

# To an Athlete Dying Young

by A.E. Houseman (1896)

The time you won your town the race  
We chaired you through the market-place;  
Man and boy stood cheering by,  
And home we brought you shoulder-high.

**chaired**: carried

To-day, the road all runners come,  
Shoulder-high we bring you home,  
And set you at your threshold down,  
Townsmen of a stiller town. 5

**Shoulder-high**: as in a coffin

Smart lad, to slip betimes away  
From fields where glory does not stay 10  
And early though the laurel grows  
It withers quicker than the rose.

**bedtimes**: early

**laurel**: olympic athletes were traditionally crowned with wreathes of laurels in Greece

Eyes the shady night has shut  
Cannot see the record cut,  
And silence sounds no worse than cheers 15  
After earth has stopped the ears:

**shady night**: death

**the record cut**: record being broken

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. 20

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.

**fleet**: nimble    **sill of shade**: death

**lintel**: top part of a door

And round that early-laurelled head 25  
Will flock to gaze the strengthless dead,  
And find unwithered on its curls  
The garland briefer than a girl's.

## Questions

1. Underline examples of alliteration in the poem.
2. Where does Houseman use synecdoche and to what effect?
3. How does the poet feel about the athlete's early passing?
4. What is the rhyme scheme of the poem?
5. What is the theme of the poem?

**synecdoche**: literary technique using a part to represent the whole