

The Ruined Maid

"O 'Melia, my dear, this does everything crown!
Who could have supposed I should meet you in Town?
And whence such fair garments, such prosperi-ty?"--
"O didn't you know I'd been ruined?" said she.

--"You left us in tatters, without shoes or socks,
Tired of digging potatoes, and spudding up docks;
And now you've gay bracelets and bright feathers three!"--
"Yes: that's how we dress when we're ruined," said she.

--"At home in the barton you said 'thee' and 'thou,'
And 'thik oon,' and 'theäs oon,' and 't'other'; but now
Your talking quite fits 'ee for high compa-ny!"--
"Some polish is gained with one's ruin," said she.

--"Your hands were like paws then, your face blue and bleak
But now I'm bewitched by your delicate cheek,
And your little gloves fit as on any la-dy!"--
"We never do work when we're ruined," said she.

--"You used to call home-life a hag-ridden dream,
And you'd sigh, and you'd sock; but at present you seem
To know not of megrims or melancho-ly!"--
"True. One's pretty lively when ruined," said she.

--"I wish I had feathers, a fine sweeping gown,
And a delicate face, and could strut about Town!"--
"My dear--a raw country girl, such as you be,
Cannot quite expect that. You ain't ruined," said she.



“The Ruined Maid”

1. What are some comic or ironic features of this poem?
2. What attitude toward the “ruined” young woman’s new condition does her former co-worker take?
3. How has the “ruined maid’s” life and health changed since her “fall”? How has her speech altered?
4. How is the poem altered by the fact that the now-changed woman feels no regrets? Why does she continue to use the word “ruined”? Is her usage ignorant, ironic, or anti-conventionally assertive?
5. What seem to have been the motives for her occupation? In actual cases, might there have been others which the poet ignores?
6. What response is evoked from the reader by this situation—e.g., laughter, scorn, pity, or disgust?
7. If the innocent country girl had expressed blame and/or the “ruined maid” had exhibited grief and regret, how would the poem’s tone and message have been altered?
8. What fate would the middle-class Victorian reader have expected for the kept woman/prostitute speaker? Do we expect she will be happily “ruined” for long?
9. How do the poem’s diction, rhythm and rhyme scheme contribute to its meaning?
10. How does the illustration relate to the poem?