

## Maxine Kumin

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### *Mourners, Onlookers, Gawkers*

Thomas Hardy was borne into the Poets' Corner  
at Westminster without his heart. Rumor  
had it eaten by the surgeon's cat  
perched on the mortuary slab as it  
awaited burial, and a pig's substituted  
to be interred in the old churchyard  
as the great man had requested: *At Stinsford*  
*I shall sleep quite calmly, whatever happens.*

Some sources said the King of Pop had planned  
to have his ashes sprinkled on the moon but  
by the time he died his estate could not  
finance the trip, and that for pallbearers  
he had in mind the Harlem Globetrotters  
but his brothers bore the casket at the end.  
He lies in the Great Mausoleum at Forest Lawn  
with scores of Hollywood's half-remembered stars:  
Jean Harlow, Spencer Tracy, Carole Lombard.

The eminent of Hardy's day, including J. M. Barrie  
Shaw, Kipling, and A. E. Housman, carried  
his cremated remains into the Abbey  
past grieving but respectful crowds to lie  
next to the grave of Charles Dickens. This  
*gruesome but historic compromise*  
was offered by the Stinsford vicar, wise

to Hardy's pride in his working-class family  
despite his having called God "that vast imbecility."

Michael Jackson, after years of doctoring  
turned from cute African American into a being  
of indeterminate gender, whiter than WASP, one  
wisp of hair hanging, nose narrowed, lips reddened  
chin cleft, and doubtless more refinements. Retailers  
around the world rejoiced in the posthumous fervor.

*Tess* was bad enough, but *Jude* so deeply vexed  
the Victorian age's views of God and sex  
that the Bishop of Wakefield burned it. Demeaned  
and outraged by the epithet *Jude the Obscene*  
Hardy responded to the public outcry  
by abandoning fiction and taking up poetry.

An audience of millions watched Jackson's funeral  
online as the LAPD scrambled to control  
the crowds. In Stinsford all shops went  
black, blinds drawn for the hour of interment.  
So have these two performances a classic likeness?  
Do mourners, onlookers, gawkers share a sense  
of schadenfreude as the procession passes?  
Farewell, Michael, with umbrella and sunglasses.  
*Vale*, Thomas, heartless and staunchly godless.