‘Old Man, Old Man’ by U.A. Fanthorpe

1. Before reading the poem, think about the phrase ‘old man’ and what images it brings to mind. Does it surprise you to learn that the ‘old man’ of the title actually refers to the poet’s father and if so, why?

2. What does the word ‘recalcitrant’ mean and why might the things in bottles be ‘recalcitrant’?

3. What do we learn about the poet’s father on line 3?

4. Write down three things that the poet’s father used to be able to do.

5. Now list three things he can no longer do.

6. Why might losing the hammer cause the poet’s father so much distress?

7. In stanza 3, why do you think the poet describes him as ‘Lord’ of ‘shed, garage and garden’?

8. In stanza 4, what words and phrases tell us that the ‘old man’ knew a great deal about glue, nuts and bolts?

9. Can you find the implied criticism at the end of this stanza?

10. Now that he is in his nineties, the ‘old man’ has been ‘self-demoted’ to a different task. What is this task? Does he do it well? How do we know?

11. In stanza 6, the poet tells us that the man has become forgetful. What sort of things does he forget? Why are the examples selected by the poet particularly tragic?

12. Find and write down two pieces of evidence that suggest that this man did not have a good relationship with his children.

13. What is worrying the old man in stanzas 8 & 9? Do you think he is really making these journeys or is he just talking about them?

14. Write down the word or phrase that tells us the old man’s eyesight is failing.

15. How does the old man see his daughter now? Why might the poet repeat this phrase on the last line?

16. Why do you think the man tries not to cry when his daughter leaves?

17. How do we know that the daughter actually wants to help her father? Do you think it is a sign of cruelty that the poet writes, ‘I love your helplessness’? Why might she say this? Do you think she really likes her father being this helpless?

18. Who do you feel sorry for in this poem - the father, the daughter or both? Try to explain your answer.