Maude Clare

POEM TEXT

Out of the church she followed them
With a lofty step and mien:
His bride was like a village maid,
Maude Clare was like a queen.

"Son Thomas," his lady mother said,
With smiles, almost with tears:
"May Nell and you but live as true
As we have done for years;

"Your father thirty years ago
Had just your tale to tell;
But he was not so pale as you,
Nor I so pale as Nell."

My lord was pale with inward strife,
And Nell was pale with pride;
My lord gazed long on pale Maude Clare
Or ever he kissed the bride.

"Lo, I have brought my gift, my lord,
Have brought my gift," she said:
To bless the hearth, to bless the board,
To bless the marriage-bed.

"Here's my half of the golden chain
You wore about your neck,
That day we waded ankle-deep
For lilies in the beck:

"Here's my half of the faded leaves
We plucked from the budding bough,
With feet amongst the lily leaves, -
The lilies are budding now."

He strove to match her scorn with scorn,
He faltered in his place:
"Lady," he said, - "Maude Clare," he said, -
"Maude Clare," – and hid his face.

She turn'd to Nell: "My Lady Nell,
I have a gift for you;
Though, were it fruit, the blooms were gone,
Or, were it flowers, the dew.

"Take my share of a fickle heart,
Mine of a paltry love:
Take it or leave it as you will,
I wash my hands thereof."

"And what you leave," said Nell, "I'll take,
And what you spurn, I'll wear;
For he's my lord for better and worse,
And him I love Maude Clare.

"Yea, though you're taller by the head,
More wise and much more fair:
I'll love him till he loves me best,
Me best of all Maude Clare.

SUMMARY

Maude Clare followed the newlyweds out of the church, walking with poise, head held high. Lord Thomas's bride, Nell, looked like a simple country maiden, while in contrast, his ex-lover Maude Clare looked stately as a queen.

"My son, Thomas," his mother said to him, smiling through her tears of joy, "I hope that you and Nell are as faithful to each other as your father and I have been for years."

"You know," she added, "your father faced a similar predicament, torn between love and marriage, before our wedding thirty years ago. But he did not seem quite as conflicted as you do, and I was not as anxious about his first love as Nell seems."

Indeed, Lord Thomas seemed so torn with indecision that he had turned white. Nell was white-faced too, but with pride and relief that she had won his hand. Yet Lord Thomas could not look away from Maude Clare, herself white-faced with anger, even as he kissed his new bride.

"Excuse me," Maude Clare interrupted, "I have brought you a wedding gift, my lord. May this gift be a blessing on your shared hearth and home, your shared table, and indeed your shared marital bed."

"Here, take back my half of the golden chain you gave me. You wore the other half around your neck, you will recall, on that day we spent together, wading barefoot in the mountain

stream, looking for lilies."

"And here, take back my half of the wilted leaves we plucked, back when the trees were beginning to bud. Remember our bare feet among the sprouting lily leaves? Now the lilies are in full bloom."

In response, Lord Thomas tried to meet Maude Clare's contempt with his own, but stuttered and failed. "Lady," he said, then more intimately, "Maude Clare, Maude Clare"—before at last he turned away, unable to even face her.

Maude Clare turned to Nell, his new bride, instead. "My lady Nell," she said, "I have a gift for you too. Though I should note, if this gift were fruit it would be spoiled or eaten by now, or if it were flowers, the dew would be all dried up."

"Here, Nell, take my portion of Lord Thomas's unfaithful heart, my share of his weak and worthless love. Take it or leave it, in fact. I don't care, I am through with him."

"I'll take your leftovers," Nell said. "I'll wrap myself in the remains of the love you've rejected—because he's my husband now, for better or worse, and I love him, Maude Clare."

"Yes, that's right. I know you are taller, and smarter, and prettier than me, but I am his wife now, and I will love him until he loves me back and loves me back. Indeed, I'll love him until he loves me better than you, Maude Clare."

THEMES

LOVE, MARRIAGE, AND SOCIAL EXPECTATIONS

"Maude Clare" focuses on a Victorian-era love triangle between the aristocrat Lord Thomas, his ex-lover Maude Clare, and his new bride Nell. Though the poem suggests that Lord Thomas truly cared for the bold and fierce Maude Clare, and may even still have feelings for her, he marries the demure and wholesome Nell instead. The poem implies that Nell better fits the Victorian ideal of a bride, making the matter of which woman Lord Thomas "loves best," as Nell puts it, irrelevant. The poem thus highlights the pressures of societal expectations in Victorian society, revealing how rigid ideas about propriety and status lead only to heartbreak, resentment, and dissatisfaction.

Details throughout the poem imply that Lord Thomas prefers Maude Clare, who's presented as Nell's opposite in many ways: she is taller, "more wise and much more fair," and Lord Thomas cannot stop looking at her, even as he kisses his new bride. Where Maude Clare looks "like a queen," Nell looks "like a village maid," and the poem implies that Maude Clare and Lord Thomas had an intimate relationship in the not so distant past.

Yet the love between Lord Thomas and Maude Clare was not, in the Victorian era, sufficient reason for marriage. In fact, the opposite is true: any intimacy before marriage was scandalous in a society that severely restricted the interactions of unmarried men and women. Ironically, then, Maude Clare and Lord Thomas's relationship is the very thing that dooms her chances of becoming his bride! In society's eyes, she is an unacceptable choice.

Maude seems righteously furious at this humiliating turn of events, and Lord Thomas doesn't seems all that happy about it either. For starters, he is not described as a joyous groom, but instead as "pale with inward strife." Nell gets the short end of the stick too, explicitly acknowledging that Lord Thomas has chosen her for reasons other than love; she vows at the poem's close to "love him till he loves me best," indicating that she knows full well that she comes in second place—even on their wedding day.

Even Lord Thomas's mother seems to be in the know; she praises her son's choice of bride, subtly implying he might have decided otherwise. She also suggests that Lord Thomas's father faced a similar predicament before his own marriage, underscoring the longstanding power of the social expectations guiding love and marriage in Victorian culture.

Thus, though the poem implies that Maude Clare and Lord Thomas's love was sincere, readers will perhaps sense that Lord Thomas was always going to make the socially acceptable choice to marry Nell. In other words, the question of which force would win out—romantic love or societal status—was never in doubt. It does not matter who Lord Thomas "loves best," however much Nell may wish to one day win her husband's heart; it only matters who society will judge as suitable on his arm at the altar.

Where this theme appears in the poem:

- Lines 1-48

HYPOCRISY AND SEXISM IN VICTORIAN ENGLAND

Throughout "Maude Clare," the poem makes clear that Lord Thomas and Maude Clare behaved in ways that were considered unacceptable for unmarried lovers in Victorian England. Though the extent of their romance remains ambiguous, even the *hint* of impropriety is enough to taint Maude Clare's reputation and ruin her chances for marriage. In contrast, Lord Thomas is able to marry another woman without any meaningful consequences. This demonstrates the sexist hypocrisy at the heart of Victorian society, and how difficult it was for a "fallen woman"—or, really, any woman who broke with Victorian ideals of femininity—to regain her footing in society.

The poem presents Maude Clare as a kind of femme fatale, described as so beautiful and alluring that Lord Thomas cannot look away from her. She's also bold, assertive, and openly

angry—all traits that go against strict Victorian expectations that women be pure, gentle, and demure.

The poem also suggests that Lord Thomas may have led Maude Clare on, or that she'd hoped for marriage before her lover tossed her aside for Nell. Maude Clare's bold decision to confront Lord Thomas at his wedding thus briefly offers the chance for some catharsis. She makes it impossible for Lord Thomas to blithely move on to the next stage of his life—marital bliss with a more "acceptable" woman—without facing at least *some* consequences.

Lord Thomas seems weak and pitiful in these moments; in response to Maude Clare's accusations, he "falter[s]" over his words and is unable to muster any kind of reply, ultimately just "hid[ing] his face" from her. Above all, the poem draws attention to Lord Thomas's embarrassment about being called to account in such a public setting—or perhaps, more generously, his shame over how he and society have treated Maude Clare in the aftermath of their relationship.

Yet Maude Clare remains the victim in this situation. The poem's closing lines, and the day itself, ultimately belong to Nell, the woman who keeps her rage in check and stands by her husband (though it's worth noting that Nell marrying a man who doesn't love her isn't really "winning" here either). However righteous Maude Clare's anger may be, and whatever Lord Thomas may have once promised her, it's clear that Maude Clare has already suffered and will likely continue to suffer.

Ultimately, this fleeting moment of confrontation is the only satisfaction or retribution that Maude Clare is likely to receive, and readers might even assume that her public confrontation of her ex will only reinforce the damage to her reputation. She now faces a life permanently damaged by Victorian society's hypocritical and sexist treatment of premarital romance, demonstrating the impossibility for any woman—even one as sympathetic as Maude Clare—to rise above such damning misogyny.

Where this theme appears in the poem:

- Lines 1-4
- Lines 9-40

LINE-BY-LINE ANALYSIS

LINES 1-4

Out of the church she followed them
With a lofty step and mien:
His bride was like a village maid,
Maude Clare was like a queen.

The first stanza sets the scene by describing a woman who follows a bride and groom out of the church on their wedding day. The bride, the speaker notes, "was like a village maid," whereas the other woman, Maude Clare, "was like a queen."

These similes not only introduce the two women, but also immediately juxtapose the pair. The parallelism between these phrases (note how lines 3 and 4 follow the same grammatical structure) emphasizes the sharp contrast between the two women: the bride seems humble and unsophisticated, while Maude Clare is bold and regal, walking "with a lofty step and mien."

Notably, Maude Clare is the only character named in this stanza. Though later the bride and groom are identified as Nell and Lord Thomas, here Nell is defined merely as "his bride" and Lord Thomas is even more obscured, his presence hinted at only through the pronouns "them" and "his." While Maude Clare's identity as Lord Thomas's ex-lover is not clarified until a little later, the poem's use of her name in both the title and the first stanza emphasizes her role as its central figure.

Finally, this first stanza establishes the poem's rhyme scheme, meter, and form. It uses alternating lines of iambic tetrameter and trimeter, meaning odd-numbered lines have four iambs (four da-DUMs) and even-numbered lines have just three. Take lines 3-4 as an example:

His bride | was like | a vil- | lage maid,
Maude Clare | was like | a queen.

There are variations here, as with the spondee (stressed-stressed) that draws extra attention to Maude Clare's name, but the rhythm is still clear. This meter plus the ABCB rhyme scheme (lines 2 and 4 rhyme, but lines 1 and 3 don't) indicate that the poem is a ballad.

This is a traditional form of English verse, often set to music and used to recount legends and myths. By using this particular form to tell the story of "Maude Clare," the poem instantly associates itself with a poetic tradition of high romance and tragedy.

LINES 5-8

"Son Thomas, " his lady mother said,
With smiles, almost with tears:
"May Nell and you but live as true
As we have done for years;

The second stanza opens with Lord Thomas's mother addressing her son directly. Described as crying tears of joy, she wishes Lord Thomas and his new bride well, specifically expressing her hope that "Nell and you but live as true / As we have done for years."

Readers can assume Lord Thomas's mother is referring to herself and her husband, Lord Thomas's father. In making this comparison, she explicitly connects her son's marriage to her

own, identifying it as part of a family history of happy and faithful couples. These lines hint at the broader social context in which Lord Thomas made his decision to marry, suggesting that his choice was likely shaped as much by his parents' and societal expectations as by his own preferences.

At the same time, the assonance in this stanza hints that more may be going on below the surface of these good tidings. Together with the regular meter and rhyme scheme, this stanza's assonant vowels create a lilting musicality that lends the dialogue a theatrical or performative flair. In particular, the assonant /oo/ sounds in "Nell and you but live as true" creates an especially cloying cadence, which hints that the sunny picture of marital bliss painted by Lord Thomas's mother may not be entirely honest or sincere.

In addition, these lines also introduce Lord Thomas and Nell by name, further fleshing out the other two characters in the poem's love triangle.

LINES 9-12

"Your father thirty years ago
Had just your tale to tell;
But he was not so pale as you,
Nor I so pale as Nell."

Stanza 3 is made up entirely of dialogue spoken by Lord Thomas's mother, as she continues to speak to her son. Having just expressed high hopes for his faithful marriage in the previous stanza, her speech now takes a bit of a surprising turn. Readers may be forgiven for not fully understanding *what* "tale to tell" she is referring to—it's a purposefully vague reference, and the love triangle between Maude Clare, Nell, and Thomas has not yet been entirely spelled out. But the phrase has a scandalous tinge regardless, which hints at the tangled romantic web between the three main characters.

The references to Lord Thomas and Nell's pallor also contains an important clue, suggesting they are not entirely blissful newlyweds. In short, the implicit suggestion running through these lines is that Lord Thomas and his father share an unfortunate conundrum: loving one woman, while deciding to marry another.

Once again, then, Lord Thomas's mother's dialogue provides important context, cluing readers in to the norms of the society in which "Maude Clare" takes place. It is not uncommon, it seems, for men to dally with other women before they get married—in fact, it appears to be a multigenerational tradition! It's certainly common enough that his mother feels comfortable commenting on it, at least, as though trying to brush away any concern her son might feel.

That said, his mother's subtle jab that his father "was not so pale as you / Nor I so pale as Nell" suggests that something unusual is afoot. (Indeed, as the first stanza established, Maude Clare, the third member of this love triangle, is present at the wedding and "follow[ing]" the newlyweds closely.)

LINES 13-16

My lord was pale with inward strife,
And Nell was pale with pride;
My lord gazed long on pale Maude Clare
Or ever he kissed the bride.

The fourth stanza leaves dialogue behind and returns to the main narrative of the poem—but it also reveals the presence of a first-person speaker, who refers to Lord Thomas "my lord."

This is readers' first hint that a distinct individual is narrating the poem. Up until now, the speaker has been content merely to transcribe and describe the main characters' dialogue and actions, granting readers direct access to the scene, much as a third-person speaker might.

Now, by subtly alerting readers to their first-person perspective, the speaker reminds readers of the active presence of an audience at this scene. Every wedding comes with wedding guests—and in this case, those guests include lower-class individuals like the speaker, for whom Lord Thomas is *their* lord. This is a highly-public moment, in other words, in which Lord Thomas is on full display before his family, friends, *and* his subjects.

And what a scene they all are witnessing! As the speaker describes over the course of this stanza, the bride and groom are both white-faced, Lord Thomas "pale with inward strife," and Nell "pale with pride." Both seem to be reacting to the presence of Maude Clare. Lord Thomas seems torn with indecision and perhaps embarrassment at the sight of his ex-lover, while his wife appears both proud and relieved to be the woman with the ring on her finger. Meanwhile, the speaker also describes Maude Clare as "pale," though presumably with anger or dismay—while noting that Lord Thomas cannot tear his eyes away from her, even as he kisses his new bride.

Lines 15-16 therefore confirm what the poem has been implying all along: Maude Clare and Lord Thomas were once romantically involved, though he has chosen instead to marry Nell. Thus, though all the characters' white faces are linked to different emotions, the repeated emphasis on their pallor reinforces just how fraught the scene and situation is for each of them.

Likewise, the unforgettable image of a groom staring obsessively at his ex-lover (even while kissing his new bride!) once again juxtaposes Nell and Maude Clare, emphasizing the vast difference in how Lord Thomas feels about them.

LINES 17-20

"Lo, I have brought my gift, my lord,
Have brought my gift," she said:
To bless the hearth, to bless the board,
To bless the marriage-bed.

In stanza 5, Maude Clare directly confronts Lord Thomas and Nell. The poem transitions abruptly back into dialogue, capturing the immediacy with which Maude Clare steals the spotlight.

Maude Clare uses stiff, florid language ("Lo, I have brought my gift, my lord") marked by parallelism and repetition as she informs her ex-lover that she has brought him a wedding gift:

> "Lo, I **have brought my gift**, my lord,
> **Have brought my gift**," she said:
> **To bless the** hearth, **to bless the** board,
> **To bless the** marriage-bed.

Note the anaphora of "to bless the" as well as the bold /b/ alliteration between "**b**less," "**b**oard," and "**b**ed." All this adds to the formality and intensity of Maude Clare's language, boosting the poem's dramatic sensibility and granting Maude Clare a certain dignity (much like the queen comparison in stanza 1). As a result, her intrusion into the newlyweds' special day feels compelling and even sympathetic.

And make no mistake, Maude Clare is definitely intruding! In lines 19-20, she explains that the "gift" she has brought for Lord Thomas is meant "to bless the hearth, to bless the board, / to bless the marriage-bed." These symbols of marriage and domesticity become increasingly more intimate as Maude Clare lists them, moving from a metaphor for their home as a whole ("the hearth") to their shared familial table ("the board") and finally to the private space of the couple's "marriage-bed."

Maude Clare has no right to any of these spaces, so her claim that she wants to "bless" them should be taken with a grain of salt. Her decision to not only publicly confront the newlyweds but aggressively trespass on their shared life together is a clear sign that Maude Clare's "gift" is ironically not much of a gift at all.

LINES 21-24

> *"Here's my half of the golden chain*
> *You wore about your neck,*
> *That day we waded ankle-deep*
> *For lilies in the beck:*

Maude Clare's dialogue, in which she confronts Lord Thomas and Nell, continues throughout the sixth stanza. These lines are dedicated to the first of her "gifts" for the newlyweds: one half of a "golden chain," the other half of which Lord Thomas used to wear.

The chain is symbolic, as is the fact that Maude Clare is returning it: where it once represented the romantic *connection* between herself and Lord Thomas, who wore the other half around his neck, now its return signifies the *rupture* between them. This symbol also makes clear that Maude Clare's stated intention to bring the newlyweds a "gift" was not sincere; what she is really doing here is calling Lord Thomas to account.

To that end, Maude Clare's imagery describing a romantic outing between herself and Lord Thomas speaks volumes about the nature of their relationship. Her reference to wading barefoot in a stream suggests a level of intimacy that was forbidden between unmarried men and women in Victorian society, when simply spending time along together was scandalous. But Maude Clare's frank admission of how she and Lord Thomas spent their time together suggests that she has nothing to hide. Revealing the details in this public forum serves primarily to embarrass him in front of his wife and wedding guests; her reputation is presumably already ruined by their romance.

Finally, there is an additional symbol present in this stanza: the lilies, which represent purity, chastity, and fertility, and deepen the romantic and even sexual undertones of the scene that Maude Clare describes.

LINES 25-28

> *"Here's my half of the faded leaves*
> *We plucked from the budding bough,*
> *With feet amongst the lily leaves, -*
> *The lilies are budding now."*

Maude Clare's dialogue carries on into the seventh stanza, as she bestows upon Lord Thomas a second gift: her "half of the faded leaves / We plucked from the budding bough."

This stanza suggests that at one time Lord Thomas and Maude Clare's romance was full of natural promise, like the "budding bough" and the "lily leaves" among which they used to frolic. Now, however, their love has "faded" like the leaves, which Maude Clare returns to him as a stark symbol of the way Lord Thomas let their relationship wither and die.

- Maude Clare's remark in line 28 that "the lilies are budding now" takes these nature metaphors a step further, potentially implying that something else is in bud—in other words, that she may be pregnant!

Like the two stanzas that precede this one, Maude Clare's speech here is peppered with alliteration and assonance. For example, listen to the music of phrases like "**b**udding **b**oughs" and "**l**ily **l**eaves." The musicality of her language is fitting for a ballad, but it also serves an important purpose in helping Maude Clare achieve her aim: calling out Lord Thomas in front of his wife and guests.

Assonance has a tendency to both slow down and speed up the reading process, creating a complex sonic dynamic that mirrors Maude Clare's manipulation of her audience (both wedding guests *and* readers). The repeated short /uh/ sounds of "pl**u**cked from the b**u**dding b**ough**" in line 26 and the long /ee/ sounds of "f**ee**t amongst the l**i**ly l**ea**ves" in line 27 manage to both linger over the damning details of her relationship with Lord Thomas, and insistently move forward, refusing to let

anyone turn away.

LINES 29-32

He strove to match her scorn with scorn,
He faltered in his place:
"Lady," he said, - "Maude Clare," he said, -
"Maude Clare," – and hid his face.

In the eighth stanza, the poem pivots from Maude Clare to her ex-lover, Lord Thomas. At first, the speaker says, "He strove to match her scorn with scorn," a subtle use of diacope that captures Lord Thomas's desire to match Maude Clare's contempt and anger.

Unfortunately for him, however, Lord Thomas fails. He "falter[s] in his place," and then stutters through the next two lines, 31-32, as emphasized by the repeated use of caesura:

> "Lady," he said, - "Maude Clare," he said, -
> "Maude Clare," – and hid his face.

This onslaught of caesura (all those pauses in the middle of these lines) is stilted and painful to read. Not only does it capture how weak Lord Thomas's response is (especially compared to Maude Clare's articulate and righteous speech of the previous three stanzas), but it also emphasizes how public and embarrassing this situation is for Lord Thomas. Every stutter only further invites his audience to pay even closer attention, waiting to see what words he might muster.

But in the end, it is yet another instance of caesura that caps off the entire exchange: a dash that highlights Lord Thomas's final, shameful recourse: " – [he] hid his face." All Lord Thomas can manage to do is say Maude Clare's name, and he even has trouble doing that!

LINES 33-36

She turn'd to Nell: "My Lady Nell,
I have a gift for you;
Though, were it fruit, the blooms were gone,
Or, were it flowers, the dew.

In the ninth stanza, Maude Clare "turn[s] to Nell," and addresses her rival directly—in no small part because Nell's new husband and Maude Clare's ex-lover, Lord Thomas, has just proven incapable of handling Maude Clare's confrontation!

In the same formal, florid dialogue that she used to denounce Lord Thomas, Maude Clare announces that, just as she brought symbolic gifts for Lord Thomas, she has also brought a gift for the bride. As lines 35-36 reveal, however, Maude Clare's gift for Nell is as ominous as her gifts for Lord Thomas turned out to be. Not yet revealing exactly what the gift is, and speaking in metaphor, Maude Clare issues a warning (almost as though she wants to help Nell manage her expectations):

- She compares the gift she has for Nell to fruit and flowers, but then explicitly notes that if her gift *were* these things, it would already be spoiled, consumed, or dried-up: "Though, were it fruit, the blooms were gone, / Or, were it flowers, the dew."

Of course, once consumed, fruit can never be eaten again, and once evaporated, dew is gone forever. Thus, in making this comparison, Maude Clare is making clear that—whatever her gift is for Nell—it is already permanently damaged.

As in previous stanzas, alliteration and parallelism mark Maude Clare's dialogue:

> Though, were it fruit, the blooms were gone,
> Or, were it flowers, the dew.

These literary devices add a layer of dignity to Maude Clare's speech, despite the incredible impropriety of her decision to directly address Nell. Readers should also note that Maude Clare takes special care to formally address as "My Lady" in line 33, acknowledging the social gap between them.

LINES 37-40

"Take my share of a fickle heart,
Mine of a paltry love:
Take it or leave it as you will,
I wash my hands thereof."

In stanza 10, Maude Clare delivers her most painful verbal blow yet. Consisting entirely of dialogue, these lines reveal that Maude Clare's "gift" for her romantic rival and Lord Thomas's new wife, Nell, is the "fickle heart" that Lord Thomas once promised Maude Clare herself:

> "Take my share of a fickle heart,
> Mine of a paltry love:
> Take it or leave it as you will,
> I wash my hands thereof."

The anaphoric repetition of "take" at the opening of lines 37 and 38 (as well as the consonant /k/ sound echoed in "fickle") emphasize the bluntness of Maude Clare's speech. She is unsparing here, as she denigrates Lord Thomas, metaphorically describing his love as "fickle" and "paltry" (or in other words, unreliable and insufficient).

What's more, as Maude Clare suggested in the previous stanza, when she first warned Nell about the nature of her gift, Maude Clare sees these characteristics of Lord Thomas's love as permanent. Whatever romantic tendencies he may once have possessed, he used them up on his flirtation with Maude Clare, and now, Maude Clare implies, he is incapable of any true or steadfast love.

Maude Clare's scorn is particularly clear in lines 39-40. Not only is she relinquishing to Nell "[her] share" of the heart that

by all rights now officially belongs to Lord Thomas's wife, but she also explicitly states that she does not particularly care whether Nell accepts her offer or not: "I wash my hands thereof," Maude Clare announces, another metaphor that captures her utter indifference to (or perhaps even disgust with) the entire love affair.

In doing so, Maude Clare seems to be attempting to lay claim to whatever last shreds of dignity and respect society will afford her. As a "fallen woman," her reputation ruined by this soured romance with Lord Thomas, this very public confrontation is Maude Clare's only means of retribution. In this stanza—the last readers hear from Maude Clare—she states her case as boldly as possible, explicitly denouncing Lord Thomas's treatment of her and inviting sympathy for her situation from readers and wedding guests alike.

LINES 41-44

"And what you leave, " said Nell, "I'll take,
And what you spurn, I'll wear;
For he's my lord for better and worse,
And him I love Maude Clare.

In the eleventh stanza, readers (and wedding guests) finally hear from Nell, the bride. In these lines, she issues a sharp rebuttal to Maude Clare, and explicitly accepts the ominous "gift" that Maude Clare offers her (that is, the remains of her husband's former relationship).

Using anaphora and parallelism, in a direct echo of Maude Clare's own language, Nell turns the tables on her rival, acknowledging frankly that she knows her marriage is less than ideal, and even so, that she is more than willing to accept the dregs of Lord Thomas's romance:

> "And what you leave, " said Nell, "I'll take,
> And what you spurn, I'll wear;

Nell does not seem to expect much from Lord Thomas, explaining, "For he's my lord for better and worse." Nevertheless, line 44 ends with her insisting that she loves him anyway: "And him I love Maude Clare."

After 10 stanzas in which it's been made quite clear that Lord Thomas is (or at least once was) far more infatuated with Maude Clare than with his bride (recall stanza 4, in which Lord Thomas could not stop staring at his ex, even while kissing his new wife), this line stands out as both very sad and strikingly candid.

Nell, it seems, understands her role perfectly, and she is not afraid to own it any more than Maude Clare is afraid to own hers. Like many Victorian brides, it is Nell's lot in life to marry (and try to "love") a man who does not love her back. But even so, as she points out, Nell *is* his wife now, "for better and worse," and at least in that sense she has triumphed.

LINES 45-48

"Yea, though you're taller by the head,
More wise and much more fair:
I'll love him till he loves me best,
Me best of all Maude Clare.

The twelfth and final stanza of "Maude Clare" closes the poem with more of Nell's dialogue, as though symbolically indicating who has "won" in this love triangle between Lord Thomas, Nell, and Maude Clare.

This stanza brings the poem full circle, recalling the juxtaposition of Nell and Maude Clare first introduced in the opening lines. Here, however, it is Nell herself who makes the explicit comparison, acknowledging frankly that Maude Clare is "taller by the head, / More wise and much more fair" than she is.

- This is a striking admission! It suggests that despite Nell's wholesome and innocent demeanor, she is in fact a shrewd participant in the Victorian marriage market, fully aware of her value and how she stacks up against the other woman in competition for Lord Thomas's hand.

Lines 45-48 are then Nell's trump card, in which she asserts her dominance in this love triangle, reminding Maude Clare that even "though" Maude Clare may be taller, smarter, and prettier, *Nell* is the woman who gets to spend the rest of her days with Lord Thomas.

However, these lines are tinged with unmistakable desperation, for Nell frames even her victory as a situation in which she will continue to struggle. Nell knows full well that her husband doesn't love her, but she's determined to try to win his heart anyway. After all, what choice does she have?

The mixture of antimetabole and anadiplosis suggests—all that repetition and inversion—make it feel as though Nell is trying very hard to convince not just Maude Clare of her (Nell's) victory, but herself:

> I'll love him till he loves me best,
> Me best of all Maude Clare.

Readers may doubt that Lord Thomas will ever love Nell—after all, almost the entire poem is dedicated to Maude Clare's public display of his faithlessness, and Lord Thomas does not make much of a case for himself. At the same time, however, readers can hardly fault Nell for trying to make the best of the bad situation in which she finds herself.

This closing stanza thus concludes the poem on an uncomfortable note, serving as one last reminder of the sexism and hypocrisy of the Victorian society in which both Nell and Maude Clare have been forced to make their choices. Though Nell has "won" both the last word and Lord Thomas's hand, it's

clear that she is as much a victim of a culture that sees women purely as romantic and sexual objects as Maude Clare is.

SYMBOLS

THE HEARTH, THE BOARD, THE MARRIAGE-BED

The hearth, the board, and the marriage-bed together serve as a symbol of the way Maude Clare disrupts and tarnishes the new marriage of her ex-lover Lord Thomas and his bride Nell.

In the fifth stanza, having already attended their wedding and followed them out of the church, Maude Clare explicitly confronts Lord Thomas and Nell, proclaiming that she has brought them gifts:

> To bless the hearth, to bless the board,
> To bless the marriage-bed.

A "hearth" is part of a fireplace, and has long represented warmth, comfort, and blissful domesticity in art and literature, even giving rise to the expression "hearth and home" as a reference to one's beloved home and family. A "board," in Victorian speech, refers to a table—the site of shared family meals, as well as a space to invite community and provide generosity. And the "marriage-bed," of course, refers to the literal space where a marriage is consummated, the intimate site of love and procreation.

Taken together, these three domestic sites all represent the foundation of the new couple's married life. Maude Clare's gifts are thus ostensibly meant to "bless" the new couple's marriage. However, given her identity as Lord Thomas's ex-lover (and the fact that her gifts turn out to be old tokens of their love), Maude Clare's blessing turns out to be ironic. Instead, her gifts serve as more of a curse, as she deliberately intrudes on these symbolic sites of the couple's new, shared life.

Where this symbol appears in the poem:

- **Lines 19-20:** "To bless the hearth, to bless the board, / To bless the marriage-bed."

LILIES

When Maude Clare reminds Lord Thomas of their past romance, she reminisces about a day they spent together "wad[ing] ankle-deep / for lilies in the beck."

At first glance, this recollection of flowers on a pretty spring day simply serves as a romantic detail from a lovers' outing. However, lilies have long been associated with purity, chastity, and fertility, and Victorian readers at the time "Maude Clare" was published would have been quick to make those symbolic associations.

- Maude Clare's reference to this particular flower thus emphasizes the romantic (and likely sexual) nature of Lord Thomas and Maude Clare's past relationship, and heightens her veiled accusation that Lord Thomas ruined her sexual reputation.

What's more, Maude Clare's remark, in line 28, that "the lilies are budding now," can be interpreted on two levels:

- On the one hand, Maude Clare may simply be referring to the "budding" romance between Lord Thomas and Nell—their relationship has proven to be the fertile or successful one, whereas Maude Clare and Lord Thomas merely frolicked "amongst the lily leaves" before they were in full bloom.
- On the other hand, however, Maude Clare may also be revealing, on a very subtle level, that she herself is "budding," or pregnant, as a result of that day spent with Lord Thomas.

Either way, the presence of lilies in the poem serves as a clear symbol of the romantic relationship between Maude Clare and Lord Thomas, and hints at the possibility of sexual intimacy as well.

Where this symbol appears in the poem:

- **Lines 23-24:** "That day we waded ankle-deep / For lilies in the beck:"
- **Lines 27-28:** "With feet amongst the lily leaves, - / The lilies are budding now.""

MAUDE CLARE'S GIFTS

The two gifts that Maude Clare bestows upon Lord Thomas at his wedding—a golden chain and some faded leaves—symbolize lost love and broken promises. They help to convey Maude Clare's ill wishes for his marriage to Nell.

Both the golden chain and the faded leaves are love tokens from the past romance between Maude Clare and Lord Thomas. Readers can assume that they each initially seemed to Maude Clare like *hopeful* symbols of the romantic link between herself and Lord Thomas:

- The first, half of his golden chain, is a clear symbol of connection;
- The second, leaves "plucked from [a] budding bough" during their romantic outing, is likewise a natural symbol of their blooming romance.

Now, however, as Maude Clare returns these items to Lord

Thomas, they have lost their hopeful shine. Instead, they represent the rupture of his romantic overtures and the broken promises he made to her. Though Maude Clare claims that she offers these gifts back to Lord Thomas as blessings upon his marriage, it is quite clear, given their past relationship and the nature of the gifts themselves, that they are meant more as a curse than a blessing.

Where this symbol appears in the poem:

- **Lines 21-22:** ""Here's my half of the golden chain / You wore about your neck,"
- **Lines 25-26:** ""Here's my half of the faded leaves / We plucked from the budding bough,"

FRUIT BLOOMS AND FLOWER DEW

The bloom-less fruit and dried up flowers in lines 35-36 represent Lord Thomas's damaged heart—and perhaps his inability to love again after Maude Clare.

Maude Clare brings this up when offering Nell "my share of a fickle heart" and "paltry love," in essence bestowing upon Nell whatever romantic connection remains between herself and Lord Thomas. In doing so, Maude Clare remarks that this gift, "were it fruit, the blooms were gone / Or, were it flowers, the dew." In other words, she compares their soured romance to something more tangible, assigning physical symbols to Lord Thomas's fickle heart and paltry love.

It is important to note that Maude Clare describes these symbolic items as permanently damaged. Blooms and dew represent freshness and vitality, but Maude Clare explicitly states that *if* Lord Thomas's love took the form of fruit or flowers, these elements would be missing. The gift that she's giving Nell—her husband's "fickle" heart—is spoiled and dried up.

Maude Clare may refer to this offering as a gift, but the symbolism of the rotten fruit and dried-up dew makes clear that what she's really bestowing upon the new bride is a burden and a curse. The implication of Maude Clare's metaphor is that Lord Thomas's heart is used up, and thus that Nell will never experience his love in its purest, freshest form.

Where this symbol appears in the poem:

- **Lines 35-36:** "Though, were it fruit, the blooms were gone, / Or, were it flowers, the dew."

POETIC DEVICES

ANAPHORA

Anaphora is most evident in "Maude Clare" in the dialogue spoken by Maude Clare herself. First, she repeats "to bless" three times in quick succession in lines 19-20, claiming that her wedding gifts for Lord Thomas serve:

> To bless the hearth, to bless the board,
> To bless the marriage-bed.

Shortly thereafter, Maude Clare delivers the gifts themselves, and uses anaphora once again to introduce them, repeating "here's my half" at the opening of subsequent stanzas:

> "Here's my half of the golden chain
> [...]
> "Here's my half of the faded leaves

In both cases, Maude Clare's use of anaphora draws attention to her rather shocking actions: delivering ill-intentioned wedding gifts that cast a shadow over the newlyweds by reminding Lord Thomas, his bride, and his guests of his past relationship with Maude Clare. The repetition creates a rousing rhythm, drumming up emotion and helping express Maude Clare's barely-concealed fury and frustration.

Later in the poem, however, Lord Thomas's new bride Nell also uses anaphora to deliver a rebuttal to Maude Clare:

> "And what you leave, " said Nell, "I'll take,
> And what you spurn, I'll wear;

Similarly, the parallelism of these opening clauses helps convey Nell's emotion. By turning the tables on Maude Clare and using the same poetic device to explicitly lay claim to her husband, Nell also asserts her own dominance in the love triangle as Lord Thomas's wife.

Where Anaphora appears in the poem:

- **Line 19:** "To bless the," "to bless the"
- **Line 20:** "To bless the"
- **Line 21:** ""Here's my half"
- **Line 25:** ""Here's my half"
- **Line 29:** "He"
- **Line 30:** "He"
- **Line 41:** ""And what you"
- **Line 42:** "And what you"

ASSONANCE

Assonance is used throughout "Maude Clare." It is a fitting device for a poem in the ballad form, which traditionally was set to music. In addition to its regular rhyme scheme, which relies on assonant end rhymes in every other line, the repeated vowel sounds *within* lines and stanzas helps lend the poem a strong sense of musicality.

Assonance also slows down and speeds up the reading process. In "Maude Clare," this creates a complex sonic dynamic that mirrors the complex dynamics at play in the poem's narrative. Throughout the poem, Maude Clare is confronting Lord Thomas and Nell—a dramatic, aggressive decision that keeps the scene's audience (readers and wedding guests alike) on the edge of their seats, eager for the next development. At the same time, Maude Clare's accusations as she calls Lord Thomas to account are largely leveled through subtle symbolism, best understood by reading between the lines.

Assonance helps readers do both of those things. In stanza 6, for example, Maude Clare's recollection of a romantic outing with Lord Thomas is peppered with assonant long /ay/ sounds:

> "Here's my half of the golden chain
> You wore about your neck,
> That day we waded ankle-deep
> For lilies in the beck:

The repeated /ay/ sounds serve as a kind of sonic attack, resurfacing again and again, and thereby demanding Lord Thomas's (and everyone else's) continued attention, no matter how uncomfortable the memory may be. But the assonance *also* draws particular attention to the nuances of this memory, such as Lord Thomas's decision to gift Maude Clare with "half" of his "chain," and the fact that the lovers "waded" barefoot in a mountain stream, details that suggest strong romantic (perhaps even sexual) involvement.

A similar thing happens with the /uh/ sounds of "plucked from the budding bough" in line 26 and the long /ee/ sounds of "feet amongst the lily leaves" in line 27. In all these moments, assonance emphasizes the damning details *and* refuses to let anyone look away from them.

Where Assonance appears in the poem:

- **Line 3:** "bride," "like"
- **Line 7:** "you," "true"
- **Line 10:** "tale"
- **Line 11:** "pale"
- **Line 12:** "pale"
- **Line 15:** "gazed," "pale"
- **Line 19:** "bless," "bless"
- **Line 20:** "bless," "bed"
- **Line 21:** "chain"
- **Line 23:** "day," "waded," "ankle"
- **Line 26:** "plucked," "budding"
- **Line 27:** "feet," "lily," "leaves"
- **Line 34:** "you"
- **Line 35:** "fruit," "blooms"
- **Line 36:** "dew"
- **Line 39:** "will"
- **Line 47:** "him till"

CAESURA

Much of the caesura in "Maude Clare" helps to mark the starts and stops of dialogue, shaping the rhythm of the characters' speech. This effect is most pronounced, and perhaps most significant, in the eighth stanza, when Lord Thomas delivers his only spoken lines:

> "Lady, " he said, - "Maude Clare, " he said, -
> "Maude Clare, " – and hid his face.

The prolific punctuation, marking each of Lord Thomas's halting attempts to respond to Maude Clare's confrontation, captures his utter failure to meet this consequential moment. His ex-lover has come to confront him on his wedding day, and now it is Lord Thomas's turn to reply. However, every instance of caesura only further emphasizes Lord Thomas's weak response in contrast to Maude Clare's articulate, righteous denunciation. All he can manage to say is her name, and even that seems difficult!

What's more, the caesura emphasizes how public and embarrassing this situation is for Lord Thomas. Every stutter only further invites eavesdroppers to pay even closer attention, waiting to see what words he might muster. But in the end, it is yet another instance of caesura that caps off the entire exchange: a dash that highlights Lord Thomas's final, shameful recourse: " – [he] hid his face."

Where Caesura appears in the poem:

- **Line 5:** "Thomas, " his"
- **Line 6:** "smiles, almost"
- **Line 17:** ""Lo, I," "gift, my"
- **Line 18:** "gift, " she"
- **Line 19:** "hearth, to"
- **Line 31:** ""Lady, " he," "said, - "Maude," "Clare, " he"
- **Line 32:** "Clare, " – and"
- **Line 33:** "Nell: "My"
- **Line 35:** "Though, were," "fruit, the"
- **Line 36:** "Or, were," "flowers, the"
- **Line 41:** "leave, " said," "Nell, "I'll"
- **Line 42:** "spurn, I'll"
- **Line 45:** ""Yea, though"

DIALOGUE

The majority of "Maude Clare" is written in dialogue, emphasizing the poem's dramatic, almost theatrical, nature. The events play out much like a play, over the course of one scene in which Maude Clare confronts her ex-lover Lord Thomas and his new bride Nell.

The frequent use of dialogue allows all of the characters to have their say, bouncing from Maude Clare's self-righteous exposure of Lord Thomas's faithlessness, to Lord Thomas's

pitiful inability to respond, to Nell's long-suffering acceptance of her husband "for better and worse." Even Lord Thomas's mother gets a word in, with her dialogue helping to contextualize both her son's decision to marry Nell and Victorian society's differing treatment of the two women (and the man) caught in this love triangle.

Notably, rather than resembling regular speech, the dialogue in "Maude Clare" is as formal and florid as the lines dedicated to the narrative. Take, for instance, Maude Clare's use of the archaic "lo" at the opening of the fifth stanza, and her reliance on repetition, which is rare in everyday spoken language:

> "Lo, I have brought my gift, my lord,
> Have brought my gift," she said:
> To bless the hearth, to bless the board,
> To bless the marriage-bed.

The elaborate dialogue contributes to the poem's dramatic sensibility. In turn, that strong sense of drama elevates "Maude Clare" from a tawdry tale of jilted love and ruined reputations to a larger-than-life story that feels both timeless and romantic (in the tragic sense of the word), as befits a poetic ballad.

Where Dialogue appears in the poem:

- Line 5
- Lines 7-8
- Lines 9-12
- Lines 17-18
- Lines 19-20
- Lines 21-24
- Lines 25-28
- Line 31
- Line 32
- Lines 33-36
- Lines 37-40
- Line 41
- Lines 41-44
- Lines 45-48

IMAGERY

"Maude Clare" is full of imagery that helps set the scene, capture characters, and convey emotion. The first stanza, for instance, sets up the poem's core plot—a former lover is present at somebody's wedding—while also establishing the juxtaposition of Maude Clare and Nell, all in a few vivid images:

> Out of the church she followed them
> With a lofty step and mien:
> His bride was like a village maid,
> Maude Clare was like a queen.

Thanks to the imagery in these opening lines, readers can clearly picture the conflict. Maude Clare is not just present at this wedding—she is "follow[ing]" the newlyweds out the church door, like a predator chasing its prey. However, she is no monster—she is described as walking with a "lofty step and mien," conveying her dignity and poise despite the awkward circumstances. The poem makes a point of using imagery to draw a sharp contrast between Maude Clare and Nell, one that clearly favors Maude Clare. While the "bride [looks] like a village maid," plain and humble, Maude Clare looks beautiful and stately, "like a queen."

Throughout the poem, imagery continues to play a prominent role, from the "pale" faces of everyone involved in the love triangle, to the vividly-recalled memories of Lord Thomas and Maude Clare's romance.

Where Imagery appears in the poem:

- Lines 1-4
- Line 6
- Lines 11-12
- Lines 13-16
- Lines 19-20
- Lines 21-24
- Lines 25-28
- Line 29
- Line 30
- Line 32
- Line 33
- Lines 35-36
- Lines 45-46

IRONY

Fittingly, for a poem that shines a harsh light on societal norms and expectations, "Maude Clare" is full of irony.

At first glance, the story introduced in "Maude Clare" appears to be a typical one: a wealthy young man, Lord Thomas, marries a wholesome young woman, Nell, and they step out of the church on their wedding day eager to start their lives together. However, what happens next is wholly unexpected—and the first instance of irony in the poem, upending the happily-ever-after that readers and the newlyweds alike might expect. Maude Clare, the groom's ex-lover, publicly confronts Lord Thomas and Nell, revealing that their marriage is neither as blissful nor as assured as it may seem on the surface.

As the poem and scene unfolds, irony continues to define and defile the awkward situation in which the three characters find themselves. Maude Clare claims to have brought gifts to "bless" the marriage, but those gifts turn out to be sour love tokens and ill wishes rather than good tidings. Nell delivers a speech at the end of the poem marked by her shockingly frank acknowledgement of the fact that Lord Thomas loves her less, an admission that suggests that (ironically), for all that Nell appears sweet and innocent, she's in fact a shrewd player in the

Victorian marriage market.

Indeed, the poem's dedication to uncovering the sexism and hypocrisy at the heart of the Victorian society demands that readers remain attuned to the irony of a society that claims to privilege chastity above all else, but allows men to get away with sexual desires while punishing women for even the hint of romance.

Where Irony appears in the poem:

- **Line 1:** "Out of the church she followed them"
- **Line 6:** "With smiles, almost with tears:"
- **Lines 15-16:** "My lord gazed long on pale Maude Clare / Or ever he kissed the bride."
- **Lines 18-20:** "Have brought my gift, " she said: / To bless the hearth, to bless the board, / To bless the marriage-bed."
- **Lines 34-36:** "I have a gift for you; / Though, were it fruit, the blooms were gone, / Or, were it flowers, the dew."
- **Lines 41-42:** ""And what you leave, " said Nell, "I'll take, / And what you spurn, I'll wear;"
- **Lines 45-46:** ""Yea, though you're taller by the head, / More wise and much more fair:"

JUXTAPOSITION

The foundation of "Maude Clare" is the contrast between the two women involved with Lord Thomas: his ex-lover Maude Clare and his new bride Nell. The poem juxtaposes them immediately, introducing Nell as "like a village maid" and Maude Clare as "like a queen" within the very first stanza, and continues to highlight their differences throughout the poem. Indeed, Nell herself provides some of the sharpest juxtaposition, straightforwardly acknowledging that, in contrast to herself, Maude Clare is "taller by the head, / More wise and much more fair." In matters of appearance, the poem makes clear, Maude Clare comes out on top.

The women's roles are also an important source of juxtaposition, however: Nell is the woman who has won Lord Thomas's hand in marriage, whereas Maude Clare is his ex-lover, abandoned by him and scorned by society. Though the poem presents only a single scene from these women's lives, it is clear that Nell's life is on an upward trajectory of matrimonial security, while Maude Clare is now relegated to a life on the margins as a "fallen woman," her reputation ruined by her romance with Lord Thomas. In this instance of juxtaposition, therefore, Nell takes home the prize.

However, juxtaposition in "Maude Clare" is not a black-and-white device. The characters may occupy binary roles—the innocent woman versus the unchaste woman, or the dominant wife versus the victimized lover—but the poem suggests that these binaries lack nuance and accuracy.

Indeed, the final instance of juxtaposition, in which Maude Clare "wash[es her] hands" of Lord Thomas's "paltry love" only for Nell to metaphorically scoop up even these dregs of her husband's heart, makes clear that both women are getting the short end of the stick, regardless of which side of the coin they occupy. No matter who is "more fair," no matter who gets to share Lord Thomas's "marriage-bed," both Maude Clare and Nell are at the mercy of a society in which women are defined entirely by their sexual and marital circumstances.

Where Juxtaposition appears in the poem:

- **Lines 3-4:** "His bride was like a village maid, / Maude Clare was like a queen."
- **Lines 11-12:** "But he was not so pale as you, / Nor I so pale as Nell.""
- **Lines 13-15:** "My lord was pale with inward strife, / And Nell was pale with pride; / My lord gazed long on pale Maude Clare"
- **Line 16:** "Or ever he kissed the bride."
- **Lines 33-36:** "She turn'd to Nell: "My Lady Nell, / I have a gift for you; / Though, were it fruit, the blooms were gone, / Or, were it flowers, the dew."
- **Lines 37-40:** ""Take my share of a fickle heart, / Mine of a paltry love: / Take it or leave it as you will, / I wash my hands thereof.""
- **Lines 41-48:** ""And what you leave, " said Nell, "I'll take, / And what you spurn, I'll wear; / For he's my lord for better and worse, / And him I love Maude Clare. / "Yea, though you're taller by the head, / More wise and much more fair: / I'll love him till he loves me best, / Me best of all Maude Clare."

METAPHOR

There are several metaphors in "Maude Clare." For example, when Maude Clare states that she has brought a gift to "bless the hearth, to bless the board, / to bless the marriage-bed," she is of course not speaking literally, but metaphorically referring to Lord Thomas and Nell's marriage as a whole. Likewise, the gifts that she presents, though they exist on one level as tangible objects that she can physically hand over to Lord Thomas, are also metaphors—they represent the relationship between Maude Clare and Lord Thomas, which has now "faded."

Maude Clare is not just giving back to Lord Thomas some old love tokens; she is symbolically renouncing any love left between them. The same can be said of the gift she gives Nell; of course Maude Clare cannot *literally* hand over half of Lord Thomas's "fickle heart" or literally "wash [her] hands" clean of his love. Instead, she uses metaphor to describe her decision to relinquish her romantic connection with him.

Some readers have also read metaphors into Maude Clare's description of her romantic outing with Lord Thomas, "that day we waded ankle-deep / for lilies in the beck." The symbolic

associations of lilies with purity, chastity, and fertility have led some to believe these lines, and those that follow in the next stanza, are oblique metaphors referring to sexual intimacy between Maude Clare and Lord Thomas.

Where Metaphor appears in the poem:

- **Lines 19-20:** "To bless the hearth, to bless the board, / To bless the marriage-bed."
- **Lines 21-22:** ""Here's my half of the golden chain / You wore about your neck,"
- **Lines 23-24:** "That day we waded ankle-deep / For lilies in the beck:"
- **Lines 25-28:** ""Here's my half of the faded leaves / We plucked from the budding bough, / With feet amongst the lily leaves, - / The lilies are budding now.""
- **Lines 34-36:** "I have a gift for you; / Though, were it fruit, the blooms were gone, / Or, were it flowers, the dew."
- **Lines 37-40:** ""Take my share of a fickle heart, / Mine of a paltry love: / Take it or leave it as you will, / I wash my hands thereof.""
- **Lines 41-42:** ""And what you leave, " said Nell, "I'll take, / And what you spurn, I'll wear;"

PARALLELISM

"Maude Clare" is filled with parallelism, which intensifies the poem's language while also sharpening the juxtapositions central to the poem's conflict. From the first stanza, which uses parallel similes to describe Nell and Maude Clare, the two rivals for Lord Thomas's heart, to Nell's closing speech, in which parallelism forms the foundation of her defense of her new role as Lord Thomas's wife, the device gives "Maude Clare" much of its drama and verve.

It is particularly prominent in stanzas 4 through 7:

> To bless the hearth, to bless the board,
> To bless the marriage-bed.
> "Here's my half of the golden chain
> [...]
> "Here's my half of the faded leaves
> [...]
> He strove to match her scorn with scorn,
> He faltered in his place:

As with many forms of repetition, the parallel structure of Maude Clare's dialogue creates a strong sense of rhythm, compelling readers (and, presumably, the wedding guests) to pay close attention to Maude Clare's presentation of her gifts. On a sonic level, parallelism makes it difficult to look away.

Likewise, the parallelism that follows in stanza 8, describing Lord Thomas, similarly emphasizes his actions—or lack thereof—hammering home to readers and guests alike his utter inability to meet the moment and respond to Maude Clare's confrontation.

Where Parallelism appears in the poem:

- **Lines 3-4:** "His bride was like a village maid, / Maude Clare was like a queen."
- **Lines 11-12:** "he was not so pale as you, / Nor I so pale as Nell.""
- **Lines 13-14:** "My lord was pale with inward strife, / And Nell was pale with pride;"
- **Lines 19-20:** "To bless the hearth, to bless the board, / To bless the marriage-bed."
- **Line 21:** ""Here's my half of the golden chain"
- **Line 25:** ""Here's my half of the faded leaves"
- **Lines 29-30:** "He strove to match her scorn with scorn, / He faltered in his place:"
- **Lines 31-32:** ""Lady, " he said, - "Maude Clare, " he said, - / "Maude Clare, ""
- **Line 37:** ""Take my share of a fickle heart,"
- **Line 39:** "Take it or leave it as you will,"
- **Lines 41-42:** ""And what you leave, " said Nell, "I'll take, / And what you spurn, I'll wear;"

REPETITION

Much of "Maude Clare's" poetic power comes from its reliance on many different forms of repetition. In almost every case, this repetition intensifies the drama and theatricality of "Maude Clare," elevating its subject matter as well as hearkening back to the musical roots of its ballad form. Some of these repetitive devices, such as anaphora and parallelism, are so prominent that they merit their own sections in this guide, but others appear only a handful of times.

Take the mixture of antimetabole and anadiplosis in lines 47-48:

> I'll love him till he loves me best,
> Me best of all [...]

The repetition emphasizes Nell's determination (or, perhaps, desperation) to become Lord Thomas's one and only love.

Diacope is another form of repetition that appears all throughout the poem (which also forms the basis of much of the poem's parallelism). There's line 29's "scorn with scorn," for example, which describes Lord Thomas's attempt to match Maude Clare's anger. The diacope of lines 24 to 28, meanwhile, draws attention to Lord Thomas and Maude Clare's former relationship. Here Maude Clare repeatedly mentions the "budding" "lilies" they once romped around in, forcing Lord Thomas (and the reader) to bear witness to their past intimacy.

All the repetition, in other words, is a means of making sure that Lord Thomas cannot so easily turn away from what he once experienced with Maude Clare. Maude Clare's name itself

then becomes almost a refrain, repeated many times throughout the poem, and this mirrors the way that her presence looms over Lord Thomas and Nell's new marriage.

Where Repetition appears in the poem:

- **Line 3:** "was like a"
- **Line 4:** "was like a"
- **Line 6:** "With smiles," "with tears"
- **Line 11:** "pale as"
- **Line 12:** "pale as"
- **Line 13:** "was pale with"
- **Line 14:** "was pale with"
- **Line 15:** "pale Maude Clare"
- **Line 17:** " I have brought my gift"
- **Line 18:** "Have brought my gift"
- **Line 19:** "To bless the," "to bless the"
- **Line 20:** "To bless the"
- **Line 21:** ""Here's my half of the"
- **Line 24:** "lilies"
- **Line 25:** ""Here's my half of the"
- **Line 26:** "budding"
- **Line 27:** "lily"
- **Line 28:** "lilies," "budding"
- **Line 29:** "scorn with scorn"
- **Lines 31-32:** ""Maude Clare, " he said, - / "Maude Clare, ""
- **Line 35:** "were it"
- **Line 36:** "were it"
- **Line 37:** "Take"
- **Line 39:** "Take"
- **Line 41:** "And what you," "I'll"
- **Line 42:** "And what you," "I'll wear"
- **Lines 47-48:** "I'll love him till he loves me best, / Me best of all"

SIMILE

There are two simple similes in the poem, and they come in lines 3 and 4:

> His bride was like a village maid,
> Maude Clare was like a queen.

These straightforward similes immediately help convey the two women's different appearances and attitudes, setting up their juxtaposition and the central conflict of the poem. The parallelism of the phrases that make up the simile itself draws attention to just how *different* these two women are: Nell seems humble and unsophisticated next to the bold and regal Maude Clare.

The fact that Maude Clare seems like royalty emphasizes just how striking her presence must be, especially compared to Nell's. The simile tells readers right away that Maude Clare's interruption of the wedding will not be a quiet or subtle one!

Where Simile appears in the poem:

- **Lines 3-4:** "His bride was like a village maid, / Maude Clare was like a queen."

ALLITERATION

Alliteration pops up throughout "Maude Clare," most notably in Maude Clare's dialogue as she presents the newlyweds with her inappropriate wedding gifts. Like the poem's use of assonance, this poetic device lends the poem a strong sense of musicality, in keeping with its traditional roots as a ballad.

Alliteration also elevates Maude Clare's aggressive confrontation of Lord Thomas and Nell. The repeated opening /b/ sounds in lines 19-20 of "**b**less," "**b**oard," and "**b**ed," for instance, transform what could have read as a rude or pushy interruption into a stately proclamation. Likewise, the repeated /w/, /b/, and /l/ sounds that occur in stanzas 6 and 7 ("**w**e **w**aded," "**b**udding **b**ough," "**l**ily **l**eaves") give Maude Clare's recollection of her romance with Lord Thomas the sonic power of a righteous denunciation, rather than a shrewish complaint or maudlin memory.

Where Alliteration appears in the poem:

- **Line 4:** "Clare," "queen"
- **Line 14:** "pale," "pride"
- **Line 15:** "lord," "long"
- **Line 19:** "bless," "bless," "board"
- **Line 20:** "bless," "bed"
- **Line 23:** "we waded"
- **Line 26:** "budding bough"
- **Line 27:** "lily leaves"
- **Line 29:** "strove," "scorn," "scorn"
- **Line 35:** "fruit"
- **Line 36:** "flowers"
- **Line 39:** "will"
- **Line 40:** "wash"

VOCABULARY

Lofty (Line 2) - Noble, in character and spirit; haughty and overbearing.

Mien (Line 2) - Air, bearing, or demeanor; especially expressive of attitude or personality.

Strife (Line 13) - Bitter conflict, fight, or struggle.

Hearth (Line 19) - A brick, stone, or concrete area in front of a fireplace; also a reference to one's home.

Board (Line 19) - Old-fashioned word for table.

Beck (Line 24) - British word for a stream or creek.

Bough (Line 26) - A tree branch.

Scorn (Line 29) - Open dislike and disrespect; contempt or disdain.

Faltered (Line 30) - Stuttered; spoke brokenly or weakly.

Fickle (Line 37) - Marked by lack of steadfastness, constancy, or stability.

Paltry (Line 38) - Inferior, meager, insufficient.

Thereof (Line 40) - Of the thing that has been mentioned (in this case, Lord Thomas's heart and love).

Spurn (Line 42) - To reject with disdain or contempt.

Fair (Line 46) - Pleasing to the eye or mind; pretty or beautiful.

FORM, METER, & RHYME

FORM

"Maude Clare" is a ballad, a traditional form of English verse that tells a story. One of the oldest poetic forms in English, ballads were often set to music and captured the local legends or romantic stories of rural communities. The tales of Robin Hood, for example, can be found in many ballads. By the time "Maude Clare" was written, however, the ballad had become a more formal poetic tradition, employed by likes of Robert Burns and Samuel Taylor Coleridge.

Though "Maude Clare" does deviate a bit from the ballad's classic rhyme scheme, on the whole the poem adheres faithfully to the formal conventions of the ballad. It is made up of twelve stanzas of four lines each (making them quatrains), which alternate between iambic tetrameter and trimeter. (More on the poem's rhyme and meter in the Rhyme Scheme and Meter sections of this guide.)

Likewise, the poem's tragic tale of a love triangle fits right into the ballad's typical subject matter. However, "Maude Clare's" sympathetic rendering of a fallen woman, and its emphasis on the sexist hypocrisy of Victorian mores, make this poem an unconventional ballad in its willingness to highlight and confront unjust societal norms.

METER

"Maude Clare" alternates between lines of iambic trimeter and iambic tetrameter, meters with three or four iambs (poetic feet with a da-DUM rhythm) per line. This is the typical meter for a ballad, a form of English poetry that was often set to music, and whose conventions "Maude Clare" follows quite faithfully.

The poem starts with a line of iambic tetrameter (four metrical feet, or eight syllables) and alternates with iambic trimeter (three metrical feet, or six syllables) from there:

> Out of the church she followed them
> With a lofty step and mien:
> His bride was like a village maid,
> Maude Clare was like a queen.

The poem's syllables do not always fit perfectly within this metrical pattern, however! Line 1 probably reads more naturally by stressing "Out" and creating a trochee (essentially, the opposite of an iamb: DUM-da): "Out of." The second line, meanwhile, requires readers to read the words "With a" together as one swift syllable in order to maintain the iambic rhythm. This awkward fit into a strict metrical pattern happens in other instances throughout the poem, mirroring the stifling social constraints that the poem's main characters face and which cause so much grief and drama.

Nevertheless, on the whole the poem maintains a rhythmic and musical metrical consistency, giving "Maude Clare" the romantic feel inherent to the ballad form. The love triangle between Lord Thomas, Nell, and Maude Clare thus takes on a certain grandeur, as the meter helps elevate what might otherwise read as an unseemly or vulgar story of sex and betrayal to the level of literary tragedy.

RHYME SCHEME

"Maude Clare" uses a consistent rhyme scheme, with every stanza adhering to the following pattern:

> ABCB

This is the typical rhyme scheme of a ballad, the poetic form "Maude Clare" follows. In addition to giving the poem a cohesive feel, it creates a strong sense of lyricism, an especially significant feature of the ballad given its musical origins. This sing-song cadence is also key to elevating the tale of Lord Thomas, Nell, and Maude Clare from everyday scandal to the stuff of legend or romance, akin to the ballads of King Arthur, Lancelot, and Guinevere.

Readers should note that the *sounds* associated with the ABCB pattern do change from stanza to stanza. For instance, the first stanza's consistent end rhymes (the Bs in the ABCB pattern) are "mien" and "queen," while the second stanza instead rhymes "tears" and "years," the third stanza "tell" and "Nell," and so on and so forth, differing every stanza. This allows the poem greater flexibility of word choice, while still maintaining its sing-song cadence and the reassuring regular rhyme of the ballad form.

SPEAKER

The speaker of "Maude Clare" is a first-person observer attending Lord Thomas and Nell's wedding. For the most part, however, this speaker serves as a passive witness. The speaker recounts the scene beat-by-beat much as the narrator of a play or novel might do, without revealing their first-person perspective until the fourth stanza, when the speaker twice

refers to Lord Thomas as "my lord."

This use of a speaker who remains almost entirely in the background of the scene allows the poem to accomplish two things:

1. First, the speaker's low profile lets the poem focus on the faithful transcription of the main characters' dialogue and actions, granting readers direct access to the confrontation between Lord Thomas, Nell, and Maude Clare, much as a third-person speaker might. Readers are immersed in the moment, watching the scene unfold in real time, which heightens the stakes of the characters' decisions, and adds drama and tension to the poem.
2. Second, by subtly alerting readers to the fact that the poem's speaker *is* in fact a distinct individual with a first-person perspective, the poem reminds readers of the active presence of an *audience* at this confrontation! In other words, readers are not alone in watching the confrontation unfold—Lord Thomas, Nell, and Maude Clare are also being observed by all of the wedding guests, which include lower-class individuals like the speaker, for whom Lord Thomas is *their* lord. By reminding readers that even Lord Thomas's subjects are present, the first-person speaker adds another layer to the public embarrassment that Lord Thomas endures at Maude Clare's hands.

SETTING

"Maude Clare" is set outside a church in the moments immediately after the wedding of the aristocrat Lord Thomas and his new bride Nell. Consisting entirely of one scene in which Lord Thomas's ex-lover Maude Clare confronts the newlyweds, the poem does not describe its setting in any detail. Only the first line—"Out of the church she followed them"—establishes where this scene is taking place. More broadly, however, readers can assume that this church is located in pastoral England, based on other references in the poem to "village maid[s]" and "lilies in the beck," as well as the characters' names and titles.

More fundamental to "Maude Clare," however, is the Victorian era in which the poem is set, and in which it was written. This 63-year period in England marked the duration of Queen Victoria's reign, and defined the nation's cultural and social mores for multiple generations. During this time, men and women's roles became more sharply defined, and there was an increased emphasis on female chastity and virtue. These cultural expectations—and the way they clash with the reality of human behavior—provide the dramatic fuel for "Maude Clare." All of the characters' actions are shaped by the strict prescriptions of their era, whether, in Lord Thomas's case, this means adhering to Victorian norms, or, in Maude Clare's case, breaking them.

CONTEXT

LITERARY CONTEXT

Christina Rossetti is considered one of the Victorian era's finest poets. Born in England in 1830, she was the daughter of Italian poet Gabriele Rossetti and sister of poet and painter Dante Gabriel Rossetti. Christina Rossetti grew up surrounded by poetry and art, and published her first poems at a young age, first with her grandfather's private press and then in a journal printed by the Pre-Raphaelite Brotherhood, the famous artistic school of which her brothers William Michael and Dante Gabriel were founding members.

Rosetti's most famous work, 1862's *Goblin Market and Other Poems*, established her as a major voice in Victorian poetry. This collection includes "Maude Clare" (though the poem was first published a few years earlier, and several stanzas longer, in the weekly magazine *Once A Week)*. Gerard Manley Hopkins and Alfred, Lord Tennyson are among the luminaries who praised Rossetti's work, and lauded her as the literary successor of poet Elizabeth Barrett Browning.

Unlike many poets, Christina Rossetti became popular in her own lifetime. Her literary inspirations were as wide-ranging as the works of Dante and Petrarch, the Bible, fairy tales and folktales, and the lives of saints. She was also a noted early feminist, and many of her poems, including "Maude Clare," deal with the complexities of women's lives in restrictive Victorian society.

Rossetti wrote more than a dozen more books, including children's verse and religious prose. She died of cancer in 1894, after which her brother William Michael edited and published her collected works. Her poetry has been a major influence on writers up to the present day, including Virginia Woolf and Philip Larkin.

HISTORICAL CONTEXT

Christina Rossetti lived in a world marked both by revolutionary change and reactionary conservatism. The Victorians (that is, those living in Britain during the reign of Queen Victoria) were innovators and empire-builders, and England reshaped itself considerably under the six decades in which Victoria reigned. A primarily rural population made an unprecedented shift to the cities as factory work outpaced farm work, and the invention of the steam engine resulted in new infrastructure like railroads, steamships, and factories. The telegraph and photograph were both invented in this era as well. Walter Besant, a late Victorian novelist, once observed that the era had "so completely changed the mind and habits of the ordinary Englishman, that he would not, could he see him,

recognize his own grandfather."

Perhaps in response to this speedy reconfiguration of the world, Victorian social culture became deeply conservative. "The woman question" became a pressing concern in Britain—a term used to describe the debates around the role and nature of women in society. Though some, like Rossetti, questioned the traditional and restrictive roles defined for women, for the most part the Victorian era resulted in a sharpening divide between the male and female spheres. Victorian women were relegated to a domestic life of homemaking and child-rearing, an ideal embodied in Coventry Patmore's famous poem, "The Angel in the House."

Women were also expected to adhere to a strict code of sexual morals: a woman had to be be chaste, pliant, and submissive, and any deviation could mean social exile. "Maude Clare" captures the intense repercussions that women faced for violating Victorian social norms. Rossetti herself had firsthand knowledge of how women suffered under these restrictions; for over a decade, she volunteered with the St. Mary Magdalene house of charity in Highgate, a refuge for former sex workers, or "fallen women" as they were called.

Rossetti's feminist legacy is complex. For example, she did not fully support the women's suffrage movement. However, she did believe in the power of female representation in government. Moreover, her literary work was part of a tide of bold and moving poetry and fiction by Victorian women, asserting the complexity and meaningfulness of women's lives in a public literary sphere otherwise largely dominated by men.

MORE RESOURCES

EXTERNAL RESOURCES

- Gender and Power — Read about the role of gender and power in Christina Rossetti's work. (https://www.bl.uk/romantics-and-victorians/articles/christina-rossetti-gender-and-power)
- "Maude Clare" in "Once A Week" Magazine — Scroll down to see the original 1859 printing of "Maude Clare," including verses later cut from the poem. (https://dvpp.uvic.ca/poems/onceaweek/1859/pom_232_maude_clare.html)
- The Pre-Raphaelites — Explore the artistic and literary context in which Christina Rossetti worked. (https://www.apollo-magazine.com/christina-rossetti-and-pre-raphaelite-art/)
- The Fallen Woman — See different artistic representations of the Victorian archetype of the "fallen woman." (http://www.victorianweb.org/gender/fallen.html)
- Christina Rossetti's Biography — Read about the poet's life and work. (https://www.poetryfoundation.org/poets/christina-rossetti)

LITCHARTS ON OTHER CHRISTINA ROSSETTI POEMS

- Cousin Kate
- In an Artist's Studio
- No, Thank You, John
- Remember

HOW TO CITE

MLA

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CHICAGO MANUAL

Malordy, Jessica. "*Maude Clare.*" LitCharts LLC, December 31, 2020. Retrieved March 4, 2021. https://www.litcharts.com/poetry/christina-rossetti/maude-clare.