

SONNETS ON HARDY

AUGUST ROBERTS LEISNER

HE EXPLAINS HIS CHOICE OF TRAGEDY

"Fear must be banished by the tears' own light
And by the streaming scarlet of the heart;
The spirit need not cower under night—
Doom steadies to dark grandeur in our art.

"This is the secret of my scarlet pen
Running through destinies that count all woe.
As with the Greeks, tragedy must firm again
The heart unsteadied by its overthrow.

"I too know life has its bright ecstacy,
Its beauty as of roses in full bloom,
But this must find its place in tragedy,
Heighten, and so transcend, life's hourly doom,
For what is truly tragic is sublime,
The spirit's drama acted out of time."

HE SPEAKS OF LOVERS

"Love always loved despite the final snare,
The open grave never discouraged it.
Though death's rebuffed a while, not unaware
Of night the lovers' starry infinite.

"In fact the night is nearly all their dream:
Into it the moon lifts its love-wan flower
As to a threnody where death lets gleam,
A raptured while, its abstinence from power.

"For shadows need not always chill with fear:
They may assuage the too hot blood of love,
Temper its burning with a cooling tear,
Enhance the perfume of the blossomed grove.
Only at last they chill, when flesh is frail
And love, though spirit-warm, moves coldly pale."

THE WOODLANDERS

Amid the shadows of unnumbered leaves,
Each striving for a place against the light,
Weighting with twisted rope even the eaves
Of barn and residence to ease the fight.

Amid this sad abundance of desire,
Symbol profuse of life's inveterate hope,
The heart must too reach out for the sun's fire,
Equally zealous to increase its scope.

Its scope, though, how misunderstood by man,—
Who spurns the blood-red promptings of the soul
For gilded station in a social plan
That never contemplates its empty goal,
Yielding a tragedy so desolate
As to eclipse the desert-touch of Fate.

HOUSES FOR HIM WERE HAUNTED

Houses for him were haunted with dead lives,
Yet never fear bade him to shy away;
He took past them his daily walks or drives
And stopped awhile as on some former day

When lives were really there to welcome him
To all their little troubles or their joys,
For never would he let a memory dim,
In time-shrunk men he could see little boys.

Houses were haunted, and himself a ghost
With brow less wrinkled, eyes less sad with time,
Lifting a glass in some glad bridal toast
Or fiddling, even, to some country rhyme.
His latter years were haunted too, it seemed,
Just like the houses where he stopped and dreamed.

VISITORS AT MAX GATE

Men were surprised when, visiting Max Gate,
They saw a man like other men come down,
His eyes undarkened by his thoughts of Fate,
His brow as thoughtless of his far renown.

And more surprised when at their seriousness
His smiling words showed nothing of concern,
Trying to ease them with a soft caress
Lest they might fear to take their speaking turn.

For art is art, the poet still is man,
All the more eager for the heart's release
From burning tension of its troubled plan,
That but for crested moments knows no peace—
All the more eager for the simple flow
Of friendliness that is life's undertow.