

# Poem analysis: do not go gentle into that good night

[Life](#), [Death](#)



C. S. Lewis once said, "no one ever told me that grief felt so like fear." In Dylan Thomas's villanelle, "Do not go gentle into that good night," written within the Emerging Modernist Period, illustrates a man grieving his old and dying father to rage at death for people should look over their lives and have confidence of having accomplished the defining moments by taking risks and having no fear before death is upon them. Within the first tercet, a young man reacts to the closeness of death with a fighting approach as to rebuke the acceptance of the end. Throughout the poem, the repetition and rhyming of the last words helps to allow the reader to understand the making of a form of writing known as a villanelle. One of the two key phrases within this villanelle, "do not go gentle into that good night," (1) occurs several times to emphasize the plea against death the speaker has toward men in old age and the personification "of Gloucester's son Edgar" (Cyr) from William Shakespeare's play King Lear. The diction of "gentle" (1) is an adjective in place of an adverb making the "less grammatically correct" (Hochman) "gentle" (1) an epithet for his father and involving the relationship shared between the two men through their personal background. The second key phrase, "rage, rage against the dying of the light," (3) gives insight towards Thomas's following poem, the "Elegy," when the detail of the relationship between a young man, Dylan Thomas, and his father. Furthermore, the metaphor of "the dying of the light" (3) conveys the history of one of Thomas's favorite poets, W. B. Yeats and his military background within the phrase "Black out" (Cyr) helps to clarify that death draws near. Within these two lines, the author uses words such as "gentle" and "rage," "dying" and "good," and "night" and "light" as a contradictory term within

the diction. Likewise, the alliteration and the consonance of the “ g” in “ go gentle... good”(1) and “ rage, rage against”(3) help to signify as the “ chorus”(Overview: “ Do Not Go Gentle into that Good Night”) within the remainder of the villanelle. Within the next four tercets, the achievements of four different kinds of men in old age neglected to lessen the gloom within their surroundings. “ Wise, “(4) “ good, “(7) “ wild, “(10) and “ grave men”(13) are metaphors for men who have “ failed to enlighten the dark world in which they live. “(Hochman) Thomas uses the metaphors of “ at their end, “(4) “ last wave by, “(7) “ too late, “(11) and “ near death”(13) to stand as the appearance towards death. The imagery within the villanelle, “ words had forked no lightning, “(5) “ danced in a green bay, “(8) and “ caught and sang the sun in flight... they grieved it on its way”(10-11) is that of dark descent towards a “ more dangerous world... of human wildness”(Hochman) which is followed by the diction of “ be gay”(14) as a “ state of lightness”(Hochman) to “ contrast the light and dark imagery. “(Overview: “ Do Not Go Gentle into that Good Night”) Within line fourteen, the consonance of “ bl” in “ blind... blaze, “(14) the alliteration of the “ i” sound inside “ blind eyes... like, “(14) and the assonance of the “ z” sound in “ eyes... blaze like meteors”(14) helps to explain the syntax of the tercet. In addition, Thomas’s purpose of “ grave men, “(13) serious men, who can see but have no vision now understand the capability of possessing a serious and happy life style functions as a paradox for the men “ are blind”(Overview: “ Do Not Go Gentle into that Good Night”) and cannot see yet have a better understanding than a man with sight and this comprehension of sudden enlightenment continues into the final lines of this intimate villanelle. The

last quatrain contains a personal request to a young man's father to show true emotions during the hardship before death comes within the night. Thomas begins the last stanza addressing the audience, his father, which reveals to the reader an "obliquely drawn persona"(Cyr) of the personal relationship between a sickly father and his caring son. Following, the author uses "on the sad height"(16) as a metaphor towards death as well as a paradox to enlighten the aspect of life achievements. Thomas's use of the "religious overtones"(Welford) in "on the sad height, curse, bless"(16-17) relates to the imagery in the book of Deuteronomy in the Bible for a "sad height"(16) is "sad"(Westphal) sense Moses cannot enter the Promised Land he dies on the summit of Mount Nebo and Joshua, his "'son,'" (Westphal) grieves at the loss of a "solid rock in his life. "(Welford) The imagery, "curse, bless, me now with your fierce tears"(17) stands as a specific plea to the audience to give the speaker the blessing of fearful and uncontrollable tears that he had not done prior and to "curse"(17) those "who will be left behind. "(Hochman) The devises of the "s" sound as assonance occurring on line 17, "curse, bless... fierce tears" allows the rhythm of the poem to continue the elaborate patterns throughout the poem. The final quatrain portrays the theme of the villanelle that the grieving of man at the sight of his dying father allows the fear of loss or suffering to change any perceptions towards death.