

The Haunted House

I lay beside you . . . on your lips the while
Hovered, most strange . . . the mirage of a smile,
Such as a minstrel lover might have seen
Upon the visage of some antique queen --
Flickering like flame, half choked by wind and dust,
Weary of all things saving song and lust.

How many days and years and lovers' lies
Gave you your knowledge? You are very wise
And tired, yet insatiate to the last.
These things I thought, but said not; and there passed
Before my vision in voluptuous quest,
The pageant of the lovers who possessed
Your soul and body even as I possess,
Who marked your passion in its nakedness
And all your love-sins when your love was new.

They saw as I your quivering breast, and drew
Nearer to the consuming flame that burns
Deep to the marrow of my bone, and turns
My heart to love even as theirs who knew
From head to girdle each sweet curve of you,
Each little way of loving. No caress,
But apes the part of former loves. Ah yes,

Even thus your hand toyed in the locks of him
Who came before me. Was he fair of limb
Or very dark? What matter, with such lures
You snared the heart of all your paramours!

To-night I feel the presence of the others,
Your lovers were they and are now my brothers
And I have nothing that has not been theirs,
No single bloom the tree of passion bears
They have not plucked. Beloved, can it be?
Is there no gift that you reserve for me --
No loving kindness or no subtle sin,
No secret shrine that none has entered in,
Whither no mocking memories pursue
Love's wistful pilgrim? I am weary too,
With weariness of all your lovers, and when
I follow in the ways of other men,
I know each spot of your sweet body is
A cross, the tombstone of some perished kiss.

With all its beauty and its faultless grace
Your body, dearest, is a haunted place.
When I did yield to passion's swift demand,
One of your lovers touched me with his hand.
And in the pang of amorous delight
I hear strange voices calling through the night.

--George Sylvester Viereck (1884-1962)