Felix Randal
Gerard Manley Hopkins (1844–1889)
Victorian

Ministering to Randal’s soul, developed a sense of compassion + connection with the dying man. Recalls him being a big fellow = to most physically demanding job—shoeing large horses. Reflects on long illness + death of Felix Randal + comments on his own role (as priest) in caring for the dying man. More about Hopkins ministry. Aliments England 1885 cause of death.

Glossary
Farrier — blacksmith shoeing horses
Mould — shape
Rambled — talked aimlessly
Anointed — blessed by a priest
Reprieve — temporary improvement
Ransom — deliverance; being saved
Quenched — stopped
Boisterous — lively
Fettle — trim the horse shoe
Drayhorse — horse pulling a wagon
Pining — to become ill/waste away

Theme: Religion & Nature

Form: Petrarchan/Italian Sonnet
This sonnet consists of two a-b-b-a rhyme quatrains (the octave) followed by two rhymed c-c-d stanzas making up the sestet.
ABBA / ABBACA / CDC
Each section has a particular function, allowing Hopkins to develop his theme.

Four fatal ailments: 
Melancholy
Phlegm
Blood
Bile

1. Felix Randal the farrier, O is he 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 endears them to us, us too it endears.

10. My tongue had taught thee comfort, touch had quenched thy tears,

11. Thy tears had touched my heart, child, Felix, poor Felix Randal

12. How far from then forethoughted, all thy more boisterous years,

13. When thou at the random grim forge, powerful amidst peers,

14. Didst fettle for the grey drayhorse his bright and battering sandal

Sound Devices:
Poem demands to be read aloud. The rhythm of pauses and flow is made clear by the punctuation and word order.

In the first line, three points are made, separated by the commas and the question mark. 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 sound, but also due to the linking of these words.

The final two lines of the poem create a strong rhythm as the short phrases ‘random grim forge’, ‘powerful amidst peers’ (line 13), ‘grey grey drayhorse’ and ‘bright and battering sandal’ (line 14) balance each other and cumulatively build the image of strength.

Poesic Devices:
A notable feature of this sonnet is the shift in tone. The opening line comes across as matter-of-fact, whereas the sestet provides a stark contrast as the raw feelings of the speaker become clear. The tone changes to one of loss and grief.

Hopkins uses his structure to establish some distinct contrasts. He shows us the strapping healthy Randal who once was ‘powerful amidst peers’ (line 13) and we can then draw the contrast with the ‘pining, pining’ (line 3) man who was broken by ‘some/Fatal four disorders’ (lines 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.

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.