

Poem #4

“Invictus” by William Ernest Henley

Out of the night that covers me,
Black as the Pit from pole to pole,
I thank whatever gods may be
For my unconquerable soul.

In the fell clutch of circumstance
I have not winced nor cried aloud,
Under the bludgeonings of chance
My head is bloody, but unbowed.

Beyond this place of wrath and tears
Looms but the horror of the shade,
And yet the menace of the years
Finds, and shall find me, unafraid.

It matters not how strait the gate,
How charged with punishments the scroll,
I am the master of my fate:
I am the captain of my soul.

At age 12 Henley was diagnosed with tubercular arthritis that necessitated the amputation of one of his legs just below the knee. As he healed in the infirmary, Henley began to write poems, including “Invictus.”

The poem has received more positive publicity with the introduction of the Invictus Games, an international sporting event for wounded, injured, and sick service personnel.



Taking it apart

“Invictus” by William Ernest Henley

“Invictus” is Latin for “unconquered.”

“Pit” here means hell or darkest night.

Out of the night that covers me,
Black as the Pit from pole to pole,
I thank whatever gods may be
For my unconquerable soul.

No matter how dark it gets, he is still in charge of himself.

“Fell” means to knock down, like felling a tree, but it can also mean of a cruel nature.

In the fell clutch of circumstance
I have not wincd nor cried aloud,
Under the bludgeonings of chance
My head is bloody, but unbowed.

To “bludgeon” is to beat. So he is saying that even though he’s been harshly treated by fate, he is still standing proud.

He says here that even though what awaits him after this life is death, he is still brave.

Beyond this place of wrath and tears
Looms but the horror of the shade,
And yet the menace of the years
Finds, and shall find me, unafraid.

“Shade” here refers to the darkness of death.

This is a biblical allusion to the saying, “Strait is the gate and narrow the way that leads to eternal life.” (Matthew 7:14)

It matters not how strait the gate,
How charged with punishments the scroll,
I am the master of my fate:
I am the captain of my soul.

“Strait” means narrow, tight, difficult.

The scroll is a metaphor for the law.

When he says “captain of my soul,” he makes an image of his life as a ship, and he’s the one sailing it.

Memorizing it

“Invictus”

Out of the n_____ that c_____ me,

B_____ as the P____ from pole to p_____,

I t_____ whatever g_____ may be

For my u_____ soul.

In the fell c_____ of c_____

I have not w_____ nor cried a_____,

Under the b_____ of chance

My head is b_____, but u_____.

B_____ this place of w_____ and tears

Looms but the h_____ of the s_____,

And yet the m_____ of the y_____

Finds, and s____ find me, u_____.

It m_____ not how s_____ the gate,

How c_____ with p_____ the scroll,

I am the m_____ of my f_____:

I am the c_____ of my s_____.

Memorizing it

“Invictus”

O__o__t__n____t__c____m__,

B____a__t__P__f__p__t__p____,

I t____w____g____m__b__

F__m__u____s__.

I__t__f____c____o__c____

I h__n__w____n__c__a____,

U____t__b____o__c____

M__h____i__b____, b__u____.

B____t__p____o__w____a__t__

L__b__t__h____o__the s____,

A__y__t__m____o__t__y____

F____, a__s__f__m__, u____.

I__m____n__h__s____t__g____,

H__c____w__p____t__s____,

I a__t__m____o__m__f____:

I a__t__c____o__m__s____.