

SECTION A: ANALYSIS OF THE POEM

5. FELIX RANDAL

Cecil Day Lewis

1 Felix Randal the farrier, O he is dead then? my duty all ended,
 2 Who have watched his mould of man, big-boned and hardy-handsome
 3 Pining, pining, till time when reason rambled in it and some
 4 Fatal four disorders, fleshed there, all contended?

5 Sickness broke him. Impatient he cursed at first, but mended
 6 Being anointed and all; though a heavenlier heart began some
 7 Months earlier, since I had our sweet reprieve and ransom
 8 Tendered to him. Ah well, God rest him all road ever he offended!

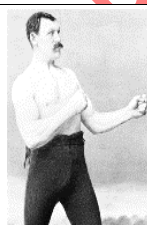
9 This seeing the sick endear them to us, us too it endears
 10 My tongue had taught thee comfort, touch had quenched thy tears
 11 My tears that touched my heart, child, Felix, poor Felix Randal;

12 How far from then forethought of, all thy more boisterous years,
 13 When thou at the random grim forge, powerful amidst peers,
 14 Didst fettle for the great grey drayhorse his bright and battering sandal!

DICTION

WORD	MEANING
Line 1 - <i>farrier</i>	blacksmith (makes/repairs things in iron by hand) who specialises in horseshoes
Line 2 - <i>mould</i>	shape, type
Line 2 - <i>hardy</i>	strong, capable of enduring hardship
Line 3 - <i>pinning</i>	to fail / get weaker gradually in health, either due to sickness or to grief
Line 3 - <i>rambled</i>	talked aimlessly
Line 4 - <i>fatal</i>	causing death
Line 4 - <i>disorders</i>	sicknesses
Line 4 - <i>fleshed</i>	made into flesh; given a body
Line 4 - <i>contended</i>	competed with one another, to fight
Line 5 - <i>cursed</i>	swore
Line 5 - <i>mended</i>	cured, healed
Line 6 - <i>anointed</i>	A blessing given by a priest (given the last sacrament), a sacred prayer just before someone dies. In the Catholic context, the last rites are meant to prepare the dying person's soul for death by providing absolution (forgiveness) for sins by penance (confessing sins to priest), sacramental grace and prayers for the relief of suffering through anointing (smear holy oil), and the final administration of the Eucharist (eating bread and drinking wine i.e. Holy Communion), known as 'Viaticum'.
Line 6 - <i>heavenlier</i>	(more heavenly) holy, blessed
Line 7 - <i>reprieve</i>	a temporary improvement
Line 7 - <i>ransom</i>	deliverance; being saved

Line 8 - <i>tendered</i>	offered, presented or given
Line 8 - <i>all road</i>	all the way
Line 8 - <i>offended</i>	displeasure or anger, hurt a person's feelings
Line 9 - <i>endears them to us</i>	makes us like them
Line 10 - <i>thee / thy</i>	you / your
Line 10 - <i>quenched</i>	stopped
Line 12 - <i>forethought</i>	predicted
Line 12 - <i>boisterous</i>	lively
Line 13 - <i>thou</i>	your
Line 13 - <i>random</i>	made from stones or blocks of uneven sizes and shapes
Line 13 - <i>grim</i>	intimidating and gloomy
Line 13 - <i>forge</i>	a workshop in which metal objects (e.g. horseshoes) are made and fixed
Line 13 - <i>amidst</i>	amongst
Line 13 - <i>peers</i>	those of equal status, age, abilities or qualifications to you
Line 14 - <i>didst</i>	did
Line 14 - <i>fettle</i>	trim the horseshoe
Line 14 - <i>drayhorse</i>	a large working horse
Line 14 - <i>battering</i>	hitting hard and repeatedly
Line 14 - <i>sandal</i>	horseshoe



BACKGROUND ON POET

Gerard Manley Hopkins was born in Essex, near London, in 1844 and studied at Oxford, where he converted to Roman Catholicism. He was ordained as a Jesuit priest in 1877, and some of his poems reflect the conflict he felt between his religious vocation and the attraction of the sensory world. Hopkins experimented with poetic techniques, and he attempted to capture the natural world through his original use of rhythm, alliteration and internal rhyme. Hopkins died in 1889 of typhoid fever.

SUMMARY

The speaker hears of the death of Felix Randal, a farrier whom he has counselled (given spiritual guidance to) during his final illness. He remembers how Randal, once so strong, had wasted away physically and how he had fought against his sickness. He remembers that later Randal turned his thoughts to God and the promise of eternal life, which the speaker had convinced him of. The speaker mentions the close relationship that developed between the sick person and the counsellor. He ends with a vivid description of Felix Randal in his healthier days.

TITLE

The title simply tells us whom the poem is about – the farrier Felix Randal, now dead after a long illness. He was a member of Hopkins's church and was named Felix Spencer in real life.

TYPE, FORM AND STRUCTURE

- ▶ This is an **Italian or Petrarchan sonnet**, divided into an **octave (the first eight lines)** and a **sestet (the final six lines)**.
- ▶ It follows the **traditional rhyme scheme** of *abba, abba* and then *ccd, ccd*.
- ▶ Each section has a function to develop the theme of the poem.
 - The **octave** states the situation and establishes the background leading up to Randal's death.
 - The **sestet** allows the speaker's emotional state to find voice as he addresses the dead man directly and expresses his regard for him.
- ▶ His own sense of loss and sorrow is made explicit in this sestet of the poem.

THEME

- ▶ The poem deals with the fact that even the **strongest die**.
- ▶ The poem also suggests that **religious faith has a healing, comforting power**.
- ▶ Finally, the poem is about the **bond of friendship**, even love, which **grows** between **those who care for the sick**, and **those who are cared for**.

IMAGERY

- ▶ The poet creates a vivid image of Randal's admirable strength and power before his illness: '*big-boned and hardy-handsome*' (line 2), '*boisterous years*' and '*powerful amidst peers*' (lines 12 and 13). This is reinforced by Randal's ability to work easily with the huge horses he was making shoes for – '*the great grey drayhorse*' (line 14).
- ▶ In **contrast** to Randal's previous strength, the poet paints a clear picture of his physical and mental decline: '*pinning, pinning*' ... '*reason rambled*' (line 3); '*Sickness broke him*' (line 5); '*thy tears*' (line 10); '*child ... Randal*' (line 11).
- ▶ In lines 4 and 5, the poet uses **personification**: he gives the illness that destroyed Randal human characteristics: '*Fatal ... contended?*' and '*Sickness broke him*'. In this way, he emphasises the strength of the disease that was able to defeat such a powerful man.
- ▶ To ease the sadness of the contrast between these two images of Randal, the poet uses wonderful images of comfort and friendship that he, the priest, is able to give to the sick man: '*a heavenlier ... earlier*' (lines 6–7); and '*my tongue ... thy tears*' (line 10). The word '*tongue*' in line 10 represents the kind words the priest spoke to Randal – this is called **metonymy** (association between two concepts).
- ▶ He also mentions '*our sweet ... ransom*' (line 7) that he offered ('*tendered*') Randal – this refers to the Christian belief that Jesus Christ paid with his own life for our sins and thus obtained for us everlasting life, just as one might pay a kidnapper '*ransom*' money to free someone from captivity. The '*reprieve*' refers to the comfort and relief that this belief brings to the sick man.

DICTION

- ▶ Hopkins uses **alliteration** to bring his descriptions to life. When describing **Randal in his prime** he uses these examples: '*mould of man*', '*big-boned*', '*hardy-handsome*' (line 2); '*powerful ... peers*' (line 13); '*great grey*', '*bright ... battering*' (line 14). The following examples describe the sick man: '*reason rambled*' (line 3); '*Fatal four ... fleshed*' (line 4). The comfort brought by the priest is described by: '*heavenlier heart*' (line 6); '*reprieve and ransom*' (line 7) and '*tongue ... taught ... touch ... tears*' (line 10).
- ▶ He uses words with **negative connotations** to describe Randal's sickness: '*cursed*' (line 5), the pitying phrase '*Sickness broke him*' (line 5) and '*pinning, pinning*', repeated for effect in line 3. When he discusses the **effects of his friendship**, the poet uses words with a **positive connotation**. '*Heavenlier heart*' (line 6) and '*sweet reprieve and ransom*' speak of the comfort Randal got from his faith and '*tendered*' has a **gentle sound** (lines 7–8). Other positive terms are: '*endears*' (line 9); '*comfort*', '*quenched thy tears*' (line 10) and '*touched my heart*' (line 11).
- ▶ In the **last three lines** the poet's words describing Randal have a positive, celebratory mood ('*boisterous*' and '*powerful*', line 12), and describe the huge horses that Randal handled with such strength and confidence ('*great*' and '*bright and battering*', line 14).

SOUND DEVICES

- ▶ The **rhythm of pauses** and flow is made clear by **the punctuation and word order**.
- ▶ **Line 1**: Three points are made, separated by the **commas** and the **question mark**.
- ▶ **Lines 2 – 4**: The use of **alliteration** in '*hardy-handsome*' (line 2), '*reason rambled*' (line 3) and '*Fatal four*' (line 4) not only increases the impact of the words due to their sound, but also due to the linking of these words.
- ▶ **Lines 13 – 14**: A strong rhythm is created as the short phrases '*random grim forge*', '*powerful amidst peers*' (line 13), '*great grey drayhorse*' and '*bright and battering sandal*' (line 14) balance each other and cumulatively build the image of strength.

TONE

The poem has a thoughtful yet **conversational tone / matter-of-fact tone / detached tone**. It reminds us of how we react when we are told of someone who has died. The speaker moves from one aspect of the man's life to another and mentions thoughtfully the comfort that friendship and faith can bring.

- ▶ **LINES 1–4:** He begins by saying the **farrier's name**, and immediately goes on to ask, 'O he is dead then?' as if he is talking to someone who has just brought him the news. He then describes his memory of the man, and how he watched him 'pining' as the illness progressed, and how his 'duty' as priest and counsellor is now over.
- ▶ **LINES 5–8:** Now the speaker **remembers thankfully** how Randal got comfort and peace from the 'sweet reprieve and ransom' that he as a priest could offer him. He ends the octave by hoping that God will 'rest him' and forgive any sins Randal may have committed. The **colloquial phrase** 'all road' means 'if'.
- ▶ **LINES 9–11:** Here the speaker thinks about how the process of caring for the sick can lead to an affectionate bond ('endears ... endears', line 9). He becomes emotional as he addresses Randal directly ('My tongue ... comfort', line 10) and then cries out 'child ... Randal' (line 11) in a way that **shows his real grief and loss**.
- ▶ **LINES 12–14:** Just as we might end our discussion of someone's death by giving our favourite memory of the person, the speaker becomes calmer and describes the strong, vigorous man in his 'boisterous years', when he hammered and mended horse-shoes and nailed them to the hooves of the huge, powerful 'great grey drayhorse' with no difficulty. The **final image** the speaker gives us is of the horse-shoe – the 'bright and battering sandal', which gives us an idea of the satisfaction that Randal got from his work.

CONTRAST

- ▶ A notable feature of this sonnet is the **shift in tone**. As mentioned above, the opening line has **matter-of-fact tone**, whereas the **sestet** provides a **contrast** as the raw feelings of the speaker become clear. The **TONE CHANGES** to one of loss and grief.
- ▶ Hopkins uses this structure to establish some distinct **contrast**. He shows us the strong, healthy Randal who once was 'powerful amidst peers' (line 13) and we can then draw the **contrast** with the 'pining, pining' man (line 3) who was broken by 'some/ Fatal four disorders' (line 3-4).
- ▶ A **contrast** is also provided by describing the spiritual state of Randal who acquires a 'heavenlier heart' (line 6) after time spent with the speaker. This time spent together also causes the development of their relationship from perhaps one of mutual tolerance to a close one where each genuinely cared for the other.

LANGUAGE DEVICES

- ▶ Hopkins' use of **compound adjectives** like 'hardy-handsome' (line 2) gives his poem a liveliness and freshness. The **diction** of the **last stanza** lends power to the content, as the reader can visualise Felix Randal 'at the random grim forge' (line 13) performing impressive physical feats.

SECTION B: ANSWER THE FOLLOWING QUESTIONS SET ON THE POEM:

- 1.1 How does the description of Felix Randal as a 'mould of man' in line 2 suit his occupation? (2)
- 1.2 Felix Randal's illness affected him in two ways. Explain. (2)
- 1.3 Discuss the speaker's observation in line 9 with reference to the sonnet structure of the poem. (3)

- 1.4 How does the speaker's memory of Felix Randal in lines 12–14 create the final tone in the poem? (3)
[10]

SECTION C: MORE QUESTIONS & ANSWERS ON THE POEM

SECTION A:

1. In line 1, the speaker says, '*my duty ... ended*'. In your own words explain what his '*duty*' had been. (2)

As a priest, the speaker's duty was to visit the sick man and comfort him by reminding him of the Christian belief in eternal life after death (1). Before the man died the priest would anoint him with holy oil and take his last confession (1).

2. What does the word '*pining*' (line 3) suggest about the effect of Randal's illness? (2)

The word '*pining*' tells us that this previously strong and powerful man (1) had wasted away from sickness, becoming thin and weak (1).

3. In line 5 the speaker says, '*Sickness broke him.*' Describe how Randal managed to find peace in his last days. (2)

After his first feelings of anger and fear, Randal was helped by the priest's message of salvation (1) and the final sacraments he gave him (1).

4. Refer to lines 9–11.

- 4.1 Explain what the speaker means in line 9. (2)

The speaker is reflecting on how looking after sick people leads one to become fond of them (1), and causes them to love their carer (1) – a bond of affection is created by the process.

- 4.2 Comment on the appropriateness of the word '*child*' in line 11. (3)

Although Randal was an adult his illness had caused him to become very vulnerable (1) and the affection the speaker had developed for Randal during his illness (1) causes him to feel great pity and compassion (1). It is, therefore, appropriate for the priest to feel fatherly towards Randal.

5. The last three lines end the poem with a positive, upbeat tone. Would you agree with this statement? Justify your response by referring to diction and imagery. (3)

Your own response, for example: Yes, instead of emphasising how weak and sick Randal had become (1), he leaves us with a description of how powerful and capable he had been in his younger days (1). The ending, therefore, leaves us with a positive feeling of admiration for Randal (1).

OR

No, he describes the '*boisterous*' years when Randal was full of life and strength (1) only to emphasise how different Randal had become during his illness ('*How ... of*') (1) so this leaves us with a feeling of sadness (1).

SECTION B:

1. Quote the phrase from the poem that tells us of the speaker's belief that Felix Randal's soul had been saved. Randal had not only been 'anointed' (line 6), which prepared his soul for the afterlife but the speaker's use of 'ransom' (line 7) tells us he believes Randal was saved. 2. Relate the physical decline of Felix Randal. From being a strapping 'hardy-handsome' (line 2) man 'powerful amidst peers' (line 13), Felix Randal became physically weak 'Pining, pining' (line 3) as he succumbed to the illness that 'broke him' (line 5).

2. Relate the physical decline of Felix Randal. From being a strapping 'hardy-handsome' (line 2) man 'powerful amidst peers' (line 13), Felix Randal became physically weak 'Pining, pining' (line 3) as he succumbed to the illness that 'broke him' (line 5).

3. Discuss the connotations of the word 'mould' (line 2) and its application in this context. The word 'mould' means shape or recognisable form. In this instance, it is used to denote a physical 'type' or physique: that of a large, strong man. The word also has the connotation of influencing or guiding someone's character. This is also appropriate in the context of the poem, as the speaker, the priest, converts his parishioner, Felix Randal, and moulds his 'heavenlier heart' (line 6).

4. Comment on the poet's use of tone in the poem. Provide evidence from the text to support your answer. The poem begins with quite a detached, unaffected tone as the death of Randal is commented on and the reaction is merely 'my duty all ended' (line 1). The octave relates the progression of Randal's diminishing health and his religious growth, but the speaker seems resigned and accepting of the inevitability of the death. In contrast, the sestet reveals the loss and pain of the speaker as the distressed tone conveys: 'Thy tears that touched my heart' (line 11).

5. Ministering to the sick and dying forms an integral aspect of the function of a priest. Given the clues provided in this poem, do you think Hopkins was effective in this function? Motivate your answer.

Dealing with others' pain and fears must be emotionally difficult, as the priest needs to provide comfort and assistance while protecting his own emotional state. While the speaker in this poem seems to be able to keep his emotions in check in the octave, the raw grief expressed later in the poem tells us how emotionally involved this priest became. Constant experiences of grief frequently repeated must surely be emotionally destabilising and might ultimately lead to a personal breakdown. Thus, if the poem reflects Hopkins' experience, he could be considered effective as a provider of comfort to the dying, but possibly at significant personal cost.

6. Based on the information provided in the poem, describe Felix Randal before he got sick. Felix Randal was a well-built, lively young man with pleasant features. His job as a farrier tells us that he was physically strong. The reference to his being 'powerful amidst peers' (line 13) and his interaction with the biggest breed of horse confirms this.

7. Refer to line 5: 'Impatient he cursed at first, but mended'. In what way was he 'mended' and how was this achieved? In this context, 'mended' (line 5) refers to the 'correction' of his attitude. From cursing and bewailing his fate and physical difficulty, he learns to accept the situation and acquires patience and endurance, in the face of his hardship. He has found religious faith and this gives him comfort and the strength to cope with his troubles.

8. Discuss how the form of the poem enhances the impact of the content. The Petrarchan sonnet form works well for this content. Hopkins uses the octave to set up the situation. He tells us about Felix Randal's situation and the speaker's role in ministering to the dying man. The tone of the octave is mostly dispassionate and prepared to accept the unpleasant fact of Randal's death. The sestet moves on to describe the mutual effect the two men had on each other and there is an outpouring of emotion that contrasts with the octave. The sestet is an expression of grief and sorrow, and the impact of Felix Randal's death on the speaker is unmistakable.

9. There are two 'characters' in this poem: Felix Randal and the speaker. Compare your emotive response to each. Give reasons to justify your answer. Felix Randal's troubles are well described and reader probably feels some pity for the strapping young man who succumbs to illness and dies. The description of his cursing, tears and confused rambling evokes an emotional response from the reader. The speaker, on the other hand, is more complex. Initially, the speaker comes across as coldly matter-of-fact, more interested in whether his duty is done than in the death of Randal. He appears a little self-satisfied at his successful religious instruction of his pupil. However, the despair and grief that he allows us to see in the sestet, arouses a far more sympathetic response. He allows his vulnerability to be exposed and his pain engages the reader.

SECTION C: EXAMPLE OF TWO ESSAY QUESTIONS

1.

In 'Felix Randal', Hopkins emphasises the temporary nature of human existence, and affirms the importance of religious faith. Critically discuss the above statement, referring closely to the poet's use of **diction, imagery** and **tone** in your essay. Your response should take the form of a well-constructed essay of 250–300 words (about ONE page). (10)

Note that you are not required to say whether you agree with Hopkins' beliefs – you only **discuss what the poet is saying**, and how he is saying it. Here is a framework for your essay:

- **Introduction:** Write one or two sentences to explain what the poem is about and paraphrase the question. This will give a context for your argument.
- **Paragraph 1:** Describe the contrasts of the strong and sick Felix Randal and **quote (diction)** from the poem to support your answer.
- **Paragraph 2:** Explain how the illness overtook Randal and how he was powerless against it. **Quote** from the poem to show this and **explain** what the **images tell us** about our human bodies. Refer to **diction** and change of **tone**.
- **Paragraph 3:** Write about religious faith and the care the speaker was able to give. Explain how this brings comfort.
- **Conclusion:** Show that the images you have quoted support the statement. Extend your argument by making a concluding comment about the overall message of the poem.

The speaker in the poem cared for Randal during his final illness. He watched him become weaker, struggle against his sickness, and finally find spiritual peace before he died.

He repeatedly contrasts the healthy Randal and the sick man to emphasise that physical health and strength does not last forever. He portrays this by the following **diction** and **imagery**: 'big-boned ... handsome' and 'pining ... rambled'; 'Sickness ... at first' and 'boisterous ... peers'.

Randal's huge physical strength was powerless against the illness – his 'reason rambled' as the 'fatal ... disorders' took over his body; the sickness 'broke him'. These **images** emphasise how frail our human bodies are even when we seem strong. Religious faith brought Randal comfort. He 'mended ... anointed' and gained a 'heavenlier heart' when the priest offered him spiritual comfort – 'our ... ransom'.

Line 8 brings a **tone** of confidence as the speaker expresses his belief that God will 'rest him' and forgive him his sins.

The poet's use of diction, imagery and tone does support the validity of the statement. However, the speaker was not implying that the worldly life is unimportant – he expresses his personal grief at Randal's death ('child ... Randal') and also his personal feelings of fulfilment caused by his care of Randal ('This seeing ... endears'). Even though he believes in the importance of faith, he still relates to Randal in a very human and loving way.

2.

In 'Felix Randal', the speaker contemplates what he sees as significant aspects of the life and death of the farrier. With close reference to **diction, imagery** and **tone**, critically discuss how the above statement is reflected in the poem. Your response should take the form of a well-constructed essay of 250–300 words (about ONE page). (10)

The speaker expresses admiration in the manner the farrier lived. He was a 'big-boned' and 'hardy-handsome' man who required brute strength to perform his job. He worked with great force at his 'random grim forge' as he hammered the horseshoe into place. The speaker imagines him standing

powerful and grim at the fire as he prepared the drayhorse's '*sandal*'.

In life, Felix Randal was a productive individual, lively and '*boisterous*'. He was respected for his work and '*powerful amidst peers*'. This contrasts with his being described as a '*child*' when his health is compromised by disease.

The focus then shifts to Felix's physical decline. The speaker notes how the farrier was debilitated by illness. The '*mould*' that was so strong and powerful lost its shape as the farrier faded away ('*pinning, pinning*') until his thoughts became confused ('*reason rambled*').

In stanza 2, the speaker realises that his ministering to Felix had the effect of making Felix more accepting of his plight. Despite Felix's initial frustration and impatience ('*impatient he cursed*'), he became more tolerant ('*a heavenlier heart began*').

Realising Felix's death is imminent, the speaker prepares Felix by '*tending to him*' and offering him the sacrament of the Holy Communion ('*sweet reprieve and ransom*'), which carries the promise of forgiveness and a new life. He offers him the final rites ('*Being anointed*') in order to prepare his soul for its release. Through this process, the speaker forges a bond of compassion and trust with Felix. The speaker registers with melancholy/tenderness that Felix reconciled himself to his fate in a truly Christian manner. The speaker comes to the realisation that he has become more compassionate / empathic as a result of his association with Felix. Stanza 3 focuses on the sympathetic relationship of the two men. '*This seeing the sick endears them to us*' indicates that an intimate bond developed between the two men.

The speaker eased the pain and discomfort that Felix experienced ('*My tongue had taught thee comfort*'). Felix's tears touched the speaker's heart and this accounts for the latter's sense of loss and mourning at his death.

The **tone** is initially detached / dispassionate / unaffected / matter-of-fact but shifts to being contemplative, grieving and compassionate.

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