

Is victory worth the sacrifice english literature essay

[Literature](#), [British Literature](#)



English 1A Explication Revisited IS VICTORY WORTH THE SACRIFICE? Victory has always been mankind's greatest desire. Whether it is winning a football game or an argument with older siblings, the satisfaction we get is simply priceless. However, nothing in this world comes with a free price tag. Behind every successful individual are years of hard work, persistence and dedication. There is no other substitute for victory, except sacrifice. In "To an athlete dying young", Mr. Housman uses metaphor and symbolism to prove a point, where fulfilling one heart's greatest desire, sacrifices need to be made, and the price one must willingly pay to leave an impression in this world is sometimes death itself. The first stanza of the poem explains the triumph of a boy, after he won the race in his town. The tone of the poem is exciting and full of pride. Mr. Housman cleverly sets up the scene, which leads the readers to incorrectly presume the mood of the poem. One would assume a poem that celebrates the success of the fortunate and hard-working athlete to be quite cheerful; however, one would be quite wrong: "The time you won your town the race / We chaired you through the marketplace" (lis 1-2). These two lines describe a magnificent scenery of a young athlete winning a race, and obtaining glory when he is carried through the town. "Man and boy stood cheering by, / And home we brought you shoulder-high" (lis 3-4). As indicated by the poet, everyone in town is exceptionally glad for him. The town essentially united as one single organism. They moved and reacted as one. They stood by and understood each other without the necessity to communicate. This phenomena often occurs when something memorial happens or catastrophically arises. In this case, both of which happened. Alliteration, which is the repetition of

consonant sounds, is used to attract readers and make them want to read on. The rhymed couplets of the poem with the structure of AABB, CCDD, EEFF, etc.; gives the cheerful effect that the poet desired. The second stanza transitioned seamlessly with the first when it is said that all the runners will come to celebrate with this young athlete. However, the mood of the poem suddenly inclines when there is a foreshadowing of death. The word "threshold" is frequently connected with tombs, and the words "stiller town" is a metaphor which describes the cemetery. These indicate that the townsmen are carrying this young man to the cemetery: "To-day, the road all runners come, / Shoulder-high we bring you home, / And set you at your threshold down, / Townsman of a stiller town." (lis 5-8). The young athlete passed away right after achieving the biggest success of his life, thus it is explained that following victory is the tremendous sacrifice that must be paid. One could possibly state that victory is not the reward, however it is the expense the individual must pay psychologically as well as physically to experience that glory. The expense of success would be too much for many individuals if they were instructed in advance precisely what the cost would entail, including fighting an unknown battle while being doubtful if anything is sufficient to obtain any triumphs. On the other hand, that isn't what the poet believes: "Smart lad, to slip betimes away / From fields where glory does not stay / And early though the laurel grows / It withers quicker than the rose" (lis 9-12). One's success can never endure the test of time and it will gradually disappear from the recollections of the loved ones. This statement is confirmed by the poet, as the laurel is an allusion to victory and by creating a comparison between the laurel and the rose, the poet wants to

state that victory will fade as quickly as the rose withered. Nevertheless, the poet points out that the athlete was wise enough to pass away prior to the biggest accomplishment of his life (although it might not be his intention), to ensure that he will be remembered eternally as "the winner" by the townsmen. The following stanza establishes what was previously mentioned to be accurate. "Eyes the shady night has shut / Cannot see the record cut" (lis 13 - 14). The meaning of these lines definitely suggest that one cannot evade death, whomever one might be. "Shady night" is a metaphor because it compares death to night. This is when one might start to question the significance associated with sacrificing one's life for glory as, "And silence sounds no worse than cheers / After earth has stopped the ears" (lis 13-16). The purpose of sacrificing all one has is to experience the glory, to understand the greatest truth that many has sought. But what is there to experience when the sound of cheers and celebration isn't different than the silence sound of death? The young athlete might as well have lost the race and his life would be no different, with the exception he could have appreciated many years throughout his later life. In contrary, the poet remarks that the young athlete will stand out. He will not be among those, whose names died before they did. "Now you will not swell the rout / Of lads that wore their honours out, / Runners whom renown outran / And the name died before the man" (lis 17-20). Renown is a metaphor, and the poet uses this method to make a direct comparison between the young athlete and those whose fame and achievements slowly faded away and buried along with countless others. This young man will be different. He will be remembered. Nonetheless, over time, there will always be someone superior

comes up. The new athlete will surpass the old one. The young athlete will soon lead the path that many has failed to realize; when one's life depends on expectations of others, one is destined to disappointment. It is time to set the young athletes to rest. Sill of shade is an allusion to an entrance to death: " So set, before its echoes fade, / The fleet foot on the sill of shade, / And hold to the low lintel up/ The still-defended challenge-cup" (lis 21-24). Alliteration is once against repeated to set the rhyme of the poem. The word " still defended" is used and it is to say nothing will last forever. The cups are physical things that are passed from one owner to the other, the emotional trophies will stay forever in the everyone's heart. The last stanza closes up the poem nicely. This young athlete will settle to where he belongs. He is crowned with a laurel head as a sign of triumph: " And round that early-laurelled head / Will flock to gaze the strengthless dead, / And find unwithered on its curls / The garland briefer than a girl's" (lis 25-28). Many will come and visit him, including the dead. They will know that he was a champion. His victory is well preserved." To an Athlete Dying Young" is a poem of great despair and misfortune. The young champion was carried on the shoulders of all of his fellow townspeople as the winner that he was. Unfortunately, he has traded in his life to get what he wanted. Victory is seen by many people as a reward after numerous years of hard work and dedication. Some might not realize, however, victory is actually an expense and it is something one has to pay in order to experience the glory. Sometimes, the cost is too enormous to handle, and it could take away one's life, just as the young athlete in this poem. It's up to one to decide whether the cost is worth the cause. It might as well be worth it because in the end,

death is a victory over the upcoming pain, troubles and struggles that accompany life. Work cited: Housman, A. E. " To an Athlete Dying Young." Backpack Literature: An Introduction to Fiction, Poetry, Drama, and Writing. 3rd ed. New York, N. Y. [u. a.: Longman/Pearson, 2008. 621. Print.