Channel Firing
Thomas Hardy

That night your great guns, unawares,
Shook all our coffins as we lay,
And broke the chancel window-squares,
We thought it was the Judgment-day

And sat upright. While drearisome
Arose the howl of wakened hounds:
The mouse let fall the altar
Arose the howl of wakened hounds:
The glebe cow drooled. Till God called, "No;
It's gunnery practice out at sea
Just as before you went below;
The world is as it used to be:

"All nations striving strong to make
Red war yet redder. Mad as hatters
They do no more for Christe sake
Than you who are helpless in such matters.

"That this is not the judgment-hour
For some of them's a blessed thing,
For if it were they'd have to scour
Hell's floor for so much threatening . . .

"Ha, ha. It will be warmer when
I blow the trumpet (if indeed
I ever do; for you are men,
And rest eternal sorely need)."

So down we lay again. "I wonder,
Will the world ever saner be."
"Than when He sent us under
In our indifferent century!"

And many a skeleton shook his head.
"Instead of preaching forty year,"
"I wish I had stuck to pipes and beer."

Again the guns disturbed the hour,
Roaring their readiness to avenge,
As far inland as Stourton Tower,
And Camelot, and starlit Stonehenge.

Questions:
1. Identify the speakers in the poem (there are four).
2. How does Hardy make a joke out of taking the phrase about "waking the dead" literally, not figuratively?
3. In what way is this a pessimistic poem (seeing the worst in a situation)?
4. What does the poem tell us of man's progress?
5. Hardy shows God as a kind of stern authority figure, thinking up suitable punishments for those who threaten war. Does writing about God in this irreverent way mean the poem, as a whole, is not serious? Is the humor used to criticize someone? If so, whom?
6. How do both God and one of the dead men refer to war?
7. In the last stanza Hardy refers to places associated with different stages of civilization going back to ancient times: why is he bringing history into the argument?
8. Rhyme and meter, are very strong and obvious throughout most of the poem but more subtle in the last, serious, stanza: how does this strengthen the humor?
Is My Team Ploughing
A. E. Housman

"Is my team ploughing,
That I was used to drive
And hear the harness jingle
When I was man alive?"

Ay, the horses trample,
The harness jingles now;
No change though you lie under
The land you used to plough.

"Is football playing
Along the river shore,
With lads to chase the leather,
Now I stand up no more?"

Ay, the ball is flying,
The lads play heart and soul;
The goal stands up, the keeper
Stands up to keep the goal.

"Is my girl happy,
That I thought hard to leave,
And has she tired of weeping
As she lies down at eve?"

Ay, she lies down lightly,
She lies not down to weep:
Your girl is well contented.
Be still, my lad, and sleep.

"Is my friend heartily,
Now I am thin and pine,
And has he found to sleep in
A better bed than mine?"

Yes, lad, I lie easy,
I lie as lads would choose;
I cheer a dead man's sweetheart,
Never ask me whose.

Questions
1. How many speakers are there in this poem? Who are the speakers?
2. What is the premise of this poem?
3. Why has the first speaker been forgotten so quickly? Is this cruel or is it realistic? Why?
4. What significance do you find in the order of the four questions asked in the poem?
5. How would you describe the speaker’s attitude in the last stanza? Was he a true friend to his dead companion? Why or why not?
6. Why does his final reply (the last stanza) begin with a different word from all the others? How is the hesitancy in this speaker’s answer demonstrated through the structure of the final stanza?
7. In the first line of the last stanza, the poet had originally written “I sleep easy” but changed the word “sleep” to “lie” in the final version. What is the effect of this?
8. What might the dead companion answer to his friend if there were another stanza?
Ah, Are You Digging On My Grave?
Thomas Hardy

"Ah, are you digging on my grave
My loved one?--planting rue?"
— "No: yesterday he went to wed
One of the brightest wealth has bred.
'lt cannot hurt her now,' he said,
'That I should not be true.'"

"Then who is digging on my grave?
My nearest dearest kin?"
— "Ah, no; they sit and think, 'What use!
What good will planting flowers produce?
No tendance of her mound can loose
Her spirit from Death's gin.'"

"But some one digs upon my grave?
My enemy?--prodding sly?"
— "Nay: when she heard you had passed the Gate
That shuts on all flesh soon or late,
She thought you no more worth her hate,
And cares not where you lie."

"Then, who is digging on my grave?
Say--since I have not guessed!"
— "O it is I, my mistress dear,
Your little dog, who still lives near,
And much I hope my movements here
Have not disturbed your rest?"

"Ah, yes! YOU dig upon my grave . . .
Why flashed it not on me
That one true heart was left behind!
What feeling do we ever find
To equal among human kind
A dog's fidelity!"

"Mistress, I dug upon your grave
To bury a bone, in case
I should be hungry near this spot
When passing on my daily trot.
I am sorry, but I quite forgot
It was your resting-place."

The dialogue between two contrasting voices is intended to create irony.
1. To whom do the voices belong?
2. Why is the identity of the second speaker not immediately revealed?
3. What theme gradually emerges as each of the first speaker's guesses proves false?
4. What in the first speaker's remark about "A dog's fidelity" (line 30) engenders irony?

(Hardy here may be satirizing conventional attitudes towards death and mourning which may be seen in many Romantic poems of the nineteenth century.)

5. What conventional attitudes about death does the first speaker reveal?
6. How does the second speaker unconsciously undermine these conventional attitudes?
7. How do the diction and tone shift markedly in the final stanza?
8. Explain the euphemism involved in "you had passed the Gate" noting why the "G" is a capital
9. How does Hardy distinguish each of the speakers?
10. What is implied about the nature of the surviving spouse's second marriage in line 4?
11. Why has Hardy given the second speaker the final word?

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