

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.

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!

