

Module 7: Balancing the Individual and Society

Topic 4 Content: "To an Athlete Dying Young" Analysis

Introduction


"To an Athlete Dying Young" Analysis

Rhyme Scheme

Advantages and Disadvantages

Themes

Introduction



In this interactivity, click each of the tabs to analyze poetic devices and the subject matter in the poem "To an Athlete Dying Young" by A. E. Housman.

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The regular AABB rhyme scheme gives the poem a very predictable and almost nursery rhyme pattern to it. Because the poem has a cheery sound like a nursery rhyme with a predictable meter and rhyme scheme, the subject matter revolving around the unpredictable nature of death feels like a stark contrast. Additionally, the galloping pattern feels a bit like a runner (or an athlete) running at a steady pace toward some end goal, or perhaps death itself.

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Advantages and Disadvantages

"To an Athlete Dying Young" Analysis

Rhyme Scheme	<h4>Advantages and Disadvantages</h4> <p>According to the poem, what are the advantages and disadvantages of dying young? You might think that there are very few things worse than dying young, yet the speaker of the poem focuses mostly on the advantages of an early death. The obvious disadvantage of dying young is that the young athlete does not get to live a long life, but the advantages seem to be many: going out with a bang, not seeing himself fade, not seeing younger, more talented athletes rise to glory above him, etc.</p>
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The main themes of "To an Athlete Dying Young" revolve around death and fame. The speaker seems to suggest that if one dies young soon after achieving fame, he never has to experience the loss of his fame. In the speaker's eyes, fame is fleeting and not truly valuable. These themes are evident in the lines below.

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

Notice that *rout* in this stanza means "crowd." These lines reveal the speaker's attitude toward early death, which spares the young deceased athlete from watching his own celebrity die out before he does.

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