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**Invictus**

**Master of His Fate**

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**October.28. 2024**

**We, as Patriot Americans, must be the Masters of our Fate in Restoring America and Our Constitution**

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 bludgeoning 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” (which means “unconquered” in Latin) was initially published with no title in William Ernest Henley’s first poetry collection, Book of Verses, in 1888. However, it was written thirteen years earlier while Henley was recovering from an operation to save his one remaining leg. It was published under various titles such as “Captain of My Soul,” “Myself,” and “Master of His Fate” in Victorian papers and anthologies. However, Sir Arthur Quiller-Couch supplied the single Latin word “Invictus” for its appearance in The Oxford Book of English Verse in 1900. The poem is one of the best-known pieces of Victorian verse. It is often quoted alongside the works of Rudyard Kipling and Sir Henry Newbolt as a quintessential articulation of late nineteenth-century Stoicism.

Invictus” is a short poem first published in 1888 that expresses the speaker’s resolution to remain in control of his fate.

* Amid an all-encompassing darkness, the speaker thanks “whatever gods may be” for his “unconquerable soul.”
* The speaker asserts that he remains “unbowed” by the blows life has dealt him and “unafraid” of the inevitability of death.
* Finally, the speaker emphasizes that he will remain undaunted no matter what, saying, “I am the master of my fate, / I am the captain of my soul.”[[1]](#footnote-1)
* The poem is divided into four stanzas, each containing four lines. In the initial stanza, the first-person speaker refers to the absolute darkness that covers him, then adds that this darkness extends “from pole to pole,” suggesting it is something universal rather than purely personal despair. This dichotomy is never explored, as the poet casually extends his experiences into a general comment on the evils that beset humanity. He says he thanks “whatever gods may be” during this darkness for his “unconquerable soul.” The reference to the “gods” establishes the fundamentally pagan and even anti-Christian tone of the poem. The speaker has no hope of heaven or any other afterlife. He does not believe in the one God of the Bible. He acknowledges that there might be some gods in whom he has no particular interest, and he does not expect help. The critical matter is the phrase with which he ends the poem, his “unconquerable soul,” which depends on no supernatural power and is proof against any ordeal.
* In the second stanza, the speaker makes two very similar points, establishing his Stoical indifference to the vicissitudes of life. He says that the “fell clutch of circumstance” has never caused him to cry out or even to wince, the minor possible reaction that pain might cause. The phrase “fell clutch of circumstance” is a paradox, if not quite an oxymoron. The word “clutch” suggests intention, while “circumstance” makes it clear that the speaker’s troubles are not caused by supernatural malevolence but are the arbitrary result of a world that appears hostile despite its lack of a will. The paradox is repeated in “The Bludgeoning of Chance.” Blows rain down upon the speaker, and they bloody his head, though he stubbornly refuses to bow, which would be a gesture of submission and defeat. These painful blows, however, come not from any agent, whether natural or supernatural, but mere chance. This intensifies the idea that life is inherently hostile.
* The third stanza begins with an explicit statement of atheism and nihilism. Beyond the world, which is hopeless and miserable, described as a “place of wrath and tears,” there is no hope for anything better. No heaven awaits us as a reward for virtue, only “the Horror of the shade.” There is some danger of contradiction here, as well as hyperbole. Many readers might find the relentless focus on gloom and darkness throughout the poem hyperbolic, even while they cannot deny the reality of the side of life Henley depicts. However, the idea contained in “The Horror of the Shade” seems internally inconsistent. Is death to be nothing (“the shade”), or will it be horrible? However, using the verb “looms” suggests the solution...[[2]](#footnote-2)

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1. Invictus by William Ernest Henley [↑](#footnote-ref-1)
2. Colin Cavendish-Jones [↑](#footnote-ref-2)