

## Four Poems for Good Friday

### 'I wake and feel' by Gerard Manley Hopkins

I wake and feel the fell of dark, not day.  
What hours, O what black hours we have spent  
This night! what sights you, heart, saw; ways you went!  
And more must, in yet longer light's delay.  
With witness I speak this. But where I say  
Hours I mean years, mean life. And my lament  
Is cries countless, cries like dead letters sent  
To dearest him that lives alas! away.

I am gall, I am heartburn. God's most deep decree  
Bitter would have me taste: my taste was me;  
Bones built in me, flesh filled, blood brimmed the curse.  
Selfyeast of spirit a dull dough sours. I see  
    The lost are like this, and their scourge to be  
    As I am mine, their sweating selves; but worse.

### 'Requiem' by Elizabeth Jennings

It is the ritual not the fact  
That brings a held emotion to  
Its breaking-point. This man I knew  
Only a little, by his death  
Shows me a love I thought I lacked  
And all the stirrings underneath.

It is the calm, the solemn thing,  
Not the distracted mourner's cry  
Or the cold place where dead things lie,  
That teaches me I cannot claim  
To stand aside. These tears which sting –  
Are they from sorrow or from shame?

'Parable of the Old Man and the Young' by Wilfred Owen

So Abram rose, and clave the wood, and went,  
And took the fire with him, and a knife.  
And as they sojourned both of them together,  
Isaac the first-born spake and said, My Father,  
Behold the preparations, fire and iron,  
But where the lamb for this burnt-offering?  
Then Abram bound the youth with belts and straps,  
and builded parapets and trenches there,  
And stretchèd forth the knife to slay his son.  
When lo! an angel called him out of heaven,  
Saying, Lay not thy hand upon the lad,  
Neither do anything to him. Behold,  
A ram, caught in a thicket by its horns;  
Offer the Ram of Pride instead of him.

But the old man would not so, but slew his son,  
And half the seed of Europe, one by one.

'The Airy Christ' by Stevie Smith.

*After reading Dr Rieu's translation of St Mark's Gospel.*

Who is this that comes in splendour, coming from the blazing East?  
This is he we had not thought of, this is he the airy Christ.

Airy, in an airy manner in an airy parkland walking,  
Others take him by the hand, lead him, do the talking.

But the Form, the airy One, frowns an airy frown,  
What they say he knows must be, but he looks aloofly down,

Looks aloofly at his feet, looks aloofly at his hands,  
Knows they must, as prophets say, nailèd be to wooden bands.

As he knows the words he sings, that he sings so happily  
Must be changed to working laws, yet sings he ceaselessly.

Those who truly hear the voice, the words, the happy song,  
Never shall need working laws to keep from doing wrong.

Deaf men will pretend sometimes they hear the song, the words,  
And make excuse to sin extremely; this will be absurd.

Heed it not. Whatever foolish men may do the song is cried  
For those who hear, and the sweet singer does not care that he was crucified.

For he does not wish that men should love him more than anything  
Because he died; he only wishes they would hear him sing.