

# Symbolism in william ernest henley's invictus

[Literature](#), [Poem](#)



The word symbol derives from the Greek word “symbolon” meaning token or watchword. (Online Etymology Dictionary) “Invictus” by William Ernest Henley is a poem about not being afraid when the death is approaching, and holding on to one’s honor in spite of the discourtesy life places for us. John Donne’s “A Hymn to God the Father” is about doubts and uncertainties surrounding the poet’s mind. He prays God to forgive all of his guilty faults, and is feeling a fear of not being able to confess them all, and he considers of dying on the edge between life and death. Through the poem “Invictus”, symbolism improving the images and feelings depicted by the poet, are used to emphasize not surrendering to fear; however in the poem “A Hymn to God the Father” ambiguous symbols are used to focus on the speaker’s fear of dying before being forgiven for all his sins.

Henley uses symbolism to express his courage against difficulties and to clarify the feelings and images mentioned in his poem. In the first line of first stanza “Out of the night that covers me”, he uses night as a symbol. It represents the hardships, sufferings and the pain of worldly existence. Night is a term related to dark which is commonly used with a negative meaning and therefore Henley compares night to agony and he connects this to the last line of the stanza where he thanks God that he is invincible and not afraid of his misery. Also on the last two lines of the third stanza, “And yet the menace of the years/ Finds, and shall find, me unafraid.” Henley’s words “menace of the years” stand for the expiration of our worldly time, death. He states that he is not afraid of the forthcoming years nor bitter end. With this, Henley helps reader to visualize that the author of the poem concretizes a characteristic feature of having the guts, which is also related to imagery.

On the other hand, Donne uses symbolism for describing the man's feelings of death and fear which sometimes can be explicated in several ways; there is no actual answer about what will happen when he dies. Lines of last stanza are controversial and not actual. "I have a sin of fear, that when I have spun/My last thread, I shall perish on the shore." This "thread" may refer to his presence on world, referring to the "tapestry of life" symbol which means, you must accept something because it is a part of life that cannot be avoided. However, it also might refer to lots of lies knitted together. Sins are generally associated with cheating, and, like lies, one sin leads us to another one. He might be confused in his sins, which is allowing them to have a prominent presence in his life.

And the symbol of "shore" on the same lines could either be a symbol for heaven or hell but it is more likely to refer to purgatory or Limbo (the place between heaven and hell in Christian beliefs), although shore would point out a mortal universe, lending reliance to thought of this man and turning back to the last thread of his life only to exceed death to an empty and isolated place- the Limbo- or the "shore". Perhaps with not succeeding to believe in God and suspecting his word, Donne feels that his punishment could be exile to that deserted place.

In the poems "Invictus" and "A Hymn to God the Father" Henley and Dunno had used different kinds of symbols in certainty to express their antagonistic feelings about the fear of death. Dunno, feeling fear about it while Henley, standing against it.