

# Character analysis of the speaker in "do not go gentle into that good night"



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The poem *Do Not Go Gentle into That Good Night* was written by Dylan Thomas in 1951. He was exposed to literature at a very young age, his father used to read to him the works of Shakespeare and this, of course, prompted him to start using literature as a way to express himself. There are two main characters in the poem. One is the speaker, and the other is a dying man. This essay will look into the character of the speaker and how the author has used him to bring out the major themes.

Thomas is a "linguistic genius" and expresses intense emotions in this poem. Thomas, I believe, has an emotional technique when writing. "Thomas describes his technique in a letter: "I make one image—though 'make' is not the right word; I let, perhaps, an image be 'made' emotionally in me and then apply to it what intellectual & critical forces I possess. . . ." (Poets. org) Reading this part in his letter, tells me that Thomas was a very emotional writer. When he wrote the poem "Do Not go Gentle into That Good Night", it was inspired by his sick father's final days. ". . . when the father lay on his deathbed, Dylan Thomas wrote a poem that captures the profound sense of empathy he felt for the dying old man" (in Poetry)

The speaker is the son of the dying old man. From the beginning, the speaker references four men, one for each of the interior stanzas. The four types of men that he talks about are the wise men, the wild men, the good men, and the rave men. The speaker talks about how he gets an epiphany pertaining to truth or error. Some of the phrases that can be used to describe the speaker include philosophical, intelligent, passionate, but most of all, he is desperate. Based on the title of the poem, he is urging his father to go into his final peace without at least giving it a final try to stay alive and

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be with his son. He wants his after not to be so meek and actually fight against the course he is on (Freeman 1). He can be described as intelligent mainly because of how he has been able to use the four different types of men to make his point.

The speaker also portrays his father to be a person of a passive character. He portrays him to be a person who will go along with something as long as it is the more natural way out. The way he describes his father's passive character shows that he is actually quite different from that passive person. He uses the four men in his poem to show his father that even if his inadequacies are similar to those of the four men, he can still have a moment to do something different for once and fight back (Branine and Glover 70). Essentially, the speaker's acts can be likened with how a coach would act with his team especially if it looked as if the team would lose. He has an obligation to be their best cheerleader and try to convince them to fight back and not to give in just because the situation looks grim. This is the same principle that the speaker in the poem is applying when he encourages his dying father to "Rage, rage against the dying of the light" and not die without putting up a fight.

As a reader, one can understand the speaker's grief over the impending loss of his father. The speaker describes the situation in a way that will make anyone reading the poem feel as if

they are going through the motions with him. He uses persuasion and such techniques to try and convince his father to fight back despite the inevitability of death (Branine and Glover 66). This could make people paint

him in one of two ways. He can either be considered an optimist or delusional. He can be considered an optimist because he feels that his father has a fighting chance even though the odds are well stacked against him. For instance, he is optimistic that even at "old age," his father "should burn and rave." The speaker can also be considered as delusional because his father is too far gone to be brought back by anything short of a miracle. However, despite his anger towards his father, he puts that all aside to do his best to be there for him in his final moments (Freeman 1). One of the reasons why he is holding on to the hope that his father can come back is most likely because he felt as if he had been robbed of time with his father.

In most poems, people often choose to not to dwell on the speaker of the poem because most speakers are usually just fictional characters created out of the imagination of the poets. That is the approach that most people take when they read this short masterpiece by Dylan Thomas. It is only when one gets to the final stanza that they understand what the speaker has been trying to say all along. If one reads the first few stanzas alone, it may seem as though these are the rantings of a person who is bitter towards old age and the inevitable life cycle that ends in death (Branine and Glover 67). The speaker is also self-contradictory in some places. At one point he says that he believes that death is an inevitable part of human lives. As such, people should expect it and prepare themselves to deal with it. However, he turns around and says that the same inevitable death is something that people should not fear and they should fight back against it (Branine and Glover 67). This is where the speaker's emotions are seen to be getting

the better of his rationale. After all, he is just a son who wants to see his father alive again. He is willing to feed him all manner of false hope to ensure that he will stay all the while knowing deep down that he was fighting a losing battle.

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