## Thomas Hardy (1840-1928)

## 10 The Harvest-Supper

(Circa 1850)

Nell and the other maids danced their best	
With the Scotch-Greys in the barn;	
These had been asked to the harvest-feast;	
Red shapes amid the corn.	
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Nell and the other maids sat in a row	5
Within the benched barn-nook;	
Nell led the songs of long ago	
She'd learnt from never a book.	
She sang of the false Sir John of old,	
The lover who witched to win,	10
And the parrot, and cage of glittering gold;	
And the other maids joined in.	
Then whispered to her a gallant Grey,	
"Dear, sing that ballet again!	
For a bonnier mouth in a bonnier way	15
Has sung not anywhen!"	
As she loosed her lips anew there sighed	
To Nell through the dark barn-door	
The voice of her Love from the night outside,	
Who was buried the month before:	20

"O Nell, can you sing ballets there, And I out here in the clay, Of lovers false of yore, nor care What you vowed to me one day!

"O can you dance with soldiers bold,	25
Who kiss when dancing's done,	
Your little waist within their hold,	
As ancient troth were none!"	
She cried: "My heart is pierced with a wound!	
There's something outside the wall	30
That calls me forth to a greening mound:	
I can sing no more at all!	
"My old Love rises from the worms,	
Just as he used to be,	
And I must let gay gallants' arms	35
No more encircle me!"	
They bore her home from the merry-making;	
Bad dreams disturbed her bed:	
"Nevermore will I dance and sing,"	
Mourned Nell; "and never wed!"	40
1925	

(From The Collected Poems of Thomas Hardy. London:

Macmillan, 1930)