

Niels Looije
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Poem Analysis: Felix Randall

By Gerald Manley Hopkins

This poem written by Hopkins, in 1880, is a religious sonnet addressed to the dead Felix Randall, the farrier. It is a sonnet, meaning that it contains 14 lines, divided up into two quatrains and a sestet, which in turn is divided up in two tercets. This way of writing in fact keeps Randall from expressing himself completely because he is following a fixed rhyme scheme, but nonetheless he has written a powerful poem with an extensive use of vocabulary.

The story that is told in the sonnet is divided up into two different perspectives: the physical state, and the mental or spiritual state.

The first quatrain is told in a physical point of view and is an introduction to Felix Randall who is horse farrier. This being mentioned immediately brings to mind that he must be a strong man, which in turn creates the physical perspective. After being introduced to Felix Randall, the reader is immediately thrown into the deep end by Hopkins and told that Randall is dead, that he had died from "four fatal disorders" and all Randall's harsh and hardy-handsomeness had been lost in his death by this sickness. The vocabulary, which Hopkins uses in this quatrain, brings out the harshness and the boisterousness of Felix Randall. Obviously a person needs to be strong and big-boned in order to be able to put horseshoes on horses. Randall makes it very clear that Randall was one of these people in his second sentence. It says: "Who have watched his mould of man, big-boned and hardy-handsome". Now mould of man, implies that he had quite a lot of muscles and that he was a strong fellow. But this expression can be taken several different ways. First of all and the most probable one for this poem, a mould of man, or actually a man of mould usually has to do with someone being mortal. That a person, no matter how strong or how bold he is, he can still die from disease. Second of all, a mould can also be a certain shape, which is used to pour in something and then get the same shape back but in a more solidified way. Hopkins could have used this to tell the reader that the world could be better place if every man was like Felix Randall. That if every time a new person was created, he should first be poured into the "mould" of Felix Randall and then set into this world. There