencies, to designate ourselves.

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[58] Cart.Ryan.1
[59] ir.tswino.25
[60] Coward (1984) p.13
[61] Gilbert & Gubar (1996) p.1197

They've left us their negatives." [62] Unable to articulate female desire on her terms, without positive female space Mew appropriates masculine space through her use of a male persona. However, Warner suggests

> (n)egation is by the living death of the loss of youth, by death itself, by the workings of a malign fate, by the dictates of conventional morality, by renunciation and even (...) by the glorification of the renunciation of all love into itself a kind of passion. [63]

Frequently Mew's narration depicts women in stereotypical language. Women are referred to as "frightened fays","vain" [64], "unstrung", [65] "wild" and "strange". In "Monsieur qui passe", a poem Fitzgerald describes as possessing an "hysterical pitch" [66] and Faderman refers to as one "of her best poems" [67], the narrator exclaims "(t)hese women and their nerves!" [68] One can see therefore that Mew assumes a narrative position that superficially presents a patriarchal perspective on women and throughout presents female desire as negative within the symbolic order. For, as Irigaray writes women's pleasure is only conceived in relation to the phallus/penis. "She remains forsaken and abandoned in her lack, default, absence, envy, etc. and is led to submit, to follow the dictates issued univocally by sexual desire, discourse,

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[62]Irigaray (1977) p.207
[63]Warner (1997) p.xxi
[64]Showalter ***Daughter's of Decadence*** (1993) p.119
[65]op cit.135
[66]Fitzgerald (1984) p.86
[67]Faderman (1994) p.448
[68]Warner (1997) p.45.L.31

and law of man." [69] Lacanian psychoanalysts maintain that the phallus and the penis are not the same thing and that both sexes are able to assume the phallus, which is a neutral signpost, a signifier. Yet, as Teresa Brennan observes in ***Between feminism and Psychoanalysis*** (1989) "the ideally neutral phallus is represented in a one-sided masculine way."[70] Irigaray writes "(t)hey have wrapped us so long in their desires, we have adorned ourselves so often to please them, that we have come to forget the feel of our own skin." [71] Having appropriated a male position the male narrators of Mew's work are, as Warner remarks: "frequently colourless" [72] and "non-descript"...[73]"Wrapped (...) in their desires" Mew cannot/does not express sexual desire in positive terms. Sexual pleasure, is expressed, almost exclusively, in terms of fetishism which I shall consider in some detail later.

However, fundamentally, Mew's focus on women is both passionate and romantic. "The appreciation for female erotic beauty in Mew's poetry is intense" writes Lillian Faderman in ***Chloe plus Olivia an anthology of Lesbian Literature*** (1994). The female subjects of Mew's work are either "objects of

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[69] Irigaray (1977) p.49
[70] Brennan (1989) p.4
[71] Irigaray (1977) p.218
[72] Warner (1997) p.xx
[73] op cit. p.xx

passion ...(or)...women who crave passion." [74] Meanwhile, in some of her poetry, Mew portrays women as objects of desire whilst at the same time being insane, wild creatures. This is an area of conflict for women within the patriarchal symbolic order. A woman cannot be both good and bad and therefore a "splitting" occurs in which individual women have to disown one aspect of their experience. In Jane M. Ussher's excellent critique ***The Psychology of the Female Body*** (1989) in which she examines the discourse surrounding the female body criticising some psychological approaches but generally maintaining that psychology has much to offer a feminist reconsideration of the female body and reproduction, Ussher quotes Adrienne Rich[75] :

> Two ideas flow side by side: one, that the female body is impure, corrupt, the sight (sic) of discharges, bleedings, dangerous to masculinity, a source of moral and physical contamination, 'the devil's gateway'. On the other hand, as mother, the woman is beneficent, sacred, pure, asexual, nourishing: and the physical potential for motherhood - that same body with its bleedings and mysteries - is her single destiny and justification in life.

In her opening line to "This Sex Which is Not One" from her book of the same title (1985) Irigaray declares "(f)emale sexuality has always been conceptualised on a basis of masculine parameters". Women's wildness and insanity can be imagined as sexually desirable only within the confines of masculine controls and parameters. Women are desired for their 'good' or 'bad' qualities: as mother or

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[74]Warner (1997) p.xx
[75]Rich ***Of Woman Born*** (1986)

as whore, "divided in two" [76] to suite the expectations of the voyeur; "for their pleasure" [77]. These 'opposing' positions have been set one against the other within the rhetoric that creates/constructs the idea of woman through out history. Angela Leighton I "The Fallen Woman and the Woman Poet"[78] writes "(s)exual morality and social difference have split the very nature of female subjectivity." The fallen woman became the muse; the lost self, the "ghost of what has been forbidden, denied [and] divided [...] the Victorian woman poet's familiar."[79] Ussher in ***Women's Madness*** (1991) contends that the representation of women as either 'good' or 'bad', 'virgin' or 'whore', acts as a form of sexual oppression used to control women. The irony is that 'good' women are pure and sexless whilst 'bad' women are sexual, and in women "sexuality itself is seen as bad" [80]. Yet, within the terms of patriarchy what is required is a sexual but pure woman. Women who stepped beyond the boundaries; women who were promiscuous, women who bore illegitimate children, women who were sexually abused and traumatised as a result, all such women ran the risk of being labelled mad and dispatched to asylums. However, Irigaray demonstrates, as does Helene Cixous in her work on "patriarchal binary thought"[81] in ***Helene Cixous: a reader*** (1994), that women are not either/or, women are not rigid and fixed "we are always

[76]Irigaray. (1977) p.210
[77]op.cit p.210
[78]Leighton (1996) p.231
[79]op cit. p.232
[80]Ussher. (1991)37
[81]Cixous (1994)

several at once" [82] Irigaray suggests that women become "exiled from" themselves [83] in the search for definition within such patriarchal confinements. Superficially a male persona provides an alternative solution. However, one cannot define Mew's work as *ecriture feminine*.

Patriarchal limitations are not confined to descriptions of sexual desire in Mew's poetry. Women are depicted in terms of being commodities belonging to men (or society) also. In her poem "On The Road To The Sea" Mew writes

> ...I want your life: - before I die I want to see
> The world that lies behind the strangeness of your eyes
> I want what world there is behind your eyes, I want your life...[84]

A passionate poem, whose male narrative voice both desires and expects possession of his subject. This is a reflection of the symbolic order, then as now. The narrator of "On The Road To The Sea"[85] is indignant that he has been denied possession of his subject. "I would have liked (how vile we are!) to have taught you tears" and "I liked you best when you were small" and again he declares "The child in you: I like that best". By implication a child is more controllable than a woman who refused to smile at a narrator who claims to " make other women smile".

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[82] Irigaray (1977) p.210
[83] op.cit210
[84] Warner (1997) p.32
[85] op cit. p.32 L.15,21, & 2

The significance of Mew's subversive stance in depicting a subject who refuses to comply cannot be underestimated. It is a subversive strategy that Mew employs from "The Changeling"[86] to "Elinor"[87]. Through Mew's frequent use of a male narrative voice she succeeds in portraying women's second class status, as goods to be owned by men/society without question. However, Mew's subversive textual strategy is partly through her subjects' refusal to comply, therefore challenging the inevitability of the status quo. There is also a questioning of biological determinism that saturated society of the time. At the same time Mew challenges the institutions that served to control and define female sexuality, such as marriage and religion.

Throughout Mew's work what is desirable in women within the symbolic order, from the male narrator's perspective, is frailty and passivity as well as beauty and charm. In fact beauty and charm stem from passivity and frailty within this misogynistic outlook. Such women like the "frightened fay" of "The Farmer's Bride"[88] surprisingly remain objects of desire. Even instability, perceived insanity and childlike behaviour are not beyond desire if there is even a deluded chance of mastery. "The act of looking eroticizes the object."[89]

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[86] op.cit 14-16
[87] op.cit 20
[88] Warner (1997) p.1 L.8
[89] Ives (1998) p.26

A good example of "male" desire is in the title poem from Mew's first volume ***The Farmer's Bride*** (1915). This poem illustrates the contrived nature of a gendered symbolic order. *The Farmer's Bride* is a dramatic monologue regarding a young woman who on marriage "turned afraid/ (of)...all things human" [90]The subject runs away and is "fetched" [91] back and locked up. The implication is that in refusing to accept her marriage she must be insane. Within a patriarchal symbolic order there can be no other, alternative explanation. An alternative explanation would imply challenge. The act of labelling people, particularly women who refuse to conform, as insane has occurred for centuries and is extensively documented. [92] Although 'the farmer's bride' "does the work around the house / As well as most (wives)" [93] she is portrayed once again as childlike. She "chats and plays"[94] (L.?) with the animals. Such references to women relating to animals and the natural world are used to emphasise women's relationship to nature. Simone de Beauvoir in ***The Second Sex (*** 1949) writes that culture is perceived to eclipse nature and because of materialist factors, women are unable to surpass their position as equal to nature. Whilst men are considered logical and controlled women are referred to as naturally "wild" [95], chaotic and lacking. On first examination this may

[90]Warner (1997)p.1 L.4-5
[91] op cit. L.18
[92]I shall deal with this in more detail in the chapter on "Madness".
[93] Warner (1997) p.1 L.20-21
[94] op cit. L.22
[95] Warner (1997).p.1 L.34

appear to correspond with elements of Irigaray's work. Irigaray may be seen to collude with this premise. However, central to Irigaray's theory is the fact that such representations within the symbolic order are negative as depicted by Mew. In the confines of *The Farmer's Bride* a wild nature is used as an explanation for the subjects refusal to comply and keep "men-folk" at bay [96]. Irigaray might suggest that a "wild" quality is simply one of many potential characteristics open to a woman, one of the multitude of possibilities "without limits or borders". [97] At this point in the poem the farmer's frustrated sense of self pleads "but what to me?"[98] . This is quickly followed by the penultimate stanza's claim that it is a wife's duty to produce heirs: "what's Christmas-time without there be/ Some other in the house than we?" [99]. This may be seen as a reference to what Irigaray refers to as "men's reproductive laws". Irigaray satirises Freudian analysis "...through her desire for a child-penis...(w)oman lives her own desire only as the expectation that she may at last come to possess an equivalent of the male organ" [100]: a baby! Mew challenges the symbolic order by daring to present a woman uninterested in motherhood, uninterested in her husband, and seemingly uninterested in what people (men) think. However, the final stanza transfers the focus from the desire to have a compliant domesticated wife to unambiguous

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[96] op cit.L.25
[97] Irigaray (1997) p.217
[98] Warner (1997) p.1. L.33
[99] op cit.L.40-41
[100] op cit. p.24

sexual desire. Passionate in his despair, the narrative voice of the farmer eroticises the "poor maid"[101] abruptly displacing reproductive *"need"* with sexual longing.

> 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! [102](L.50-4)

"We change names as men exchange us, as they use us" writes Irigaray of marriage[103]. Here in Mew's poem through a male narrative voice, the subject of the poem "The Farmer's Bride" is nameless but for the title that places her as a possession of the farmer. It is significant from a feminist perspective that the subjects name is inconsequential within the symbolic order. Elsewhere in the work of Mew, women who are objectified by the male gaze remain nameless. This is particularly apparent in the short story "A White Night"[104] which is discussed later in the chapter on religion. The point is that she could be any woman, any "hole". [105] The close of the poem is in fact a non-closure as the narrator does not succeed in his desire to tame his bride. She has refused to consummate the marriage and continues to refuse the farmer's will. Whilst the narrator's response is to define his subject in terms of insanity and instability he

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[101] op cit. L43
[102] op cit. L50-54
[103] Irigaray (1977) p.205
[104] Showalter ***Daughters of Decadence*** (1993)
[105] Irigaray (1977) p.24

is nevertheless unsuccessful in grinding her down. She does not relent and despite the male narrative voice there is no alternative scenario, no triumphant conquest involving the yielding of the subject to the farmer's will, neither is there a rape scene. Through the male narrative voice the farmer is initially portrayed as a victim of the wild nature of his bride. However, as the poem progresses and his patriarchal expectations are displayed, his authority and power within the marriage are shown to be paralysed. He is effectively shown to be impotent by his wife's non-compliance. In questioning male authority "masculinity", the power of the phallus, is resisted and denied.

The farmer's bride "refuses to conform to an alien order" [106]. Despite being labelled as 'Other' twice over; once as woman, secondly as nonconformist woman (thus insane) - although far from perfect - it is empowerment of a sort. The farmer's continuing desire to dominate his bride, written in terms of sexual gratification only serves to challenge the legitimacy of such authority. The focus is on challenging the validity of marriage as an institution, a theme evident in other work of Mew's such as the short story "Elinor"[107] in which the subject and title of the story Elinor refuses to bow down to the conventions of wedlock. When Elinor challenges a man his response is "must I mistake you for

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[106] op.cit 210
[107] Warner (1997) p.70

a woman?" [108] Women who refuse to marry or challenge their role within a marriage are perceived as deviant, not 'real' women at all.

Fundamentally, however, in "The Farmer's Bride" Mew is questioning both male and female sexuality. The eroticisation of the subject is as connected to her refusals and unavailability as well as her physical attractiveness. She is further eroticized by her childlike vulnerability. Her actual appearance becomes relevant only in the final stanza. Her personality appears completely irrelevant. Whilst the subject is described in terms that position her as childlike and insane the narrator's desire does not fade. In fact the vulnerability of the subject appears to heighten the narrator's desire. Therefore, in this instance, male sexuality is depicted in terms bordering on paedophilia. What is evident is that Mew is portraying male sexuality in terms of control. The implication is clear: male sexuality is at odds with female sexuality. This is precisely the point that Irigaray makes by privileging the phallus "(o)thers may make fetishes of us to separate us"[109].

It is suggested[110] that Mew is portraying a woman's fear of her sexual self, however, Irigaray would argue that such a critical response stems from an acceptance of a gendered symbolic order where female sexuality is defined in

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[108] op cit p.75
[109] Irigaray (1977) p.217
[110] Warner (1997)

relationship to the phallus. As "The Farmer's Bride" refuses to accept the phallus, her sexuality is considered abnormal. The idea that female sexuality, female desire, can be removed from the phallus/penis is alien to Freudian and Lacanian psychoanalysis rhetoric. It is however central to Irigaray's work. "Women haven't been taught, nor allowed, to express multiplicity... That doesn't suit their [male] desires"[111] writes Irigaray "Our pleasure is trapped in their system"[112] . Virginity can only be deemed as 'lost' following penetration from the penis. Irigaray writes "where a virgin is one as yet unmarked by them, for them (...) A virgin is the future of their exchanges..."[113] Whilst 'classical' psychoanalytical theories prescribe "normal" female sexuality, by such definitions women cannot be "normal" for they are not men. This is a fundamental concept articulated throughout feminist discourse from Simone de Beauvoir to Luce Irigaray and beyond.

In the final line of *The Farmer's Bride* the narrator powerfully eroticises the subject's hair. Throughout Mew's work there is an erotic focus upon women's hair that suggests elements of fetishism. At least one-tenth of Mew's poetry incorporates images of women's hair as sexually desirable. Whilst other images recur, such as the colour red, the moon and the sea the concentration on hair is

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[111] op.cit p.210
[112] op.cit211
[113] op.cit211-2

most pronounced. In the dictionary fetishism is defined as "a thing to which more respect or attention is given than is normal or sensible (...) an object or activity that is necessary for or adds to an individual's sexual pleasure (and) an object that certain people worship." [114] Freud's work on fetishism was published in 1927. A fetish, Freud suggested, is created as a result of a horror of female genitalia. The fetish is a substitute for the castrated penis. Within Freudian analysis fetishism is a male pursuit. As a woman Charlotte Mew could not, according to Freudian analysis, have a fetish, although her male narrative voice appears to. Perhaps Freudian theorists would argue that a lesbian by definition, identifying with men through her "masculinity complex" [115] and having been unsuccessful in entering the symbolic phase, having refused to reject women for their lack of a penis, will 'inevitably' transfer their perverse desire for other women into a fetish as a substitute for the penis, which they themselves and their love object also, lack. However, Freud himself has little to say on lesbianism. As mentioned before, lesbianism was generally marginalised by sexologists. Nevertheless, according to Freudian theory as a consequence of castration anxiety men have two options, homosexuality or fetishism. In ***The Enigma of Woman, Woman in Freud's Writing*** (1987) Sarah Kofman points out that, if male castration anxiety is 'inevitable', it is heterosexuality that is the abnormal response to revulsion at female genitalia. Kofman quotes Freud:

[114] Oxford Advanced Dictionary (1948)
[115] Irigaray (1977) p.169

> Why some people become homosexual as a consequence of that impression, while others fend it off by creating a fetish, and the great majority surmount it, we are frankly not able to explain. [116]

Kofman wonders at "how many men, if not all, manage to overcome their horror and ever experience pleasure in sexual relations with a woman." [117] Freud declined to address this himself. Rather than dismiss Freudian psychology, Kofman, a Lacanian theorist herself, argues that a study of Freud reveals a stereotype that discloses a fear of fluid, multiple feminine identities. It is these fluid, multiple feminine identities that Irigaray is intent upon discussing. "After a woman has reached a certain age, psychoanalysis can do nothing but avert its gaze" writes Irigaray. Unable to explain issues of femininity Freud simply refused to develop his analysis.

A fetish for women's hair is depicted throughout Mew's work. In "Fame", the second poem in ***The Farmer's Bride*** "Fame" is personified as a woman with "Bright hair"[118] In "The Forest Road" Mew's fixation is goulish:

> ...See, dear, your hair -
> I must unloose this hair that sleeps and dreams
> About my face, and clings like the brown weed
> To drowned, delivered things, tossed by the tired sea
> Back to the beaches. Oh! your hair! If you had lain
> A long time dead on the rough, glistening ledge
> Of some black cliff, forgotten by the tide,

[116]Kofman (1980) p.84
[117]op.cit p.84
[118]Warner(1997) p.3 L16

The raving winds would tear, the dripping brine would rust away
Fold after fold of all the loveliness
That wraps you round, and makes you, lying here
The passionate fragrance that the roses are.
But death would spare the glory of your head
In the long sweetness of the hair that does not die:
The spray would leap to it in every storm,
The scent of the unsilenced sea would linger on
In these dark waves, and round the silence that was you -
Only the nesting gulls would hear - but there would
Still be whispers in your hair, Keep them for me; keep them for me...

Furthermore, "Monsieur Qui Passe", a poem about women's ability to bewitch contains the line "But she had hair! - blood dripped in gold" [119]. "Absence" returns to thoughts of the sea "(i)t is a wind from that far sea/ That blows the fragrance of your hair to me." [120] In "She was a sinner" Mew writes of an unspoken, god fearing love (perhaps between two women) "knowing not its name (...) I did not spare/ But tore and trampled it [the love] and stained my hair (into) strands Of shame". The title of the poem and these two lines are deeply significant. The fetish, the hair, the object of desire is destroyed, mutilated as a result of the guilt and "shame" felt regarding the love object of the narrator . This is an example of Mew's work corresponding to a classic Freudian analysis. Contrast "She was a sinner" to "To a Little Child in Death"[121] in which angels have "shining hair" and one is presented with a

[119] Warner (1997) p.28
[120] op. cit p.55 L3-4
[121] op cit. p68

conflicting appropriation of the fetish. Yet, angels and sinners contrast in a similar fashion to virgins and whores. The dichotomy explicitly demonstrates an awareness of the multiple faces of women but at the same time demonstrates the cultural perception of women as divided between good and bad.

Throughout this analysis of Charlotte Mew's work particular powerful symbolic images are recurrent; the sea; the moon; the colour red; and death. These symbols have all been linked to *the feminine* throughout feminist literary discourse. Both the sea and the moon have connotations with the cyclical. The tide comes in and goes out in relation to the waxing and waning of the moon. This directly relates to the menstrual cycle which in 'normal'[122] circumstances is cyclical in nature and relates in time to the lunar cycle. Menstruation is viewed as a fundamental difference between men and women. Blood therefore marks women as Other. Irigaray poignantly writes "(y)our blood has become their meaning." [123] It is significant that Mew writes of passion as being "red". It is therefore significant that if passion in women is viewed as unfeminine and red= blood/women/ menstruation = danger.

Ussher in ***The Psychology of the Female Body*** (1989) writes that "(the menstruating woman is seen as basically 'mad' or 'bad', liable to commit crimes

[122]Whatever "normal" is ... See Ussher (1989) chapter 3
[123]Irigaray (1977) p.205

and prone to acts of 'lunacy'". [124] The word 'lunacy' relates directly to lunar which literally means *of the moon.* Irigaray in "When our Lips Speak Together" writes of "blood ... coming back. While our lips are growing red again..."[125] which is a reference to gaining a sense of self that is not "conceptualised on the basis of masculine parameters"[126] but "from the body". Here blood is not taboo and unmentionable. It is typical of Irigaray to be ambiguous; the "lips" could be either oral lips or vaginal lips: the labia. Either way the increase in blood is related to increased pleasure which physically draws more blood to the lips producing a plumper, redder sensuality. It is equally relevant that menstrual blood (obviously) touches the vaginal lips.

Both the moon and the colour red are associated by another literary Charlotte twenty years before Mew's birth. In Charlotte Bronte's ***Jane Eyre*** (1847) the portrayal of Bertha Mason, Rochester's wife, locked up in an attic for her madness, reflects versions of Victorian psychiatry. Bertha is said to have inherited her condition from her own mother, and is rendered mad as a consequence of a ferocious sexuality. Showalter illustrates Bronte's references to the moon and symbolic/euphemistic use of the colour red.

> Bertha's madness is...linked to female sexuality and the periodicity of the menstrual cycle. Her worst attacks come when the moon is "blood-red" (chap.25), or "broad

[124] Ussher (1989) p.42
[125] Irigaray (1977) p.212
[126] op.cit.23

and red" (chap.27); at these moments she is vicious and destructive, although at other times she is lucid and calm. [127]

Mew's references to the colour red are numerous. Most often quoted as evidence of Mew's suppressed sensuous nature is the poem "The Quiet House" [128], a reflection on childhood in the Mew's Gordon Street home, in which Mew exclaims "Red is the strangest pain to bear;/ ...I think my soul is red/ Like the soul of a sword or a scarlet flower..." (L.29/38-9) "And crimson haunts you everywhere -"[129] Charlotte Mew's fiery passion - so often referred to in biography, repressed, and always frustrated - is clearly evident in her references to women's hair but it is also apparent elsewhere in her poetry particularly with the use of such symbolism. "Pecheresse" [130] refers to a prostitutes "scarlet shame" (.19). In "She was a Sinner" [131], refereed to previously with reference to the fetish focus on hair, love, passion and sensuality are refereed to as "crimson", "red" and "more red" but becomes "blood" as the passion grows destructive.

"Saturday Market", a poem Fitzgerald describes as "one of the most successful things Charlotte Mew ever wrote" [132]. The tone is jaunty but sinister and

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[127] Showalter (1985) p.67
[128] Warner (1997) p.20
[129] op.cit. p.21/35
[130] op cit. p.13.
[131] op.cit p.62
[132] Fitzgerald (1984) p.139

reminiscent of Christina Rossetti's "Goblin Market"[133] especially with images of "eggs a'plenty" [134], "Pitchers and sugar-sticks, ribbons and laces" ,[135] and of grinning faces. In Mew's poem a woman walks through the market hiding a stillborn baby or an abortion under her shaw "the red dead thing"[136]. The narrator tells the woman to "bury it soon" (24) and then to kill herself. In this poem "the red dead thing" needs no explaining the image is clear. The irony is, as Fitzgerald points out, that in the Saturday Market "nobody cares" (28) but the subject herself whose shame is tangible. The colour red in this poem represents the suffering that can be experienced as a result of sex. She is certainly on her own. The "red" in "Saturday Market" is directly linked, both symbolically and materially, with female sexuality, with fecundity and ultimately with death.

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[133]Faderman (1994) p.62 -76
[134]Warner (1997) p.37 L.5
[135]op cit L.9
[136]op cit L.22

Charlotte Mew and Madness

> Madness is an emotive term. It serves to categorise, to separate, to designate as different...For madness acts as a signifier, clearly positioning women as the Other. [137]

It is apparent from the discussion so far that madness is a recurring theme throughout the work of Charlotte Mew. Brad Leithauser[138] suggests that:

> (t)he distancing, both physical and spiritual, that madness imposes provided her with a - and arguably the - principle theme of her poetry. Her other major theme, unrequited passion, has obvious thematic ties to madness, among them the poignancy of thwarted self-fulfilment. "

From poems which incorporate images of defiant women labelled mad/bad such as " The Farmer's Bride" and "Saturday Market", to what Fitzgerald refers to as the "asylum poems" [139] "Ken", and "On the Asylum Road", Mew depicts a consciousness and compassion for the insane that is unusual in the period. As Charlotte's own experience demonstrates the response to madness within families was to institutionalise individuals and more or less abandon them. Certainly the existence of Mew's incarcerated siblings was a closely kept family secret.

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[137]Ussher.10-11
[138]In the introduction to the American edition of Penelope Fitzgeralds ***Charlotte Mew and her Friends*** (1984) p.2
[139] Fitzgerald (1984) p.45

Showalter's polemic ***The Female Malady: Women, Madness and English Culture, 1830-1980*** (1985) proclaims that Darwinian psychiatry governed the rhetoric and was concerned with lunatics being "degenerates"[140], people on the borders of society who did not fit the expectations of later Victorian society. Fundamental to this was the idea that madness was inherited and unequivocally connected to ideas surrounding class and race. As mentioned in the introduction Charlotte's own life was touched by mental illness. A brother and a sister were institutionalised, as was the custom of the period. Charlotte herself suffered mental ill health in her later years culminating in her suicide in 1928.

Showalter (1985) examines how cultural ideas surrounding appropriate feminine behaviour have resulted in shaping definitions of madness in women. Showalter demonstrates how at the time of the *fin~de~siecle* with the emergence of the New Woman and feminist demands for education, employment and "personal freedom" doctors warned that women who were "especially rebellious"[141] were much more likely to show signs of mental illness. Doctors such as Henry Maudsley, George Savage (consultant to the teenage Virginia Woolf), and Weir Mitchell whose methods Charlotte Perkins Gilman's polemic ***The Yellow Wallpaper*** (1892) challenges, all advocated forms of Darwinian psychiatry that stressed women's 'natural' role as "helpmate and companion of man"[142].

[140]Showalter (1985) p.107
[141]op.cit. p.145
[142]op.cit p.123

Psychiatric discourse of the period maintained that if women tried to act like men, or if women over-stimulated their brains, unimaginable physical and mental damage could occur. All manner of irreversible damage was said to be done to women's reproductive system as a result of such behaviour. Furthermore once mental breakdown had occurred the chances of it being passed on to the next generation were considerable. It is significant therefore that Charlotte told her friend Alida Monroe from the Poetry Book shop that "hereditary insanity had led herself and her sister to vow never to marry". [143] As has been demonstrated in the previous chapter the emergence of psychoanalytic theory served to "categorize...separate...(and to) designate as different" femininity and by extension women. Later, Freud's work served to position women as "Other" and to pathologise femininity further. In Freud's "Lectures on femininity"[144] he refers to "the riddle of femininity"[145]... "to those of you who are women... you are yourselves the problem"(op.sit). In ***Women's Madness. Misogyny or mental illness***? (1991) Jane Ussher also writes "Women are not mad. Misogynistic discourse merely deems us so." [146] Whilst Ussher is extremely critical of Irigaray whom she regards as a reductionist verging on biological essentialist, Irigaray's premise with regard to women and madness has an identical starting point that women are labelled in order to be controlled rather

[143]Warner (1997) p.xii
[144]From ***Sigmund Freud. New Introductory Lectures on Psychoanalysis*** (Vol.2) (1963)
[145]op.cit.146
[146]Ussher.20

than allowed to express their fluidity.

In ***Charlotte Mew and her Friends*** (1984) Penelope Fitzgerald refers to "On the Asylum Road" and "Ken" as Mew's "asylum poems... written through, but not in, the first person"[147]. "Ken" is a localised poem, dealing with a specific individual in a specific place. Ken is harmless, relating to children and animals, but he is evidently different. He is "other", not like ordinary men. He is emasculated. Significantly his emasculation is expressed partly by relating him to nature and children as discussed previously with relation to femininity. He is hideous to look at and his actions embarrass other people. The lines "If in His image God made men,/ Some other must have made poor Ken" [148] can be read as a questioning of religious doctrine[149]. Eventually Ken is placed in an asylum and whilst the onlooker briefly questions life within the confines of the asylum the narrator in the fullness of time averts his eyes "I did not look / After he called and turned". [150] Guilt is in evidence. However, the narrator does not question the incarceration of Ken. Mew succeeds in depicting an uncomfortable attitude towards the treatment of the insane although she does not question its necessity. In "On the Asylum Road" this is developed. The insane are referred

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[147]Fitzgerald (1984) p.45
[148]Warner (1997) p.17
[149]This is dealt with in detail in the chapter on religion.
[150] Warner (1997) p.19 L. 82-3

to in this poem as "the incarnate wages of man's sin": the lunatic is the embodiment of sin. This directly relates to the biblical idea that women are paying, through their suffering in childbirth for the actions of Eve. The emasculation of Ken is reinforced by this comparison. Penelope Fitzgerald writes that "(t)he horror of the darkly stained and clouded glass, the poem's one insistent detail, works very strongly."[151] The actual windows of the asylum, "made of darkly stained or clouded glass" prevent the insane from viewing [152]the sane and the sane from viewing the insane. It is a concept that is reiterated at
the close of the poem with the lines "(o)urs too are clouded glass/To them, yes, every pane." The meaning is clear: the sane and the insane are not expected to interact and the "clouded glass" signifies the narrow minded, blinkered attitude of the general population towards the insane. "Clouded glass" somehow implies a choice, a choice not to take on board issues surrounding madness a choice to distort vision and to see only what one wants to see. Whilst psychiatry had been developing over the previous century, insanity was a taboo and little understood condition; a subject to be avoided by most.

As I have discussed previously, in the poem "The Farmer's Bride" the subject of the poem is referred to as having "turned afraid" [153], a reference to insanity. The subjects refusal to comply with the symbolic orders expectations of her

[151]Fitzgerald (1984)p.46
[152]op.cit p.17-18
[153]Warner.p1.L4

mean that, as discussed by Showalter (1985), Ussher (1991) and Irigaray (1977), the subject is labelled mad and her incarceration, at the hands of her husband, is legitimised.

Madness is also dealt with in Mew's poems on a different level. Sexual longings, and frustrations, appear to drive narrators *almost* to the brink of madness. "The Farmer's Bride", an example of so many of the elements to be found throughout Mew's work, concludes with in a virtually deranged tone. The passionately morbid mood of "The Forest Road" [154] presents a picture of alienation as a result of a somewhat obsessive love, closing with the haunting "I see my soul/ I hear my soul, singing among the trees." "Requiescat" depicts a similar atmosphere. The lines "Half-haunted joy, enchanted pain" sum up a familiar, practically masochistic sentiment, mentioned by Warner and refereed to previously. Warner writes that the "renunciation of all love ...(is)... a kind of passion." [155] In ***This Sex Which is not One*** (1985) in "Psychoanalytic theory: another look" Irigaray briefly examines the subject of masochism quoting Freud "the development of powerful masochistic impulses(...) succeed, as we know, in binding erotically the destructive trends which have been diverted inwards" [156]. Irigaray responds "desires, longings, wishes of the little girl are subject to

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[154]Warner (1997) p.23-4
[155]op.cit.xxi
[156]Irigaray (1977) p.45

repression because of the taboo against (...) 'active', impulses" [157] Girls expect to be beaten simply because of their gender, because they are not male and do not have a penis. This illustrates that forms of madness are directly related to phallocentric psychoanalytical positioning of the feminine, which is precisely what feminists like Irigaray and Kofman have worked to expose.

It is therefore evident in the work of Charlotte Mew that madness, or 'forms' of madness are intrinsic. It is also evident that madness is itself, as Michel Foucault illustrated in ***Madness and Civilisation: A history of insanity in the age of Reason*** (1965) "(t)he prestige of patriarchy is revived around madness".[158] The social construction of madness can be viewed therefore as a silencing of the feminine. As is demonstrated by examining Mew's 'asylum poems', madness emasculates precisely because madness is equated with Other: the feminine.

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[157]op cit
[158]Chesler (1997)

Charlotte Mew and Religion

> And he said to the woman, "I will increase your trouble
> in pregnancy and your pain in giving birth. In spite
> of this, you will still have desire for your husband,
> yet you will be subject to him.
> Genesis Chapter 3 Verse 16

Religion is a third theme which emerges and re-emerges throughout the work of Charlotte Mew. Despite being drawn to the Roman Catholic Church "Mew felt she could not join the church because she could not cope with the obligation to confess". [159] Warner in her introduction to ***Charlotte Mew Collected Poems and Selected Prose*** (1997) describes Charlotte as "God-bothered" [160] and suggests that ***The Farmer's Bride*** has a "Christian frame" [161] as a result of its numerous references to religion. However, "Madeleine in Church" [162], was originally sited as too blasphemous by The Poetry Book shop's compositor, the commission was rejected and a new publisher had to be found. "Poem after poem polarises God, invariably in the second person of the Christian Trinity, and a human lover..." [163] It is evident throughout her work that Charlotte's relationship with religion was deeply entwined with her unfulfilled passions.

Christianity has played a central role in the discourse of femininity throughout the

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[159] Faderman (1994) p.447
[160] Warner p.xii
[161] op.cit p.xv
[162] op.cit.p.25
[163] op.cit xiii

ages. Christianity has been used as a "guise" [164] to repress and control women. *The Church* is a male one that justifies women's subjugation. Radical feminist Mary Daly goes as far as to argue in ***Beyond God the Father*** (1973) that Christianity is based on "sadomasochism", on male dominance that is dependent on violence. "Man is master by divine right",[165] therefore, religion and "the fear of God" (men) keeps women enslaved. Luce Irigaray views religion as one of the many Western philosophical discourses that oppress and repress *the feminine*.

"Madeleine in Church" is a lengthy monologue in which the narrator, Madeleine, directly questions religion and its relationship to female sexuality. The narrator voices her disbelief in a "Paradise beyond this earth" [166] questioning why, if there is a God, has He created women such as she, who "...think(s) my body was my soul" [167], who can

> "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 -
> (...) even the scent of my own hair...
> [168]

The narrator also goes on to acknowledge that through the depiction of the

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[164]Ussher (1991) p.39
[165]Beauvoir(1949) p.632
[166]Warner (1997) p.26 L.38
[167]op.cit p27 L.63
[168]op.cit p.26 L.55-59

virgin Mary, Christianity has "cast (...) many devils" [169] returning one to the earlier theme of the Virgin/whore dichotomy.

"A Question"[170] is an explicit two stanza questioning of women's place within orthodox Christianity. Mew writes that women are "scourged, tormented, mocked and called to pay/... (for) ... The sin of ages"[171] by religion. She continues "We knew no Eden and the poisoned fruit/ We did not pluck, yet from the bitter root/ We sprang, *maimed branches of iniquity*." (My emphasis). "(M)aimed branches of iniquity" [172] is a powerful phrase to describe women's position within society generally and in relation to the church specifically. Women are "maimed" by being considered as Other and "maimed" by being "called to pay" for the actions of Eve in the garden of Eden. The "iniquity" is crystal-clear. Mew develops her theme with adjectives including "accurst" [173] "(t)ainted"[174], and "(b)lind victims"[175] . The final line "- oh! God, man too has not atoned!" [176] The culpability of the male of the species is paramount in Mew's perception of Christian principles.

The questioning of religion as a tool to separate, define and position

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[169] op.cit. p29 L160-161
[170] op.cit.p65
[171] op cit. L.2-3
[172] op cit. L 6-8
[173] op cit L 9
[174] op cit L.10
[175] op cit L.12
[176] op cit L.65

marginalised people as Other occurs elsewhere in Mew's work. In "Ken", a poem referred to previously in the section on madness, Mew writes "If in His image God made men,/ Some other must have made poor Ken-" [177] questioning why God would allow mental illness and suffering. It is a question that is posed throughout Mew's work. Furthermore the question is raised time and time again throughout Mew's work in relation to women.

In "Absence" "...Christ stands/ Still with scarred hands/ Over my mouth, I must answer. So,/ I will come - He shall let me go!"[178] In "Pecheresse" Mew writes "I sold/ My soul for love and not gold" [179] which returns one to the theme of sexuality and draws on its relationship to religion. Once again Mew writes of sexuality in regards to religion in constraining terms. "Pecheresse" is set on the "waterside" "I stand ...and watch the sea/Which may have taken mine from me." [180] "This one sin I have not told" [181]

There is a reference to prostitution:

> ...The foreign ships
> Bring many a one of face and name
> As strange as his, to buy your lips,
> A gold piece for a scarlet shame
> Like mine. But mine was not the same. [182]

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[177] op.cit p.17L 17-18
[178] op cit p.56 L17-20
[179] op cit p.13. L 25
[180] op cit. p.13 L.9-10
[181] op cit. L 14
[182] op cit L.16-20

The narrator writes "one night was ours... and I lost the way/ To Paradise for him/... He bought my soul... His is the only face I know,/And in the dark church, like a screen,/ It shuts God out; it comes between". The narrator has no preconceptions that her love will return and this causes her to "love, to hate, to hunger for" him more [183].

> Yet this one sin I will not tell
> Though Mary's heart is as frozen snow
> And all nights are cold for one warmed too well.
> But, oh! ma Doue! *the nights of Hell*! (Mew's emphasis.)[184]

However, the subject is ambiguous. 'He' could be a divinity or a lover. "The Lady's heart" may be as "frozen snow", cold, unwelcoming and unforgiving, indicating a determination not to stray, to be 'good', which is central to the poem, but the final four words produce several interpretations: firstly that nights dwelling on this sin are insufferable and secondly, that the sin will lead the narrator into hell for eternity and thirdly, that perhaps, " *the nights of hell*!" are in fact a perverse form of pleasure. "(T)*he nights of hell!* simply serve to clarify the contrasting pleasure experienced through this "one sin".

In "The Mother in Mimesis" in **Body/Text in Julia Kristeva: Religion, Women and Psychoanalysis (**1992) Martha Reined links the work of Luce Irigaray, Renee Gird and Julia Kristeva. Reineke's starting point is that "our linguistic

[183] op cit L14
[184] op cit L.42-45

and cultural codes are structured by sacrifice" [185] Kristeva's work argues that "we continue to be shaped by an economy of sacrifice seen in a secular age" [186]. The "first victim of sacrifice...(is) ...the mother." [187]

> Kristeva's study of abjection warns of the dangers that still attend patriarchal religions, which have heretofore alternated between a vision of woman as angel and as whore, goddess of light and of darkness, guardian of order and bringer of chaos. Kristeva's work suggests that woman and her body cannot continue to bear the sacred to the point of breaking, the burden of which falls once again on women: in accusations of witchcraft, body mutilations such as anorexia or clitoridectomy, woman battering, or woman-hating pornography. Rituals that diffuse the terror, that spread its weight around are needed." [188]

In several works by Mew religious ritual and female sacrifice is depicted, most notably in "A White Night". [189] Showalter describes "A White Night" as "(e)ven more frightening than 'The Yellow Wallpaper'..." [190] In the story it is 1873 and a New Woman, Ella is on honeymoon with her husband King and her brother Cameron. The three are looking for a place "unique, untrodden and uncivilised"[191]. The narrator Cameron observes

> we roughed it pretty thoroughly, but the young person's passion for the strange bore her robustly through the risks and discomforts

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[185]Crownfield (1992).80
[186]op.cit80
[187] op.cit.81
[188]op.cit.82
[189]In **Daughters of Decadence: Women Writers of the Fin~de~Siecle** (1993) Elaine Showalter introduces a collection of short stories by such esteemed writers as Kate Chopin, Edith Wharton, Olive Schreiner and Charlotte Perkins Gilman also present is a story by Charlotte Mew; "A White Night" first published in ***The Temple Bar*** (cxxvii) in 1903.
[190]Showalter Daughters of Decadence(1993) p.xvii
[191]op.cit p.119

> of those wilder districts which at best, perhaps, are *hardly women's ground*... Ella accepted anything that befell, from dirt to danger, with a humorous composure" [192] (Italics are my emphasis)

On their excursion the three find themselves trapped in the cloisters of a Spanish convent. From their hiding places they witness the ritual burying alive of a woman. Showalter suggests that the ambiguous title has at least two possible interpretations; a pun referring to a *Knight* "who should ~ but does not ~ come forward to rescue the woman from sacrifice"[193] and the French *nuit blanche* "a sleepless night, a twilight zone of consciousness".

> The ritual seems like a warning of female destiny in the contexts of patriarchy. At one moment, the faces of the individual chanting monks merge into 'one face ~ the face of nothing human ~ the face of a system, of a rule. [194]

"(T)he face" is the face of patriarchy; the face of institutionalised religion."The wheel ecclesiastic."[195] Amongst the incense, the chanting,and the monks (50 -60) "She lies (...) in the very centre of the sanctuary ~ has a place uniquely sacred to her order [196] "(A) figure, white and slight... a woman's figure"[197] is sacrificed by men. She had "her part to play".[198]

The contrast between Ella at the beginning of the story and Ella at the end is

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[192] op.cit p.119
[193] Showalter Daughters of Decadence (1993) p.xvii
[194] op cit p.xvii
[195] op.cit137
[196] op.cit137
[197] op.cit127
[198] op.cit127

highly significant. What she has witnessed has reduced a confident woman to speechlessness and hysteria "Ella was naturally unstrung... she partially lost consciousness. It was as well..." [199] The narrator Cameron by contrast, is voyeuristic in the extreme. He regards what he is watching as little more than a "spectacle", "a rather splendid crime"[200] . He does not intervene and actively prevents his brother-in-law from doing so. "It was she who had the key to what I might have done but didn't do" [201] states Cameron. This is a familiar theme used to justify the unacceptable treatment of women throughout the ages. If she does not object she obviously wants it. Ussher points to the defenders of circumcision who argue that "women are active participants" and therefore "it cannot be a "tool of patriarchy"[202] . Irigaray maintains that women are taught to propagate the persecution that they are exposed to. When King is about to intervene Cameron prevents him with reference to Ella's safety but "it was not for her at all that I was consciously concerned. I was impelled ... to stand aside and see it through." [203] The penultimate paragraph could be a portrayal of the Virgin Mary herself.

> She lies, one must remember, in the very centre of the sanctuary -
> has a place uniquely sacred to her order, the traditions of her kind.
> It was this honour, satisfying, as it did, some pride of spirit or of race,

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[199] op.cit135
[200] op.cit137
[201] op.cit133
[202] Ussher.38
[203] op.cit p.133

which bore her honourably through. [204]

Within the Catholic Church, the church that Mew was herself closest too, the Virgin Mary is a central figure, she is sacred and the "traditions of her kind" indicates that women, 'good' women, are expected to emulate her. Women's 'sacred' position, like that of the Virgin Mary, is expected to instil pride as well as help her bear her position as subject of man/God.

Death is considered to be the ultimate feminine/passive state. The subject of "A White Night" is dead and the narrator's strong willed sister having acted as voyeur, is silenced. In "The Newly Born Woman" in ***Helene Cixous: A Reader*** (1994) Cixous discusses binary oppositions arguing that the logocentric symbolic order fixes meaning through patriarchal, hierarchical value systems consisting of binary oppositions such as "Activity/passivity" [205]. Cixous determines that "(e)ither woman is passive or she does not exist". [206] Without female space death becomes inevitable considering the negative positioning of women within the symbolic order, where psychoanalytic theories view women only in relation to the phallus. Irigaray writes

> "...their history, their stories, constitute the locus of our displacement. It's not that we have a territory of our own but their fatherland, family, home, discourse,

[204] op cit p.138
[205] Cixous.37
[206] op.cit39

> imprison us in enclosed spaces where we cannot keep
> on moving, living as ourselves. Their properties are our exile.
> Their enclosures, the death of our love. Their words, the
> gag upon our lips. [207]

Death is the subject of a myriad of poems by Mew and frequently linked to religion. She appears deeply preoccupied by death and mortality. From "In Nunhead Cemetery" [208], a poem generally considered to be autobiographical but with a reversal of roles between Charlotte and her brother Henry, to "Peri en mer"[209] in which the narrator envisages her own deathbed, Mew's focus returns gain and again to the subject. Mew writes in "Madeleine in Church" "well at least the dead are free!" [210] and "(d)ead at last!"[211] Often Mew's references to death evoke a tone of liberation but with so many challenges to the concept of an afterlife the focus appears to be on the here and now. As if only through death can reconciliation and freedom occur. There are several war poems such as "The Cenotaph"[212], and "May, 1915" [213]. There is even a poem about the death of Queen Victoria "V.R.I."[214]. However, Mew's strongest death poems are those which face death head on and without fear or bitterness such as "Smile, Death"[215] and "A Farewell" which she begins: "(r)emember me and smile, as

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[207] Irigaray (1977) p.212
[208]Warner (1997) p.9
[209]op.cit69
[210]op cit p28
[211]op.cit29
[212]op.cit.40
[213]op.cit.48
[214]op.cit67-8
[215]op.cit53

smiling too, / I have remembered things that went their way -" Facing death head on, appears sadly prophetic particularly as Mew's preoccupation with death often involves the narrator's own immortality. The final line of "The Quiet House" announces "...some day I *shall* not think; I shall not *be*!" [216](.L64) (Poets emphasis.) and the tone appears to be one of relief.

Mew's explicit use of the church as a symbol of patriarchal institutions that have a controlling effect upon women is dramatically demonstrated in "The White Night". Significantly Mew writes with reference to the subject in the story "(w)hat counted chiefly with her, I suspect, was something infinitely greater to her vision than the terror of men's dreams." Her sacrifice is a response to 'men's' fear of women; patriarchal fear of the feminine: that which religion itself has worked so hard to control. In "The White Night" the ultimate price is paid in death and silence. It is a pessimistic outlook. Yet, it exposes the extent to which women are subjugated throughout society.

[216]op.cit.22

The Conclusion

Some elements of her writing appear problematic for some feminists.

Mew does not present an alternative scenario. There are no happy endings or satisfactory closures. Death is often the best that can be hoped for. She does not cry out for women's liberation. Her subversion can be missed amongst the rhetoric of romantic and sexual longing. (A genre that does not sit comfortably with feminism.) Yet, as we reach the next *fin~de~siecle* I would suggest that post-structuralist feminism, and "French feminism's" particularly, have subverted notions of fixed cultural structures and identities that began with Modernist writers, such as Mew, a century ago.

Brad Leithauser[217]writes "(t)o have written (...) a handful of poems of unique beauty and finish represents an inspiriting beating of the odds." Whilst critics acknowledge that some of Mew's work "deserves the neglect it receive(s)" [218]with "lapses into obscurity"[219], overall, Mew's work merits the recognition and respect it received during her lifetime. Mew's rhymed free verse was very early Modernist. She is consistently praised for her strength in monologueand she maintains a subjective stance throughout her work that is "raw"[220] and "solemn"[221]. The paucity of work on Mew is steadily growing[222] reflecting the

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[217] p.7
[218] op.cit
[219] warner.xix
[220] warner.xix
[221] op.cit xx
[222] Collected Poems by Charlotte Mew (ed) John Newton is to be published by Penguin:

renewed interest in her. Mew's capacity to enchant is remarkable. Her work is charged with unfulfilled passions, with melancholic notions of madness and immortality it is powerfully inventive, very sensuous and extraordinarily engaging.

Central to Mew's work are concerns regarding those marginalised in society. Those relegated to the position of Other: the dispossessed. From a psychoanalytical feminist perspective Mew's work is deeply fascinating.

Lacking feminine space, Mew appropriates masculine space and in doing so questions, resists and denies the power of the phallus. Consistently she illustrates the fact that concepts of desire are phallocentric, that desire is constructed in relation to the phallus alone and that female desire is negated if it is not a reaction to male desire. As a consequence Mew assumes a male narrative position that superficially represents a patriarchal perspective on women. However, in doing so, Mew's subversive strategy displays the conflict between male desire that assumes female desire as negative/absent within the symbolic order. Mew challenges the symbolic order by portraying women who refuse to adhere to this philosophy despite the sanctions inflicted on them as a consequence. Warner describes the men in Mew's work as "nondescript".[223]

London in 2000

[223] warner.xx

However, it is more complex than this. Fundamentally, the men in Mew's work, frequently the narrator's themselves, are depicted again and again as impotent and emasculated.

Simplistically, a 'classic' Freudian reading of the work of Mew 'uncovers' what is self-evident; romantic notions directed at women in a society where such feelings are repressed. However, an examination of Mew's work with reference to feminist psychoanalysts and philosophers, primarily Irigaray but also Kristeva, and Kofman, as well as other feminist literary critics, reveals the extent to which psychoanalytic theory is based on a "Law of the Father" that privileges the phallus and negates the feminine. Classical psychoanalytical theory itself acts to reinforce the dominance of the phallus.

It is evident that a reading of Mew that acknowledges her lesbianism broadens the reach of her work. As a feminist it is important to acknowledge authorship in order to build a feminine (or lesbian) tradition. However, it is also important to move beyond this. Whether her sexuality is taken into account or not, and I would suggest that it is very difficult to cancel out such 'knowledge', Mew's work portrays an awareness of gender issues such as marriage, madness, religion and desire that ... Marriage is portrayed as an institution that chains

women to men as possessions to be used at will. Christianity is depicted as a patriarchal institution that controls women through fear of the 'Laws of God the Father'. Madness is portrayed as Other; an extension of women or an emasculation of men. Desire is rendered phallocentric and socially constructed.

Mew's subversion is twofold, simultaneously her work displays elements of essentialism and constructionism. On a basic level the fact of her male persona, her male narrative voice, corrupts the concept of an essential masculine or feminine identity. Furthermore, her male narrative voices often display either an absurdity, an arrogance or an incapacity to fulfil his role. A trace of a woman's voice is audible throughout. Fitzgerald (1984) maintains that Mew has written through, not in the first person"[224] . Feminine and masculine behaviour is demonstrated as socially constructed as the expectations of the symbolic order remain **subtly** unfulfilled. Her subterfuge is subtle. She does not portray men as victorious heroes or women as passive victims. She depicts women, as more rounded, more fluid, and less fixed.

[224]Fitzgerald (1984) p.46

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