

## WILLIAM ERNEST HENLEY'S "INVICTUS": POETIC THEME AND FIGURATIVE LANGUAGES

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### ABSTRACT

Poetic language is a symbolic replica that conveys life and the outside world. Understanding oneself and the wider world requires careful study of William Ernest Henley's poem *Invictus*. The poem skillfully conveys several important details of a line from each stanza carefully and uses them to strengthen the poem's theme, which is not merely obsessed on one keyword. The poetry conveys dignity, fortitude, courage, perseverance, control, and strength. The poem is written from the perspective of a guy who is suffering and is dealing with numerous problems in life that prevent him from leading a fulfilling life. However, despite those circumstances, the spark of hope in his mind and spirit continues to scream from his heart like a call to arms to overcome the challenges in life and once again be in control of his own life. Literary devices are distinct literary strategies that poets and authors employ to make their points. In order to make this poem successful and convey a strong message, Ernest also used a few literary techniques. Metaphor, personification, imagery, and simile were some of the literary devices analyzed in this poem. As a result, persons who experience darkness in their lives, such as depression, can benefit by thinking about this poetry. Beginning with the statement that there is darkness lurking within our lives that is as black as a hole, those sufferings may be our downfall and cause our unavoidable death, but if we confront those horrors head-on with great bravery and effort, it is only be a treat that vanishes like the darkness before dawn.

**Keywords:** Expressivism, Figurative language, Poem analysis, Poetic theme, Textual analysis.

### POET'S BIOGRAPHY

William Ernest Henley, a British poet, critic, and editor (born Aug. 23, 1849, Gloucester, Gloucestershire, England—died July 11, 1903, Woking, close to London), introduced the early works of many of the major English authors of the 1890s in his journals. Son of a bookseller in Gloucester who also attended T.E. Brown, Henley developed tuberculosis, which ultimately required the amputation of one foot. Only the surgeon Joseph Lister, whom he sought out in Edinburgh, with his talent and innovative techniques, was able to preserve his other limb. He was compelled to spend 20 months in an Edinburgh hospital between 1873 and 1875, during which time he started penning impressionistic poetry (some in free verse) about hospital life that helped him build a name as a poet. In 1875, *The Cornhill Magazine* published some of these; *A Book of Verses* published the entire sequence (1888). Later books of verse include *London Voluntaries* (1893), *Poems* (1898), *Hawthorn and Lavender* (1899), and *For England's Sake* (1902). His most well-known poem, "Invictus," (1875), is from the same time period and ends with the lines "I am the lord of my fate; / I am the captain of my soul" (1900).

### THEORETICAL BACKGROUND

This literary analysis is predicated on the idea that William Ernest Henley's poems have multiple levels of poetic topic and figurative language. Expressivism lends credence to this research premise. Expressivism is a literary theory that emphasizes the importance of the artist in the literary work by locating the literary work in the author and what they articulated (Elbow, 2014). It is widely accepted that literary works are direct expressions of their authors' inner selves.

The notion of expressivism serves as the foundation for biographical study, with the author's psyche emerging as the area of inquiry. The study of the nature of the poem and the study of the nature of the poet are related. As a result, according to this view, a literary work serves as a reflection of the author's life and times as well as the lives and periods of the characters or personae in the literary work.

Its literary critical approach, also known as subjective theory, claims that some literary works are better appreciated by readers if they are aware of the author's faith, educational background, political views, and even medical condition.

This literary analysis examines how society views its citizens as it is portrayed in the context of the analyzed poetry. As a result, it provides a complete picture of how the persona develops the overarching topic that appears in every poem (Dreier, 1999).

### RESEARCH METHODOLOGY

The study uses the textual analysis method of research based on the literary content of the poem or the so-called "fact-finding with adequate interpretation" which are done in terms of an evaluation of "available data in printed form." The study is concerned with the making of textual interpretation of the poetic themes and figure of speech in William Ernest Henley's poem *Invictus* (Pilapil, 1998 as cited in Arias, 2008).

The researchers have to appropriately understand the available printed form of literature for this qualitative style of inquiry. Since the major goal of the study is to identify the poetic themes and figures of speech in the poems, statistical methods and tools are neither required nor used

during the course of the research or in the data collection. In order to demonstrate a clear-cut, thorough data interpretation, a multi-dimensional analysis on the usage of poetic language and theme was undertaken in the process of solving the sub-problems that made up the foundation for the conduct of the study. The foundations of discourse analysis are also discussed and investigated.

## RESULTS AND DISCUSSIONS

Invictus, a poem by William Ernest Henley, is a poem of inspiration. It is really outstanding of the poet to have done this because his fight against having his limb amputated served as motivation rather than a cause for depression. We can never see so many people like this in our lives; the audacity to convey a message to people about dealing with life-or-death situations is like a once in a blue moon event. However, what I really admired about him in the first place was his sheer will and commitment through his work, specifically through his poem. The poet also has strong faith in God for showing his thankfulness for being strong through tough times. 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. (Invictus)

The second verse suggests that the obstacle in his life won't determine how his life will turn out; he will always keep his head high and handle the strain with patience and bravery. Whatever doesn't kill you makes you stronger, as the adage goes. In essence, it demonstrates resiliency and optimism.

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

The third stanza illustrates bravery, contradicts the strength of what he is made of, and suggests how tough this guy can be. According to what the stanza implies, the darkness that lurks inside him will never be scared since he is fearless. It exhibits bravery.

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.

Finally, in the final line, it is brilliantly stated that the poet is in charge of himself regardless of any obstacles that may arise in life and that, if the heart is made of steel, no amount of bullet can pierce through it. The final stanza's topic or theme refers to dignity and control.

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.



## 2.1 Poetic Theme

The poem skillfully conveys several important details of a line from each stanza carefully and uses them to strengthen the poem's theme, which is not merely obsessed on one keyword. The poetry conveys dignity, fortitude, courage, perseverance, control, and strength.

The poem is written from the perspective of a guy who is suffering and is dealing with numerous problems in life that prevent him from leading a fulfilling life. However, despite those circumstances, the spark of hope in his mind and spirit continues to scream from his heart like a call to arms to overcome the challenges in life and once again be in control of his own life.

## 2.2 Figurative Languages

Literary devices are distinct literary strategies that poets and authors employ to make their points. In order to make this poem successful and convey a strong message, Ernest also used a few literary techniques. The analysis of some literary devices used in this poem is given below.

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.

**Metaphor.** As mentioned in the first phrase, "out of the night that covers me," night here stands in for his situations, issues, and instability in life.

**Personification.** Thus, the poet humanizes "Night," which envelops him and stands in for his pain.

**Imagery.** The poem's powerful use of imagery makes it possible for the reader to experience how Henley utilized phrases like "dark as the pit" to appeal to the sense of sight.

**Simile.** He equates the darkness of night with his dark and miserable life in the second line of the poem, which reads, "Black as the pit from pole to pole."

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

**Personification.** In the second stanza, "under the bludgeonings of chance," personification is used as an illustration. Chance had been pounded repeatedly.

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.

**Metaphor.** The final metaphor, "wrath and tears," in the third verse, can be interpreted as the misery and depression in his existence. More specifically, "looms but the dread of the shade" refers to impending challenges in life that are invisible or unseen.

### CONCLUSION

As a result, persons who experience darkness in their lives, such as depression, can benefit by thinking about this poetry. Beginning with the statement that there is darkness lurking within our lives that is as black as a hole, those sufferings may be our downfall and cause our unavoidable death, but if we confront those horrors head-on with great bravery and effort, it is a temporary pleasure that vanishes as the dawn breaks. Metaphorical statements were given more contributions than other literary devices, and these metaphors were conveyed to express the right amount of feeling the poet could use. Overall, the execution of each stanza can be felt by enhancing the tone of the feelings bought by the poem, and those messages conveyed were.

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