

## Poem #12

“Do Not Go Gentle into That Good Night” by Dylan Thomas

Do not go gentle into that good night,  
Old age should burn and rave at close of day;  
Rage, rage against the dying of the light.

Though wise men at their end know dark is right,  
Because their words had forked no lightning they  
Do not go gentle into that good night.

Good men, the last wave by, crying how bright  
Their frail deeds might have danced in a green bay,  
Rage, rage against the dying of the light.

Wild men who caught and sang the sun in flight,  
And learn, too late, they grieved it on its way,  
Do not go gentle into that good night.

Grave men, near death, who see with blinding sight  
Blind eyes could blaze like meteors and be gay,  
Rage, rage against the dying of the light.

And you, my father, there on that sad height,  
Curse, bless, me now with your fierce tears, I pray.  
Do not go gentle into that good night.  
Rage, rage against the dying of the light.



Dylan Thomas was a Welsh poet who died tragically young but left a powerful legacy of work. This poem, written to Thomas's dying father, has a strict structure, but an unconventional message. Thomas encourages his father to rebel and struggle against death, what he calls the “dying of the light.” Although written for his father, Dylan Thomas himself ironically died the year after his father.

## Taking it apart

"Do Not Go Gentle into That Good Night" by Dylan Thomas

Do not go gentle into that good night,  
Old age should burn and rave at close of day;  
Rage, rage against the dying of the light.

Thomas sees life as a day – death is the closing of that day, and the dying of the light is the sunset and coming night. Notice the pairing of lines 1 & 3. Gentle matches rage; good with dying; and night with light.

Though wise men at their end know dark is right,  
Because their words had forked no lightning they  
Do not go gentle into that good night.

This is a mythological allusion to the gods who could throw lightning bolts and have the skies tremble at the sound of their voice. In this stanza, Thomas says that even though men accept that they are mortal and should die ("Death is right"), he still encourages a rebellion against it.

Good men, the last wave by, crying how bright  
Their frail deeds might have danced in a green bay,  
Rage, rage against the dying of the light.

Stanza 2 talks about how wise men approach death. This stanza is about how "good" men do. They see the things they did in life reflect like light off of a bay.

Wild men who caught and sang the sun in flight,  
And learn, too late, they grieved it on its way,  
Do not go gentle into that good night.

Rather than being useless, it is the old, near dead, "grave" men who can really see. "Gay" here means "happy" or "carefree."

Grave men, near death, who see with blinding sight  
Blind eyes could blaze like meteors and be gay,  
Rage, rage against the dying of the light.

Notice the oxymorons here: "blinding sight" and "blind eyes." There is also a simile comparing eyes that "blaze like meteors."

And you, my father, there on that sad height,  
Curse, bless, me now with your fierce tears, I pray.  
Do not go gentle into that good night.  
Rage, rage against the dying of the light.

From the general men discussed in the previous stanzas, Thomas narrows to his father in this stanza, pleading with him to fight against death, pleading with him to still be "fierce." The lines that have been separated throughout the poem come together in the last couplet to reinforce the theme of the poem.

## Memorizing it

The form of this poem is called a villanelle. It has only two end rhyme sounds. The first and third lines of the stanzas rhyme, and the second line rhymes with all other second lines. A villanelle ends with a rhyming couplet, and has nineteen lines – divided into five tercets and one quatrain at the end.

The strict villanelle structure and rhyme scheme make this poem particularly easy to memorize, particularly since the last line of the tercets are repetitive: you get five lines memorized for the price of two! You actually get more than that because the line “Do not go gentle into that good night” appears in the poem four times.

Using a highlighter or colored pencil, underline the lines that are repeated.

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## Memorizing it

Can you say the poem  
filling in the blanks?

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Do \_\_\_ go g\_\_\_ into t\_\_\_ good \_\_\_,  
O\_\_\_ age s\_\_\_ burn \_\_\_ rave \_\_\_ c\_\_\_ of \_\_\_;  
R\_\_\_, \_\_\_ a\_\_\_ the d\_\_\_ of the l\_\_\_.

T\_\_\_ \_\_\_ m\_\_\_ at their \_\_\_ k\_\_\_ d\_\_\_ is r\_\_\_,  
B\_\_\_ their \_\_\_ had \_\_\_ no l\_\_\_ they  
Do n\_\_\_ go \_\_\_ i\_\_\_ that \_\_\_.

Good m\_\_\_, the l\_\_\_ w\_\_\_ by, c\_\_\_ how b\_\_\_  
T\_\_\_ f\_\_\_ d\_\_\_ \_\_\_ have \_\_\_ in a g\_\_\_ bay,  
R\_\_\_, \_\_\_ a\_\_\_ the d\_\_\_ of the l\_\_\_.

W\_\_\_ men who caught and s\_\_\_ the sun in f\_\_\_,  
And l\_\_\_, too l\_\_\_, they \_\_\_ it on its \_\_\_,  
Do n\_\_\_ go \_\_\_ i\_\_\_ that \_\_\_.

G\_\_\_ men, near d\_\_\_, who s\_\_\_ with b\_\_\_ sight  
B\_\_\_ eyes c\_\_\_ b\_\_\_ like \_\_\_ and be gay,  
R\_\_\_, \_\_\_ a\_\_\_ the d\_\_\_ of the l\_\_\_.

And \_\_\_, my father, t\_\_\_ on that sad h\_\_\_,  
C\_\_\_, b\_\_\_, me now with your f\_\_\_ tears, I p\_\_\_.  
Do n\_\_\_ go \_\_\_ i\_\_\_ that \_\_\_.  
R\_\_\_, \_\_\_ a\_\_\_ the d\_\_\_ of the l\_\_\_.