A Death Worth Dying

The breath of William Wallace’s horse exhaled visibly into the cold Scotland air. With a blue painted face, a look of stone in his eyes, and the memory of his murdered wife, Wallace, enters the battlefield at Sterling. Unyielding to his enemies, he will not accept any terms of peace. For 100 years, Scotland’s people have been oppressed, raped, and murdered by the English. They have murdered Wallace’s father, his brother, and his wife. All the while, Scotland’s nobles bartered deals with the king of England in order to appease him and avoid war. However, Wallace would no longer follow the Scottish nobles. With no king to lead to them, Wallace unites Scotland’s oppressed people. William Wallace in BraveHeart completes his Hero’s Journey when he answers the call to fight the English and restore peace to Scotland. He endures the tyranny of England, the betrayal of his own countrymen, and ultimately, the trials of death. It is through his death, that Wallace reaches his Ultimate Boon of freedom, when he inspires his countrymen to defy England and win their freedom.

Scotland is home for William Wallace. As a boy, William was surrounded by his father and brother, as well as, other Scotland commoners and his best friend Hamish. William would tend to his father’s farm alongside his father and brother. Home is the safety of his father’s protection. However, despite his father’s efforts to shield Wallace, Scotland was a place of social and political unrest. A land filled with tyranny and constant strife with the English. Wallace would witness this with his own eyes, the cruelty of the English, after he discovers the dead bodies of the Scottish nobles including their aids, which were mere children, hung in a barn.
They had all been murdered by Edward the Longshanks, King of England. Yet, home for William was more than his father’s farm and the strife with England. Home is the courage of his father, brother, and fellow commoners that refused to give in to the English.

William Wallace would feel the bitter separation from his home when his father and brother are killed fighting the English. Home would no longer be the solace it once was. With no other immediate family, William is adopted by his uncle Argile and moves away from his father’s farm. While in his Uncle’s care, Wallace becomes educated in both language and in war. Wallace learns to be proficient in Latin and French. He also leaves Scotland during this time and travels to France and Rome.

After his father’s death, Wallace’s father would remain a guide for him on his ambiguous journey. His father would appear to him in his dreams. Lying deceased on a table he would turn to William and say, “your heart is free, have the courage to follow it” (Braveheart). Not understanding the full implication of the dream, Wallace would hold onto this memory of his father and guide.

Wallace returned to Scotland 20 years later only to find Scotland under greater oppression. Wallace would receive a call that he would refuse. When he returned, the commoners that knew him as a boy sought to recruit Wallace in the fight against the English. “We’ve come to fetch you to a secret meeting…your father was a fighter and a patriot” (Braveheart). Wallace would only reply, “I know who my father was. I came back home to raise crops and God willing a family. If I can live in peace I will” (Braveheart). Wallace knew his place was at home and wanted to settle down. He had fallen in love with a Scottish woman.
named Murron, whom he had known as a child, and his desire was to marry her. Wallace wanted nothing to do with the wickedness of the English, so he refused the call; he refused to fight.

Throughout the towns of Scotland, England had placed fortresses, with Lords and Knights, to ensure that the Scottish was adhering to English law. The English nobles and Knights are the threshold guardians for Wallace’s journey. The Scottish resisted the English at this point, but were unable to overthrow them. Tired of dealing with the Scottish skirmishes, Longshanks, the king of England, issued a decree called “prima noctes. First Knight. When any common girl inhabiting their lands is married, our nobles shall have sexual rights to her on the night of her wedding” (Braveheart). This decree was issued to breed out the Scottish blood. These guardians, these oppressors, only enraged the Scottish people.

Wallace received his talisman when he married Murron in secret. He did this so that he would not have to share her with any English Lord. As customary, a Scottish marriage would include the exchange of a cloth that represented their clans or families. However, when Wallace married Murron, he did not know this cloth would be his talisman for his journey.

Wallace answers the call to fight the English after his wife is murdered. For simply being married and not adhering to the English law of prima noctes, Murron is tied to a post in the center of town and her throat is cut. If Wallace had been there, he may have been able to prevent her death, but he gone to their meeting place in the forest, expecting her to be there. The life that William Wallace had imagined, slipped from his grasp. However, as Murron bled to death, Wallace was now awakened to the call on his life, the call to fight the English and the call to truly be free.
When Murron’s life was taken, Wallace crosses the threshold of his unwillingness to fight the English and faces the threshold guardians, the English Knights. Wallace would no longer submit to the English and their laws. All that Wallace had was taken from him, his father, his brother, and now his wife. He could no longer be subdued. With the injustice of his murdered wife, Wallace’s blood boiled with hatred. Wallace entered the town where he could now see his wife’s lifeless body tied to a post and began to successfully slaughter every Englishman. He would make a point, that no longer, would he stand for their injustice. If there was to be freedom, Wallace’s new path was determined. There was no returning to eluding the English.

The news of the overthrown English fortress would spread over all of Scotland. Neighboring clans would gather to support Wallace, and among that support, were his closest companions. One of those companions was his best friend from childhood, Hamish. He was a large burly man that wielded an ax. His other close companion was a very high strung, insane Irishman named Stephen, who was wanted in Ireland. “I’m the most wanted man on my island, except I’m not on my island” (Braveheart). Stephen would join Wallace, for the sole purpose to “get a chance to kill the English” (Braveheart). Wallace’s support would continue to grow over time as more and more caught word of the rebellion. The “word has spread, and the highlanders are coming down on their own, in droves of hundreds and thousands.” With his companions by his side and the support of the commoners, Wallace would go on to face the English Army.

The rebellion that began at Murron’s death, would gain the attention of both, the Scottish nobles and Longshanks, the king of England. Wallace would face his initiation when he gets word that, “the English are advancing an army toward Stirling,” in order to squelch the rebellion. With the support of the commoners, Wallace joins the Scottish nobles Lochlan and Mornay at Stirling. However, the nobles were not interested in going to war. Instead, they were more
interested in bartering deals with England in order to avoid war. While the nobles were discussing terms with the English commanders on the battlefield, Wallace interrupted the negotiations and made the English this offer:

Here are Scotland’s terms--lower your flags and March straight back to England, stopping at every home you pass by to beg forgiveness for 100 years of theft, rape and murder. Do that and your men shall live. Do it not, and every one of you will die today…before we let you leave, your commander must cross that field, present himself before this army and kiss his own arse (Braveheart).

England would not be mocked by this man and went to war against Scotland, and every Englishman died that day. Wallace had successfully led Scotland to victory against the English. He passed his initiation and proved his credibility as a leader.

Although victorious against the English, the road of trials ahead of Wallace would not prove to be easy. The nobles had control of what little military power Scotland had, and they were unwilling to unite, because they were too busy bickering over lands and titles. “We have beaten the English, but they’ll come back because you won’t stand together” (Braveheart). Wallace would tell the nobles. When the Nobles asked what he would do, he said, “I will invade England and defeat the English on their own ground” (Braveheart). After laughing at him, they told him that it was “impossible” (Braveheart). Wallace rebuked them. “Why is that impossible? You’re so concerned with squabbling for scraps from Longshanks table that you’ve missed your God-given right to something better” (Braveheart). The road of trials ahead of Wallace would test his resolve. Not only would Wallace face the English, but He would have to do so without the support of the nobles.
Wallace pressed on in his journey and overthrew the Northern English city of York. He beat the English on their own ground and is about to have a fateful meeting with the goddess. Longshanks sent his own son’s wife, the princess of Wales, to bribe Wallace and lure him to peace. But, Wallace would unveil the eyes of the princess to the cruelty of Longshanks.

**Longshanks:**

Hanged innocent Scots, even women and children from the city walls… The last time Longshanks spoke of peace, I was a boy, and many Scottish nobles, who would not be slaves, were lured by him to a barn where he had them hanged… I remember Longshanks notion of peace… You tell your king, that William Wallace will not be ruled and nor will any Scot while I am alive (Braveheart).

Wallace gained the confidence of the princess, and the princess showed him favor. She gave Wallace the money that was given to her to bribe him, even though he did not take the bribe. When she returned to Wales, she found that Longshanks had already dispatched an army bound for York, and the goddess would send word to Wallace to warn him of the dispatched army.

With word from the princess, Wallace rushed into action. He sent word to the Scottish nobles in an effort to gain their support. The king of England himself was marching toward York, and Wallace would face his dragon battle. Gathering the nobles for a meeting, Wallace would make his point clear. “My army has marched for more days then I can remember and we still have preparations to make, so I’ll make this plain. We require every soldier you can summon-your personal escorts, even yourselves and we need them now” (Braveheart). Wallace pled with Robert the Bruce, the rightful leader of the nobles, “unite us. Unite us! Unite the clans”
(Braveheart), and the Bruce pledged to unite the clans. Wallace arrived at the battlefield of Falkirk, near York, with the Scottish nobles Mornay and Lochlan to face the English. Wallace fully expected all the other nobles to join them, and they did. However, as the battle commenced, Wallace looked to his nobles for aid, only to watch them turn and abandon him. Betrayed by his own countrymen, Wallace loses his dragon battle Against the King of England.

After having been betrayed by the nobles and narrowly escaping Falkirk with his life, Wallace’s journey enters the belly of the whale. Having been wounded and deceived, Wallace and his men go into hiding. While in hiding, the Apotheosis of Wallace would blossom. “His legend grows… William Wallace killed 50 men. 50 if it was one…100 men with his own sword. Cut through them like Moses through the Red Sea” (Braveheart). Although Wallace was in hiding, he continued to rally “new volunteers in every Scottish town” (Braveheart). Despite the despair of his defeat, Wallace rose from the belly of the whale and was idealized as a hero.

Wallace would come out of hiding and seek vengeance on those that betrayed him, the Scottish nobles, Lochlan and Mornay. Wallace hunts down his own countrymen in his brother battle. Fear gripped the heart of the nobles, because they knew they had turned against Wallace. “Lord Craig, is it true about Mornay? Aye, Wallace rode into his bed chamber and killed him” (Braveheart). Not long after, Lochlin’s throat was cut and his body hid in the rafters of the castle at Edinburgh. Wallace made it very clear in his brother battle that the lies, betrayal, and deceit of the Scottish nobles would not be tolerated.

Wallace was a threat to the nobles and remained a threat to the king of England. So the nobles made a deal with England. They would lure Wallace to Edinburgh and have him abducted by the English. Under the guise that the nobles would unite against England, the nobles called
Wallace to a meeting. “Every man of us is ready to swear loyalty to you. Pledge us your pardon and we’ll unite behind you. Scotland will be one” (Braveheart). Against the advice of his companions Wallace would meet the nobles. Explaining to his companions, “we’ve got to try. We can’t do this alone. Joining the nobles is the only hope for our people. You know what happens if we don’t take that chance? Nothing” (Braveheart). Wallace went alone to meet the nobles and walked into the trap. Surrounded and beaten by English soldiers, Wallace is abducted and taken into English control.

   Sitting in a dungeon, surrounded by nothing but stone, with his hands and feet bound by shackles, Wallace awaits his death. As he bows his head, he prays. “I am so afraid. Give me the strength to die well” (Braveheart). Escorted from the dungeon and tied to a horse cart, Wallace is led into the castle courtyard. He is mocked and spit on by the English onlookers. With his hands and feet bound Wallace is escorted to a platform and given an opportunity to beg for mercy, which he refuses. Wallace is first hung by the neck to the brink of death and is given another opportunity to plead for mercy, which he also refuses. He is then stretched by horses until his bones are dislocated and even still, he will not cry out for mercy. Wallace is finally laid on a wooden beam and cut open. As he lay there dying, with his last breath, and with all the strength that remained within him, declared all that he has fought for, “freeeedooom” (Braveheart).

   Everything Wallace stood for swept through Scotland like a flood, and although he was dead, Wallace would reach his ultimate boon of freedom:

   William Wallace’s body was torn pieces… His head was set on London Bridge, his arms and legs sent to the four corners of Britain as a warning. It did not have the effect that Longshanks planned… In the year of our Lord, 1314, patriots of Scotland, starving and
outnumbered, charged the fields of Bannockburn. They fought like warrior poets. They fought like Scotsmen and won their freedom (Braveheart).

Wallace completed his journey through his death and returned home within the hearts of the Scottish.
Works Cited