

Thomas, "Do Not Go Gentle Into that Good Night" (637)

*Villanelle: Five three-line stanzas and a final four line stanza, for a total of six stanzas; only two rhyme sounds permitted in entire poem; First and third lines of first stanza are repeatedly alternately as third line of subsequent stanzas until the last, in which both are repeated. Poets tend to set up in iambic pentameter rhythm. (For another villanelle, see also Bishop, "One Art" p. 629)

Study Questions:

1. Thomas is not saying that death is evil, only that life is good and therefore, one should not just give up on it but fight to live. What details (such as phrases prove that his attitude to death is not necessarily negative?
2. Nevertheless the speaker urges his father not to give in without a fight. In what way are the various types of men mentioned in succeeding stanzas examples of those who fight the approach of death? As part of your response, try to figure out what category of man is represented by each of the adjectives he uses.
3. What image from nature is suggested in the speaker's reference to "rage, rage against the dying of the light"?
4. In the final lines, the speaker asks his father to "curse, bless me...." What do you think he means by placing these two apparently opposite verbs together?
5. The villanelle form makes strong use of repetition. What are some ways repetition contributes to the effectiveness of this particular poem?