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That for a short period sustained
And then killed
Your people —
I have lived one day on Egdon Heath.
I did not meet your raven-haired, environment-containing Miss Vye;
But I have caught my clothing
On scrub oak, as she often caught her hair,
And I have twisted as she did
To be free.
I have — in my time — seen two honest portrayals
Of our human predicament:
I have read your writings, Bard of Wessex;
I have walked one day upon the Barrens.

THOMAS HARDY’S “THE THREE TALL MEN”
By FRANK R. GIORDANO, JR.

Among the valuable items in the Thomas Hardy collection at the Colby College Library is a rough-draft holograph of the poet’s “The Two Tall Men.” This work, however, is not found in the collected edition of Hardy’s poems, for the author revised and expanded it into “The Three Tall Men” before publishing it in Winter Words. Carl J. Weber suggests correctly, I think, that the poem was one of the latest Hardy composed. But Weber does not analyze the importance of Hardy’s “false starts and second thoughts, his deletions and later additions, his substitutions and transpositions.” Much can be learned about Hardy’s craftsmanship, style, and objectives in metrical experimentation from such an analysis of his revisions. Nor should the opportunity to observe the poet, laboring in his workshop to vitalize an uninspired draft, be missed. The present essay, then, will study the textual changes made by Hardy in transforming raw poetic matters into a finished poem.

At this point it would be well to reproduce Hardy’s draft of “The Two Tall Men.” “The Three Tall Men” is found on pages 38-39 of Winter Words, the volume published in 1928 by Macmillan.

1 See Weber’s “An Important Hardy Manuscript,” Colby Library Quarterly, IV (November 1958), 303-304.
The Two Tall Men

"What's that tapping at night — tuck, tuck, one of those house in the street at the back?"

"O 'tis a man who. when he has leisure, is making himself a coffin to measure. He's so very tall that no carpenter will make it long enough for him."

"That tapping has been again. It has ceased (some months ago) I think. A year back — or near then?"

"Yes; 'tis the man you heard before. Making his coffin! Yes, hardly done. His brother died — his only one. And, being of his own height or more, he gave it to him — being much afraid. He'd not get a fit one hardly made; and he's making a second now, to fit himself, when he shall be need for it."

Many years later was brought to me news that the man had died at sea.
Clearly, the published poem is superior to anything promised by the draft's variant phrasings. The most notable textual changes involve the titles, the divisions within the poem, the addition of the third tapping and the third tall man, and the lengthening of the draft's twenty lines to the published poem's thirty-five. Another group of changes, rather obvious and insignificant, corrects punctuation and in general lends tidiness and polish to the final version. Finally, there is a third group of changes, involving subtle and significant variations in punctuation, diction, and phrasing, which affect meter and generally contribute to the superiority of the published poem. Though little need be said about the second group of changes, the third group requires thoughtful analysis.

The changes of the first group are all related to the addition of the third tall man; and though the changes themselves are obvious, Hardy's reasons for making them are less so. Weber attributes the introduction to a "fresh idea," but I think the third tall man can be explained more satisfactorily in terms of Hardy's characteristic temperament, his poetic principles, and the poem's own demands as a dynamic organism.

Hardy's characteristic temperament is not one of pessimism, determinism, or fatalism; these "isms" suggest a systematic philosophy and tend to oversimplify the complexity of Hardy's thought. Rather, Hardy's temperament is fundamentally ironic and occasionally approaches the tragic; and his imaginative productions usually reflect these prevailing moods. However, the phrase "cosmic irony," often applied to describe the scheme of things in Hardy's universe, is somewhat misleading. Irony implies an existing order that has been subverted or frustrated, a situation in which the outcome of events is contrary to what was or might have been expected when the principle of order functions normally. But in Hardy's world, the nature of inanimate things is unconscious and undesigning. There simply is no cosmic order accessible to man's consciousness; and Hardy sees events as chance collisions of willful and indifferent forces among themselves.² "Cosmic absurdity," then, seems to be a more appropriate description of the vision in much of Hardy's work. What is "ironic" is that man, living within this orderless universe, expects the universe to satisfy his need for order;

and experiences frustration, humiliation, some sort of dissatisfaction at any rate, when the world fails (as it so often does in Hardy) to fulfill his needs. The “absurdist” theme, then, of the conscious man in the unconscious universe is often Hardy’s theme, and the irony grows out of man’s failure or unwillingness to comprehend and accept reality.

It is because Hardy’s universe is absurd that he so often resorts to accident, fortuitous coincidence, mischance, and the unforeseen. (The objection that such events cannot happen or are too implausible, too contrived, misses the point about Hardy’s intentions as a writer of fiction. Hardy is not a “realist,” he is an “artist,” a contriver who uses such absurd events to express one aspect of his complex view of reality and to effect powerful emotions.) Coincidence and chance influence man’s life, providing a problematical, often painful context in which man must act and realize his existence. Thus, Hardy’s reliance on the absurd, the non-rational, and the non-realistic gives poetic form to his “seemings, or personal impressions.”

Now one of the intended effects of “The Two Tall Men” is irony, in that a tall man should build himself a coffin, only to die at sea. The draft, however, lacks the ironic intensity of the final version; nor is this weakness simply a matter of fewer coffins being built. In terms of mere quantitative reckoning, there are also fewer deaths, less tapping noise, and less night and darkness; all of which elements, in “The Three Tall Men,” contribute to its greater sublimity and terror as well as to its greater ironic intensity. More importantly, though, the initial shock created by the burial of the builder’s father, which supplies the motivation for all the coffin-making in the poem, is doubled and redoubled by the deaths and burials of the brother and son in the finished poem. After these events and after the third tapping, which the first speaker haltingly, fearfully records, almost hoping it did not occur, the builder’s death at sea affects us as grotesquely ironic. This poem’s impact, then, results not only from its events, but also from Hardy’s fuller evocation of atmosphere, tone, and character. The second speaker’s insensitive, almost aphoristic analysis of the terrible events he relates creates an atmosphere of grotesquerie that is missing in

3 See Hardy’s famous distinction between realism and art in Florence Emily Hardy, The Life of Thomas Hardy (London, 1962), 229. Later references to this work are cited in the text as Life.
4 See discussion on “the sublime” below.
the draft. Lines 7 and 8, for example, appear only as an afterthought in the rough form; which in the improved version (especially the phrase "shockingly short") they are essential for evoking the grotesque spectacle of a builder and his dogged determination not to be stuffed, as his father was, into an undersized casket. Moreover, lines 19 and 20, which further characterize the second speaker, do not appear at all in the draft.

Hardy's intensification and expansion of his original poem was accomplished through the use of sublime and grotesque elements. I use the terms "sublime" and "grotesque" as they are developed by Edmund Burke in his *Philosophical Enquiry into the Origin of our Ideas of the Sublime and Beautiful* and John Ruskin in *Stones of Venice*. Hardy read Burke's *Enquiry* carefully, as indicated by the marginal notations in his copy of Burke's *Works*, now in the Colby College Library. The *Enquiry* analyzes a number of subjects which effect the sublime. Among these are death, obscurity, darkness and night, strength and magnitude, and intermitting sounds; all of which stir the mind with the ideas of pain, danger, and death, and evoke what Burke calls the passions which belong to self-preservation. And,

Whatever is fitted in any sort to excite the ideas of pain and danger, that is to say, whatever is in any sort terrible, or is conversant about terrible objects, or operates in a manner analogous to terror, is a source of the sublime; that is, it is productive of the strongest emotion which the mind is capable of feeling.

There is abundant evidence in "The Three Tall Men" that Hardy used what he learned from the *Enquiry*. In heightening the poet's awareness of some sources of the "sublime," the *Enquiry* served as a handbook for "effective" writing. Nor is Burke's influence to be seen in this work alone; it is pervasive throughout Hardy's canon, to a degree as yet unfathomed by scholars. The influence of the *Enquiry* appears as early as in *Far From the Madding Crowd* and, very significantly, in *The Return of the Native*. However, "The Three Tall Men" has an element of sportiveness about it. In spite of the various elements that excite terror and are potential sources of the sublime, "The Three Tall Men" is hardly a sublime poem in its overall effect. Hardy evokes

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5 Hardy's copy of the *Enquiry* is the Bohn's British Classics edition, 1876.
6 See Bohn's Classics edition of Burke's *Works* (London, 1876), I, 74.
7 S. F. Johnson, in "Hardy and Burke's 'Sublime,'" *Style in Prose Fiction*, ed., H. C. Martin (New York, 1959), treats the influence of the *Enquiry* on *The Return of the Native*. 
terror only to play with it. Rather, the poem is an example of what Ruskin calls the “noble grotesque,” a work combining the ludicrous and the terrible, expressing the “repose or play of a serious mind.”8 According to Ruskin, the “terrible grotesque,” a type of the noble grotesque in which the terrible element dominates, can be produced when a writer experiences the mood of “predetermined or involuntary apathy.” This mood characterizes a man of strong feelings and noble instincts, who cannot be content to look at the bright side of existence. Such an artist produces the terrible grotesque when working apathetically, in a fanciful, half-serious fashion, because, despite himself, he infuses into such a work a sense of the underlying, tragic quality of life.9

That much of Hardy’s work was produced while he experienced such a mood seems clear. It is the dominance of the terrible over the sportive, though, that has confused critics and prevented them from appreciating the ludicrous or comic element that frequently flows beneath the surface of Hardy’s works.10 In “The Three Tall Men” the ideas of the absurdity of existence and the terrible blight on the builder’s life present themselves very powerfully to the reader’s imagination. However, the reader may not recognize that Hardy renders these ideas primarily through the playful anapestic dialogue of the second speaker. There can be little doubt that Hardy intended this character to be comically grotesque.

Critics have often written of Hardy’s sublime and grotesque effects, but they have not realized to what extent “the sublime” and “the grotesque” are inherent in the writer’s aesthetic. I wrote above of Hardy’s characteristic temperament as ironic, occasionally tragic. In 1897, Hardy recorded the following note, which reveals how closely tragedy and the grotesque were related in his mind: “August 13. All tragedy is grotesque — if you allow yourself to see it as such. A risky indulgence for any who have an aspiration towards a little goodness or greatness of heart! Yet there are those who do!” (Life, 296.) Various other statements in Hardy’s autobiography, while not constituting a systematic philosophy of art, do emphasize the

8 Stones of Venice (London, 1867), III, 143. Ruskin’s ideas on pages 140-145 are also pertinent to my discussion.
10 See Hardy’s comparison of his type of humor with that of Swift, in Life, 302.
importance of such characteristics of the grotesque as disproportion, distortion, non-rationalism, and anti-realism as basic principles in his work. Also, Hardy's books themselves are filled by, and fundamentally concerned with, the ideas of pain, danger, and death.

Moreover, so many of Hardy's most striking scenes, both fictional and poetic, take place at night, in darkness, or in obscure, vastly panoramic, even infinite settings. No less significant are the various ghosts, specters, Mephistophelian visitants, and speaking Spirits that are essential vehicles of Hardy's "beliefs." More than simply stylistic embellishments, the grotesque and the sublime are the primary imaginative modes of Hardy's most characteristic works.

Apart from what may be called philosophical and aesthetic considerations, "The Three Tall Men" is a more characteristic and more satisfying work than the draft if studied from the ontological viewpoint of a poem as poem. "The Two Tall Men," in terms of its structure, seems abortive. It too often fails to develop its potential. For example, in a poem structured upon a dialogue, there is too little dialogue. What there is of it is functionally awkward and lacks interest insofar as it fails to project any interesting qualities of the speakers. Not only can we not see them, we are unmove by them. It is obvious that as Hardy revised his draft, he became much more involved with his speakers, more determined to exploit their dramatic potential. Initially, their function was simply expository. They reported, in straightforward, unimpassioned and impersonal language, what occurred to the tall builder. Finally, they appear as essential participants in the poem's drama. They are as interesting to us as the builder himself, and their commentary on the dire events reveals their respective degrees of sensitivity to human suffering. Moreover, they create tension by engaging our feelings towards themselves as well as towards the builder.

Other structural weaknesses in the draft may be noted. The twenty lines do not provide sufficient room for the terrible development of the family's saga. The repetition of the tapping fails to create an aural leit-motiff, as it does in the published version. Nor does the phrase "making his coffin" resonate as forebodingly as in the later poem, where, because with both prior appearances of the phrase we learn of a misfortune, the phrase itself evokes our expectation for further disaster when it occurs for the third time.
Along with the structural improvements in "The Three Tall Men," there is a group of felicitous changes which reinforce theme and mood, and generally refine the thought. The addition of "shockingly short" in line 7 helps us understand the intensity of the builder's motivation, contributes to the grotesque atmosphere of the poem, and helps to characterize the second speaker as an insensitive tale-teller who shares none of the builder's grief or the other speaker's fear. In line 8, the weak adjective "great" becomes "deep," suggesting the profundity of the builder's anguish. "Gave" in line 15, is changed to "used," for what seems an obvious reason. The first "fit" is eliminated (line 16) to avoid redundancy (see line 17). In its place Hardy adds "long" to reinforce the ideas of the builder's tallness and his need for a full-sized coffin.

There is a final series of changes which influences rhythm. Hardy was always alert to the rhythmical, metrical, musical aspects of poetry, as his career-long study and poetic practice attest. In his second notebook Hardy pasted a clipping from Robert Bridges' piece on free verse in the London Mercury. Bridges wrote, in 1922: "The main effectual difference between the rhythms of the old metrical verse and of fine prose is that in the verse you have a greater expectancy of the rhythm . . . and the poet's art was to vary the expected rhythm as much as he could without disagreeable baulking the expectation." Hardy's interest in the piece is obvious when one notes that, many years earlier, he recorded a similar insight that occurred to him while he was making an analogy between poetry and architecture. The entry is dated 1888.

He knew that in architecture cunning irregularity is of enormous worth, and it is obvious that he carried on into his verse, perhaps in part unconsciously, the Gothic art-principle in which he had been trained—the principle of spontaneity . . . —resulting in the 'unforeseen' (as it has been called) character of his metres and stanzas, that of stress rather than of syllable, poetic texture rather than poetic veneer . . . . He shaped his poetry accordingly, introducing metrical pauses and reversed beats; and found for his trouble that some line of a poem exemplifying this principle was greeted with a would-be jocular remark that such a line 'did not make for immortality.' (Life, 301)

We have recently learned that Hardy, even before Yeats and Eliot and Pound, was experimenting with free verse. What his

11 See the interesting note on poetry. Life, 311.
contemporary critics deplored as technical ignorance “was really choice after full knowledge” in an author who “loved the art of concealing art” (Life, 300-301).

These remarks of Hardy’s on his principles of rhythmic composition are helpful in informing us of his intentions and explaining some of the changes in “The Three Tall Men.” Note the omission of “one’s” in line 2, producing a strongly anapestic rhythm early in the poem and creating an expectancy for its recurrence throughout. In the final stanza, which maintains the four-stress character of most of the lines in the poem, there is a preponderance of anapests and anapestic lines. These not only fulfill the rhythmic promises of the opening lines, but the sportive, energetic anapests also provide a ludicrous musical contrast to the terrible events related. Here is a successfully grotesque union of sound and sense.

The third line offers an example of a change which reveals Hardy’s concern for rhythmic patterns and his love for concealing art. By placing a comma after “O,” Hardy creates a line which scans as follows:

\[ \text{xuu / xu // xuu / xu.} \]

This pattern of recurring pairs of dactyls and trochees is absent in the draft, making a line Hardy no doubt thought artless. The same insistence upon patterns and reversed beats within lines can be seen by scanning lines 5, 8, 10, 15, and 16. Note also the patterning in lines 8 and 9, 28 and 29, and 20, 21, 22.

“The Three Tall Men” must have satisfied Hardy, perhaps even surprised him when he returned to his original draft. The poem exemplifies his belief in concealing art, though the art is more obvious when the poem is seen in contrast to “The Two Tall Men.” Certainly it is a very characteristic piece of work in terms of its subject, theme, and mood. But it is a modest effort, not very ambitious in its objectives, an exercise in form and stylized effect-making. Nor is it an entirely successful poem. It does not satisfy as a whole; it lacks the organic unity that comes from the effective union of sound and sense, form and content. Though it is an interesting example of Hardy’s grotesque art, though there are felicitous lines in which emotion finds articulation in fit measure, the poem is not one for which

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13 For proof of Hardy’s interest in varying metrical forms whenever possible, see the note in Life, 301-302. His “verse skeletons” and “nonsense verses” reveal his fascination for architectural patterning.

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Hardy will be remembered. When the author's hidden patterns and deceptive art are revealed, the reader is pleasantly surprised but still only moderately satisfied with the poem. For Hardy uses metrical patterns and rhythms to ornament or adorn conceptual meaning or to provide a sensuous element that is too often extraneous to meaning. Much of the patterning is done for its own sake, almost as if for the private enjoyment of the author.

EXISTENTIAL FAILING IN TESS OF THE D'URBERVILLES

By ROBERT D. TARLECK

Tess's stabbing of Alec is one of the most enigmatic gestures in all of Thomas Hardy's fiction. Arnold Kettle sees the murder as an inevitable act of self-sacrifice by a betrayed woman who is attempting to regain her self-respect.1 Dorothy Van Ghent, on the other hand, emphasizes the mythological dimension of the act, seeing it as Tess's "heroic return through the 'door' into the folk fold, the fold of nature and instinct, the anonymous community."2 And Lionel Johnson suggests that it is in obeisance to the law of nature, even though it violates social law.3 Common to each of these interpretations is the view that Tess is the victim of circumstances external to herself, that she is chiefly a subject rather than an agent of destruction. Since an understanding of this act is crucial to any critical estimate of the novel, I think it worthwhile to examine Hardy's own comments on the matter. The year following initial publication of Tess of the d'Urbervilles Hardy described the murder this way:

The murder that Tess commits is the hereditary quality to which I more than once allude, working out in this impoverished descendent of a once noble family. That is logical. And again, it is but a simple transcription of the obvious. Many women who have written to me have forgiven Tess because she expiated her offence on the scaffold. You ask me why Tess should not have gone off with Clare and 'lived happily ever after.' Do you not see that under any circumstances they were doomed to unhappiness? A sensitive man like Angel Clare could never have been happy with her. After the first few months he would inev-

1 An Introduction to the English Novel (New York, 1960), II, 53.
3 The Art of Thomas Hardy (London, 1984), 200.