

Epicurus And The Dylan Thomas Poem - "Do Not Go Gentle Into That Good Night"

Post by "Cassius" of July 6, 2025 at 8:55 AM

Don referenced this poem so maybe we should discuss it:

[Do not go gentle into that good night - Wikipedia](#)

Post by "Don" of July 6, 2025 at 9:07 AM

Dylan Thomas' poem is not that long, so here it is in its entirety:

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,

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Rage, rage against the dying of the light.
And you, my father, there on the 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.

Post by “Cassius” of July 6, 2025 at 9:16 AM

I don't know anything about the context of Dylan Thomas or whether he's commented about what he means or any background. Anyone looked into the poem and found anything they'd care to recommend? All I know is that it is well known.

"do not go gentle" does not *necessarily* equate in my mind with "rage, rage, against..."

Post by “Cassius” of July 6, 2025 at 9:18 AM

And I'd say this Vatican Saying calls for comparison:

Quote

VS47. I have anticipated thee, Fortune, and entrenched myself against all thy secret attacks. And I will not give myself up as captive to thee or to any other circumstance; but when it is time for me to go, spitting contempt on life and on those who vainly cling to it, I will leave life crying aloud a glorious triumph-song that I have lived well.

Post by “Rolf” of July 6, 2025 at 9:21 AM

I'm a big fan of this poem, but I feel it's acutely anti-Epicurean. "Raging against the dying of the light" brings to mind a bitter and agonising response to dying. Of course an Epicurean would

hardly *welcome* death (beyond very specific scenarios), raging against it doesn't seem to be the most prudent response in any situation.

Post by “Don” of July 6, 2025 at 9:23 AM

And here's a dramatic performance of the poem from Thomas' fellow Welshman, Michael Sheen

https://youtu.be/w-sM-t1KI_Y?si=Jny5yyCI_TRDF-mv

Post by “Don” of July 6, 2025 at 9:36 AM

FWIW

<https://www.sparknotes.com/poetry/do-not-go-gentle/overview/>

Post by “Cassius” of July 6, 2025 at 11:17 AM

The "rage" probably implicates the discussion of the "good" vs "bad" types of anger in Philodemus and elsewhere. I can see the argument that being angry with your disease (or deterioration with age) would be of assistance in prolonging life and pleasure.

Post by “Adrastus” of July 7, 2025 at 6:07 AM

I take the poem as a bit too ambiguous and not sure what I should be reading into "light" and "night" and the images that these men are "seeing". Is it rage against dying, or is it rage against some kind of onset of oppression? My mind tends to go to some form of mysticism, or something akin to the Ode to Epicurus in Lucretius that is a bit more sensible and reasonable interpretation of someone who has thoroughly built up a total view of Life, the Universe and Everything in a Philosophic manner, and is therefore able to achieve some large degree of

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certainty or ataraxic state of mind. The former would be disturbing to me, while the latter far less so; but in the end, I agree with some of the other comments here in that I'm not sure what rage accomplishes for the self or for others outside of a literal skirmish.

As for raging on a death bed, that sounds deeply disturbing to anyone who would witness it or may be even the one who is raging. Epicurus' death seems far more settling, instructive and joyful; despite I imagine at the same time it being deeply sorrowful for his friends who were there with him.

Post by “Eikadistes” of July 7, 2025 at 10:04 AM

[Quote from Rolf](#)

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Love it, too, and also feel that the tone doesn't quite capture Epicurean thanatology, which triggers a reflection in my mind on Epíkouros resting in a bathtub, declaring "Remember the doctrines!"

Dylan Thomas had a turbulent life, and his pre-mature end was a bit gruesome. Prior to his death, that struggle shows in his poetry. There's a lot of despair and emotional violence there. I'm not sure how his father died, but it sounds he struggled to accept the *necessary end time requires*.

Post by “Pacatus” of July 8, 2025 at 5:19 PM

Dylan Thomas is perhaps the most inspirational poet (though not the only one) for me – in terms of his creative and unique use of language (less in this villanelle, I think, than others – such as “Fern Hill” *). I discovered him by accident in my undergraduate years, pulling his *Collected Poems* off a shelf in the library stacks: I ended up cutting all my afternoon classes to read him. 😊

If I were marooned on a desert island, and could have only one book of poetry, this would be it. [Emily Dickinson's *Collected Poems* would be the other, if I could have two - which might point to a certain poetic schizophrenia! 😭 😊]

With that said, I think neither this poem nor Dylan generally can be considered Epicurean.

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* <https://poets.org/poem/fern-hill>. I would love to hear Sheen recite this one! (I used to have a recording of another Welsh actor, Richard Burton, reading Thomas.)

Post by “Pacatus” of July 8, 2025 at 5:24 PM

[Quote from Rolf](#)

I'm a big fan of this poem, but I feel it's acutely anti-Epicurean. "Raging against the dying of the light" brings to mind a bitter and agonising response to dying.

I agree that it's not Epicurean. However, I have always read "rage, rage against the dying of the light" as defiance (perhaps even a kind of "heroic" defiance), rather than bitterness. Remember, it is Dylan speaking to his father, not his father speaking ...

Post by “kochiekoch” of July 8, 2025 at 8:06 PM

I read Thomas himself went unconscious into that good night. He had pneumonia, a fatty liver due to heavy alcohol use and alleged poor care at the hospital where he was at. All at aged 39.

He collapsed, went into a coma, and never regained consciousness.

Post by “Kalosyni” of July 8, 2025 at 8:20 PM

[Quote from kochiekoch](#)

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According to Diogenes Laertius Book 10, the Epicurean wise man sayings: "Only the Wise man could discourse rightly on music and poetry, but in practice he would not compose poems."

Post by “kochiekoch” of July 8, 2025 at 8:29 PM

[Quote from Kalosyni](#)

According to Diogenes Laertius Book 10, the Epicurean wise man sayings: "Only the Wise man could discourse rightly on music and poetry, but in practice he would not compose poems."

LOL!!! The poets then and now must have had their problems! 😊

Post by “Rolf” of July 9, 2025 at 2:57 AM

[Quote from Kalosyni](#)

According to Diogenes Laertius Book 10, the Epicurean wise man sayings: "Only the Wise man could discourse rightly on music and poetry, but in practice he would not compose poems."

What does this mean exactly?

Post by “Adrastus” of July 9, 2025 at 3:42 AM

Being a 39 year old as well that has put away some beers in his time, I can't blame a guy living through a couple of World Wars for having some drink I suppose. I've certainly stressed over far less in my life. 😞

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I always considered that Laertius quote to be deeply instructive and very relevant to my apparently unreasonable disdain for story-telling, lyrics and poetry and so forth. I can't understate the power images and words had over my state of mind before I built up many barriers against it, largely through what it is I've been doing internally with Epicurean Philosophy. Also I think it was Philodemus, I think in *On Poetry* who wrote that the words and meaning of poetry or song being the real purveyor of beauty or morality within a work of art, and that sentiment I couldn't agree more with. The main issue is some unusual malady in my Soul where there is psychological confusion between the subject of the artist and my Self that distrubs me intensely. So I like extremely specific art or artists, and in my many ways people in general, that I have thoroughly vetted the message of their art and allow into my life to "program" me in hedonic regimen or whom I will trust with abidding Friendship, as I deem them benevolent.