

# Invictus by william ernest henley: courage in the face of death essay sample

[Literature](#), [Russian Literature](#)



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.

Invictus, meaning “unconquerable” or “undefeated” in Latin, is a poem written by William Ernest Henley. The poem was written while Henley was in the hospital. He was being treated for tuberculosis of the bone. He had the disease since he was young and his foot had been amputated shortly before he wrote the poem. This poem is about courage in the face of death, and holding on to one’s own dignity despite the indignities life places before us. “Night” in the first line is a metaphor for suffering of any kind.

It is also part of a simile and a hyperbole in which the speaker compares the darkness of his suffering to the blackness of a pit. In line 4, unconquerable establishes the theme and a link with the title. The second stanza begins with another metaphor, comparing circumstance to a creature with a deadly grip (fell clutch). Alliteration occurs in clutch, circumstance, and cried, in not and nor, and in bludgeoning, bloody, but, and unbowed. In line 10, shade is a metaphor for death.

In this same line, horror suggests that the speaker believes in an afterlife in spite of the seemingly agnostic third line of the first stanza. If there were no afterlife, there could be no horror after death. Menace of the years is a metaphor for advancing age. Here, strait means narrow, restricted. To escape from “the fell clutch of circumstance” and “bludgeoning of chance,” the speaker must pass through a narrow gate. He believes he can do so—in spite of the punishments that fate has allotted him—because his iron will refuses to bend.